PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 271

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1995–96

COMPRISING PERIOD
5 February—16 February 1996

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5 February 1996

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 271**

FIFTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1995–96

House of Commons

Monday 5 February 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Industrial Museums

1. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals she has to make additional resources available to working industrial museums. [11756]

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): Government support for independent and local authority museums is distributed via various bodies that we fund, including the Museums and Galleries Commission and the network of area museums councils. It is for these bodies to decide on the support to be given to industrial museums from within their overall grant in aid allocations.

Mr. Pike: Will the Minister visit the Queen's street mill in my constituency? His visit would underline to him both the need to keep that type of museum in operation, open and working, and the considerable financial costs that are incurred in keeping such a museum in operation.

Mr. Sproat: I would very much like to receive an invitation from the hon. Gentleman to visit that museum. I know that it will be a splendid museum when it is reopened, I hope, during the summer. The Government have given about £200,000 for refurbishment of the museum, including European regional development funding. I am glad that we have been able to do so and I look forward to the museum being splendidly reopened.

Dr. Spink: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the national lottery will make available to all museums a new source of funds, which will be available to working industrial museums? I am sure that he will agree that those museums are an important part of our heritage. Is my hon. Friend able to suggest why Opposition Members are so churlish as not to acknowledge the impact of the national lottery on our museums?

Mr. Sproat: About 60 museums and galleries have benefited from national lottery funds by about £98.6 million already. The lottery is a great addition to our ability to support museums. We already give about £24 million a year to the science museum and the Manchester museum. We recently funded a paper on how to look after working objects, which are a splendid part of our heritage.

Civil War Sites (Newbury)

2. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what maps her Department holds detailing the civil war sites of the first and second battles of Newbury. [11757]

Mr. Sproat: My Department has a copy of English Heritage's register of historic battlefields. This includes the first battle of Newbury, and contains a map of the site. The second battle of Newbury is not on the register, and my Department holds no maps detailing that site.

Mr. Rendel: Can the Minister confirm, therefore, that the route of the Newbury bypass cannot be said to have a serious effect on either of the battle sites? Nobody knows

exactly where the second battle was fought and, as for the first, the route merely cuts across the north-westernmost tip of where the king's forces were drawn up the night before the battle, and does not cross the battlefield site.

Mr. Sproat: I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman that what remains of the first battlefield site is not sufficiently damaged by the new bypass. As for what is known of the second battle of Newbury, little now remains save the memory.

Broadcasting (Regulation)

4. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the future regulation of broadcasting content. [11759]

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): The Broadcasting Bill currently before Parliament extends to new digital terrestrial services the obligations on impartiality, taste and decency now applying to commercial broadcasts. The new draft charter and agreement will place the BBC under equivalent obligations.

Mr. Martlew: Does the Secretary of State agree that the new Bill could have a detrimental effect on small regional television stations such as Border Television, whose headquarters is in my constituency? Is it not a fact that the Bill will make it more likely that it will be taken over by larger companies? Would that not reduce local accountability and local programming, and result in the loss of many local good-quality jobs?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that detailed consultation was undergone before we published the Bill. Regional factors—we examined this carefully—were some of the considerations. That is why we propose a new power for the Independent Television Commission to require strengthened regional programming. I hope that that will reassure the hon. Gentleman. No doubt the matter will be debated at great length when the Bill reaches this place.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Is my right hon. Friend really content with the standards of taste and decency at present observed on television? Does she truly believe that more will mean better?

Mrs. Bottomley: I agree with my hon. Friend that we must be ever vigilant about questions of taste and decency. We have reason to be proud of our public service broadcasting, and the campaign is one from which we can never relax. The strengthening of the Broadcasting Standards Council and the development of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission will be a further confidence-inspiring measure, which I hope will deliver on-going results from our media.

Dr. John Cunningham: After spending weeks drafting the Bill, including the passages on regulation of broadcasting, why did the Secretary of State wait until last Friday to publish, belatedly, a document on listed events? Why did she wait until the matter was in effect before the House before intervening? Is it not clear that it was the Government's intention in their Broadcasting Act 1990 to give effective protection to listed events especially to prevent the monopolising of that part of our national sporting heritage by a single broadcaster? Is it not now appropriate, given the widespread public concern about these issues, that the law be strengthened to prevent the creation of a broadcasting monopoly, while not excluding any individual broadcaster from participating?

Mrs. Bottomley: There has been a huge increase in the amount of sport on television. There has been a huge increase in the amount of money going into sport, such that there is now greater participation and better facilities throughout the country than in almost any previous phase.

On the Bill, we first issued a detailed consultation paper on the ownership questions. We set out the arguments. We consulted. In the summer, we set out the consultation document on digital terrestrial television. We consulted in detail and listened to all the arguments. Now, as it is clearly the wish of Parliament to discuss the matter further, we have set out the arguments and the balance of interests, and we hope in the coming weeks that detailed consideration will be given to the issue so that the House can reach a conclusion.

National Lottery

5. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many people have won more than £1 million on the national lottery. [11760]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There have been more than 75 million prizes, worth £2.6 billion, and 153 of those prizes were for more than £1 million. The good causes have won as well. On Friday, the billionth pound was awarded to St. George's market in Belfast by the national heritage memorial fund. In all, 107 awards of £1 million-plus have been made to flagship projects of sporting, artistic or heritage excellence—projects that will underpin our sense of national pride for the next millennium.

Mr. Evans: I thank my right hon. Friend for her reply. Does she agree that this is another huge Conservative success story, after having to drag the lot opposite kicking and screaming to accept a national lottery? Does she further agree that winners of huge lottery prizes might like to contemplate what might happen to their winnings if we ever have a Labour Government—who might introduce a 98 per cent. tax on high earnings? Is it not the height of hypocrisy that that lot over there, who did not want a lottery, mumble and grumble about high prizes yet queue up every Saturday for their lottery ticket? Say one thing and do another—is that not what they are all about?

Mrs. Bottomley: I agree with my hon. Friend that the Labour party, on almost every issue and undoubtedly on the lottery, says one thing and does another. As my hon. Friend knows only too well, the Labour party would increase the operating costs and reduce the amount of money coming through to good causes. We are building a better Britain with the great range of projects now available. Opposition Members sneer, but my hon. Friends are only too aware that the massive number of awards in sports, heritage and the arts are bringing new opportunities to young and old across the country.

Mr. Rooker: Does the Secretary of State appreciate that the only lottery prize that concerns me at present is

the millennium exhibition? Can she explain why she is conducting the negotiations connected with that important decision in secret? Why are those who wish to make bids unable to broadcast the contents of those bids to their relevant populations in either London or Birmingham? Why is this type of contract being put on Imagination Ltd. and the national exhibition centre? Is it just because—

Madam Speaker: Order. I have been very tolerant, but the hon. Gentleman is quite a long way off the question. There are questions about the millennium on the Order Paper; the hon. Gentleman should have tried to catch my eye when they were reached. The Secretary of State seems to be prepared to give him an answer, however, if he has reached the end of his question.

Mrs. Bottomley: I am indeed, Madam Speaker, because—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Rooker: I did not intend to be out of order, Madam Speaker. The Secretary of State mentioned the developments that would result from the lottery—

Madam Speaker: I have to agree with the hon. Gentleman. The Secretary of State went very wide of the mark in her answer to the main question. The hon. Gentleman is quite right. Would he like to finish his question? See how generous I am.

Mr. Rooker: I have apologised to you, Madam Speaker, and I think that I have made my point to the Secretary of State.

Mrs. Bottomley: It is a very fair question. Certainly, those who stage the millennium celebration will win much more than £1 million: a substantial sum is involved. I recognise the hon. Gentleman's strength of feeling and that of other Birmingham Members, and London Members have also put their case forcefully. The Millennium Commission and I will look in great detail at the issues involved—the financial aspects, and the way in which the festival can be celebrated. I give the House one absolute assurance, however: it will be a magnificent festival. It will lead the world. This will be a great moment for the whole country to celebrate the passing of one millennium and the potential of a new one.

There must be a degree of confidentiality because of the size of the sum involved, and the complexity of the issue. The commercial aspects must be considered. The Labour party may approach everything with a warmer heart, but it does so with a pretty frozen head. The issue of the millennium must be approached with both a warm heart and a clear head.

6. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many charities which assist young people have been awarded funds from the national lottery. [11761]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: More than 1,000 awards, to a value of £75 million, have been made to organisations directly concerned with young people. Of those, 101, worth more than £15 million, have been made directly to schools.

Helping the nation's young people is an investment in our future. I propose to give lottery distributors the ability to provide revenue support for initiatives to help to develop sporting and artistic excellence in our country's young people.

Mr. Hughes: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on some marvellous achievements, including the grant for the Harrow leisure centre. That grant will enable the centre to reopen, and to help many young people in my constituency. Does my right hon. Friend agree, however, that a national team of young people should compete in each sport that is represented in the Olympic games? Does she also agree that, where we have no national team, the Sports Council should consider giving grants, so that young people playing volleyball, for instance, have a pinnacle to aim for—and can probably beat the world as well?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point, which I know has been heard by my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for sport. I can tell him that, so far, 50 sports are benefiting from lottery money, and 1,226 different awards have already been made. They cover a wide range: for instance, 122 awards have been made to bowling clubs.

Dr. John Cunningham: It is true that the lottery has been hugely successful in raising funds—so much so that four major charities have today persuaded Dame Vera Lynn and Claire Rayner to launch a new scratchcard in an attempt to repair the damage to their revenue-raising that the lottery has caused. Three of the charities involved are the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Scope and the Cancer Research Campaign.

Ought not the Government to have taken a much closer look at the potential damage to charities' fund-raising before launching the lottery? What response does the Secretary of State give organisations whose revenue has now been undermined by it?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman did not read the recent account from the medical charities saying that they have had an extremely good year. In the face of expected concerns, many charities have devised a range of measures to increase their fund-raising. A recent Gallup survey suggested that, overall, there had been a 5 per cent. increase in donations to charities, and a MORI poll found that, whereas 2 per cent. of people said that they were planning to give less, 4 per cent. said that they were planning to give more. There is mixed evidence. Much information suggests that the charities have had a good year. Many of them are responding to the opportunity of scratchcards to raise their own cash, but the long and short of it is that 80 per cent. of the £1 billion that has been awarded has gone to charities. They have had a bonanza out of the lottery.

Mr. Brooke: Does my right hon. Friend take pleasure in or feel concern for the fact that more than half the oral questions tabled for her to answer today were about the national lottery?

Mrs. Bottomley: My right hon. Friend, who has much responsibility for the fact that we have this magnificent and, in practice, successful lottery, asks a question that is precisely to the point. The lottery has taken over as the

great conversation piece not only in the House but in all our newspapers. It is our favourite topic of conversation. It is doing a huge amount of good and is working.

Mr. Simon Hughes: In the same vein, will the Secretary of State confirm that many of the teachers, youth leaders and people who provide facilities for young people are most concerned that, nowadays, things outside the national curriculum—the opportunity to go to theatres, concerts, films, swimming pools or sports arenas—are increasingly prohibited because of the charges that are imposed? Young people have no access to those facilities. Given the initiative that she took last week, will she consider the way in which national lottery money could help young people to have access to facilities outside core education? Otherwise, those young people, especially if they are in lower-income families, will not have access to such facilities any more.

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman will be only too aware that his part of the world, for example, contains the magnificent new bankside project—which has received £50 million—a museum of modern arts and the Globe theatre. It is not so far away from another important lottery project. We intend that the change in rules, on which we are consulting, will enable youngsters to participate in our great artistic and cultural heritage, through concessionary tickets, through support for touring and through a range of educational measures. Once the consultation is complete, it will be for the arts, heritage and sporting organisations to take the opportunities and to make their applications to use that lottery money. We must invest in the country's talent as well as in its buildings.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: I recognise the lottery's fantastic achievement in funding sports facilities for young and old alike, including the new Starport sports centre in my constituency—which will give a new home to both the Starport hockey club and the Starport athletics club—but does my right hon. Friend agree that it is time to consider the possibility of setting up a trust fund, out of which payments could be made for sports scholarships and sports expenses for talented young sportsmen?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend deals with an issue that we have raised during our consultation on how to modify the rules. We were anxious to take forward the consultation on the modification of the rules precisely to invest in a talent fund to promote the youngsters of tomorrow to ensure that we have Olympic athletes, as well as to extend further participation generally.

7. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the impact on good causes of the national lottery. [11763]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The national lottery is a resounding success. In just over a year, more than £300 million has been raised for each of the five good causes.

Mr. Banks: I am not sure that I heard the right hon. Lady say that at our last dinner party. Whatever the impact of the lottery on good causes, will she give a categorical assurance that in no circumstances will any lottery money be used to finance the construction of a new royal yacht?

Mrs. Bottomley: I know not whether I said that at a recent dinner party or whether it was said, for example, by the people who were interviewed about the hon. Gentleman's salary a few days ago. If he had asked those people about the lottery, they would have been much more enthusiastic in their response to that than they were about the remuneration of hon. Members.

Be that as it may, the hon. Gentleman might like to provide advice on how he has managed to scoop the jackpot in his constituency. I see that it has received no fewer than 12 different awards for caring charities, ranging from the Newham Bengali community trust to the pier training shop and Victim Support. The hon. Gentleman has done better than any other hon. Member.

In terms of other projects for which lottery funding might be made available, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that the distributing bodies decide on the basis of applications. I am aware of no distributing body that has had an application in respect of the matter that he describes.

Mr. John Greenway: How quickly can we get money through to the good cause of young people who have won places at arts, drama, music and dance colleges but cannot get a discretionary grant to fund their places at those colleges? Is it for the Arts Council to decide these matters? Could we not have something in place so that young people who are to go to those colleges and schools this autumn have a chance of proper funding from the lottery?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend raises an issue that is of legitimate concern to hon. Members. Overall, the lottery intends to provide talent funding for those who would not otherwise be entitled to funding from local authorities. In all sorts of areas it is possible to increase talent and promote excellence. Fundamentally, that is a matter for local education authorities, and a number of the interests that are involved are seeing whether it would be possible to assist and encourage education authorities to face their responsibilities with some assistance from lottery money.

Mr. Fisher: Since one of the best causes will be the millennium exhibition and the celebrations associated with it, does the Secretary of State agree that, whatever site the Millennium Commission chooses for the exhibition, these are difficult celebrations to get right? The time until the end of the century is very short and the experience of Seville and other places shows the difficulties. Therefore, will the right hon. Lady turn her attention from the rhetoric on which she relies to some action, and establish a cross-departmental working party, to include the Department of Transport, the Department of the Environment and the Home Office, to look urgently at problems of infrastructure for tourism, policing, the environment and transport? Will she change this rhetoric for some action? The Government are in danger of dragging their feet and of turning what should be a great national success into a very questionable event.

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman is right in suggesting that the millennium festival is of such an order

that it is far above and much more complex than the great run of awards made by the distributing bodies. The Millennium Commission has made about 303 awards so far ranging from cycle tracks, to the renaissance of Portsmouth harbour to millennial forests. The festival is an occasion of great significance and importance. When we make the announcement, we shall consider what measures the Government might wish to announce alongside the activities of the Millennium Commission itself.

Deregulation

8. **Mr. Peter Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is her policy on deregulation; and if she will make a statement. [11765]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department of National Heritage fully supports the Government's initiative on deregulation. We attach great importance to the drive to reduce burdens on business in the UK. Over-regulation is particularly burdensome for small businesses, of which there are many in tourism. Progress has been made with deregulation in this sector, and we will continue to work constructively with other Departments to remove obstacles to greater competitiveness.

Mr. Atkinson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the industries most vulnerable to regulation is the tourism industry, which employs many people in my constituency? It is particularly vulnerable to excessive health and safety regulation; it would be especially vulnerable if the European social chapter were extended to the United Kingdom and, above all, it would be vulnerable to Labour's idea of a national minimum wage, which would destroy many young people's opportunity to start a career in that dynamic and growing industry.

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend precisely identifies the greatest threat to tourism in our generation. Employment is growing in tourism; it is of great economic significance to the country. The Government are committed to minimising regulation. The real killer of jobs would be Labour's European jobs tax—the social chapter, the minimum wage and, of course, the training levy. Once again, although Labour Members say that they support tourism, their behaviour suggests otherwise. They say one thing, but they do another.

Mr. Grocott: Rather than giving us a lecture on the social chapter and regulation, will the Secretary of State acknowledge that the Government have failed to exercise any democratic regulation in one key area—their failure to act is massively unpopular—which is resulting in the loss of major sporting events from the main terrestrial channels? Such events are increasingly available only on satellite channels. When will she understand that, if young people in particular cannot see our major national sports at their best, performed by the best, the chances of the long-term continuation of those sports and of young people becoming involved in them will be seriously jeopardised? Even though she seems to have just woken up to the problem by issuing a consultation document, will she at least ensure that she consults not only sporting authorities and broadcasters but viewers and listeners among the public, who are overwhelmingly on Labour's side on the issue?

Mrs. Bottomley: I certainly will give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. Indeed, it is important to consult not only viewers and listeners but sportsmen and women and children. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that investment in, for example, football, rugby and tennis has increased beyond all recognition because of the resources available. Many sport rights bodies have not chosen the highest bid. They have traded money against the maximum possible audience. The hon. Gentleman does not give the sporting bodies sufficient credit for the thought that they have given to the issue. It is, however, a complex matter, the issues are set out in the consultation document, and I shall be interested in all views, including the hon. Gentleman's.

Art (Public Buildings)

9. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will undertake a survey into insurance arrangements concerning displays of art in public buildings. [11766]

Mr. Sproat: Although I have no plans to undertake a survey of insurance arrangements as such, I shall consider this important matter as part of the Department's review of all aspects of its policies on museums.

Mr. Cohen: I hope that the Minister will conduct a specific review of the problem with insurance. A gallery approached me with the offer to exhibit quality paintings in my local town hall, but when I approached the chief executive, he said that, although he would love to display the paintings, he knew, since it was not the first time that it had happened, that he could not because the insurance costs were prohibitive. Does the Minister agree that much more art could be displayed in our town halls and public buildings if insurance costs were not so prohibitive? Will he conduct a review with the aim of getting more art on display?

Mr. Sproat: I know the attention that the hon. Gentleman has paid to the Crane Kalman gallery and the display of paintings by Alan Lowndes, and very much support what he has tried to do. I understand, however, that the council did not apply to have the Government indemnity scheme applied to it, which, in principle, it could have done. If objects are on loan for public benefit, councils may qualify for the benefits of the Government indemnity scheme. The hon. Gentleman's local authority may care to consider that. I shall, however, certainly consider the matter in my museums review.

Mr. Jessel: Should such insurance not be a matter for the occupants of buildings rather than the Government? Is the hon. Gentleman's question yet another example of the Labour party's insatiable appetite for interference and the desire to have a finger in every pie?

Mr. Sproat: The current state of play is indeed that local authorities can take out commercial insurance if they so wish, or apply for the Government indemnity scheme. Both are available to my hon. Friend's local authority.

Broadcasting (Listed Events)

10. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to extend the listed events under section 182 of the Broadcasting Act 1990. [11767]

Mr. Sproat: The list of events drawn up under section 182 of the Broadcasting Act 1990 is kept under regular review.

Mr. Ainger: Does the Minister agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) that the Government made a mistake in the Broadcasting Act 1990 in not preventing the satellite companies from getting exclusive rights to those eight major sporting events? Does he agree with hon. Members on both sides of the House, including a majority of Conservative Members who were polled by MORI, that the Department should be defending the rights and interests of the tens of thousands of viewers, rather than the narrow, vested interests of a few broadcasters and sporting associations? If he agrees, can he tell the House why the Secretary of State for Wales is trying to scupper in the other place an amendment that would achieve the very aim that the majority of the House wants?

Mr. Sproat: I do not believe that the House made a mistake. I was not in the House at the time, but I understand that it deliberately put a bar on pay per view and not on satellite. Sporting rights are extremely important and complex. I said so from the Dispatch Box on 20 November, in answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton). I also said that it is something that we should discuss during debates on the Broadcasting Bill—and that is precisely what we are doing.

Mr. Gale: Does my hon. Friend accept that the list has never worked properly and that, with the advent of digital subscription terrestrial television, the importance of satellite television will wane anyway? Should not the House be seeking to achieve a solution whereby sport benefits from the finance from live transmission rights and the audience benefits as far as possible from secondary rights given to free-to-air terrestrial broadcasting? Is not that the way forward?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend is extremely well informed on this matter, and I have no doubt that arguments such as those will be put forward strongly when we debate the matter. I hope that both sides of the argument will be given a proper airing and that the House will reach a just and fair conclusion.

Mr. Morgan: Will the Minister consider adding the five nations championship to the list of eight national sporting events, in spite of what happened on Saturday, when the Welsh rapier was defeated by the English bludgeon? Does he agree that that championship is the most significant sporting event to be left off the list? If the list had been drawn up after consultation with people in Wales, it would have been first and not ninth. Does he also agree that it is time to review the Government's policy, which seems to be based on the principle of reach for the sky?

Mr. Sproat: I do not know what the hon. Gentleman means by "in spite of Saturday". I thought that the Scottish XV displayed some of the finest rugby that we have seen in any match for years. The Rugby Football Union in England deliberately decided last time round that it would give the rights not to the highest bidder, but to the BBC, because it thought that audience reach was more important than cash. That is an important factor that all bodies should weigh up. Indeed, that is no doubt something that we shall discuss when we debate the Broadcasting Bill.

Tourism

11. **Mr. Robert Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress she has made in reducing excessive regulation in the tourism industry. [11768]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Good progress has been made. Measures such as the reforms of the liquor licensing law, Sunday trading law and food hygiene regulations have all benefited tourism. My Department has recently worked closely with the Department of Transport on the relaxation of rules governing white-on-brown road signs. This will help a wide range of tourism-related businesses.

Mr. Banks: Will my right hon. Friend continue her determination to dispose of all unnecessary regulations that affect the tourism industry? Will she keep a particularly sharp eye on proposals from the European Commission to enhance the role of tourism in the EU? If a large and bureaucratic organisation were to be set up, would it not have regulatory powers? Should not the European Parliament and the European Commission embark on a course of deregulation? Will she ensure that our Members of the European Parliament are fully briefed before the debate on the subject next Monday?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend has great knowledge in this area, and I know that about 104,000 of his constituents are employed in jobs involving tourism. The key need of those in the tourism and leisure industry is for the Government to lighten the load and reduce red tape. As Ramon Pasarez, managing director of the Savoy Group, says:

"What I want from the Government is the freedom to run my business."

The meddling, interference and socialist controls proposed by the Labour party are the greatest danger to our flourishing tourism industry.

Mr. Skinner: Is not one of the biggest dangers to tourism-related small businesses the fact that some people will not pay their debts on time? Is it not even worse when the Deputy Prime Minister brags about not paying his debts and putting other businesses into bankruptcy? Will the Secretary of State now admonish the Deputy Prime Minister for the Gerald Ratner-type bombshell that he has landed on the Government?

Mrs. Bottomley: The tourism industry needs to hear from people who know how to run small business, not windy rhetoric such as that from the hon. Gentleman. Some 90,000 new jobs were created in the tourism industry last year, which is a phenomenal success. There has been a one-fifth increase in the number of people working in tourism in the past 10 years. During those 10 years, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has played a crucial role in making this country more competitive and fought industry's corner in government.

National Lottery

12. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representation she has received on providing revenue support from national lottery funds. [11769]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have received a number of representations, of which I have taken account in considering the changes that I propose to make as part of the natural development of the national lottery. I intend to make it possible for the distributors to support the new areas of youth, talent, access and participation.

Lady Olga Maitland: May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her resounding success with the national lottery, as distributing more than £2 billion to good causes is no mean feat? It is not surprising that the Labour party carps and criticises—it never thought of the idea itself. Will she give an assurance that charities will be able to qualify for some sort of revenue support—for example, Victim Support will be able to get help to find people to man telephones; an orchestra might get help to appoint a conductor?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend pushes at an open door. Some 2,460 awards have been made to caring charities, three of which are in her constituency—Carshalton scout group, Sutton Crossroads care attendant scheme and the Sutton centre for voluntary services. All those organisations are helping my hon. Friend's constituents. I have no doubt that, as the lottery progresses, the different distributing bodies will learn from their experiences and want to modify their rules as they continue to invest in good causes.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Will the Secretary of State comment on the remarks made to my constituent, Professor Colin Humphries, who applied for support for science funding from the Millennium Commission and was told that it would not be appropriate because it would not appeal to readers of the *Daily Mail*?

Mrs. Bottomley: The Millennium Commission has made many awards, from the 303 that have been made, that would appeal greatly to readers of all the different newspapers. It is the commission's purpose to invest in the environment and regeneration and to ensure that a range of interests are addressed. It is especially looking for science projects. There has probably been a misunderstanding about the comment that the hon. Lady reports, because the commission hopes particularly to make progress with science.

13. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much revenue the national lottery has generated for good causes. [11770]

14. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the latest estimate of proceeds from the national lottery. [11771]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: With permission, Madam Speaker, I shall answer this question and question 14 together. [Hon. Members: "Give the answer, then."] I am sorry, Madam Speaker; I was overcome by the rollover answer.

Revenue generated by the national lottery for the five good causes totals more than £1,500 million so far. I think that the House may be aware of that information by now.

Mr. Congdon: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. May I especially welcome the recent initiative, announced by the national heritage memorial fund, to invest in urban parks? I am sure that it will be greatly appreciated by people who live in cities—especially in our greatest city, London. Is that not another example of how the lottery can be used to benefit a good cause—the environment?

Mrs. Bottomley: The national heritage memorial fund's announcement was important and significant. Investment in our built and natural heritage is of great importance. There are many projects, including cycle routes, urban forests and restoration of coastal paths, for which lottery money is being used to restore our environment. As my hon. Friend rightly says, in the inner cities it is often the natural—as much as the built—heritage that people want preserved.

Mr. Marshall: May I welcome that figure of £1.5 billion, which demonstrates that the lottery has been a major success? I especially welcome the grant of nearly £150,000 to the Wilf Slack sports ground in Barnet, which will benefit a large number of schoolchildren, in particular those from Christ's college, which my son attends.

Mrs. Bottomley: Conservative Members have no difficulty declaring the schools to which our children go. I hope that that school sets high standards.

Mr. Marshall: It is a local authority school.

Mrs. Bottomley: I am most impressed to hear that.

That is another example of how the lottery works in practice. It is probably the most successful lottery anywhere in the world. It is carefully regulated. If we can improve it further, we shall certainly do so. The Labour party sneers and jeers. It would cap prizes, reduce the amount of money coming through to good causes, and increase operating costs. The lottery has been a great success, and I pay tribute to all those who have made it possible.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Woolf Report

28. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many representations his Department has received on the subject of the Woolf report during the past six months. [11786]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Jonathan Evans): Approximately 260, of which 233 related to the implementation of the recommendations on raising the small claims limit and giving publicity for alternatives to litigation. Lord Woolf's secretariat has had some 311 items of correspondence.

Mr. Llwyd: I am grateful for that reply. The hon. Gentleman knows that, over the past 10 years, great

strides have been made in the provision of Welsh language facilities for Welsh medium trials. Will he assure me that, whatever decisions are made by the Government following the Woolf recommendations, the integrity of the Wales and Chester circuit will not be placed under pressure or varied and, more important, that there will be adequate and enhanced provision for Welsh language trials?

Mr. Evans: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for mentioning to me earlier today that he intended to raise this issue, and his concern that Lord Woolf's recommendations might have an effect on it. I have had the recommendations looked at and I can find nothing in them that would have the effect to which he refers. I share his concern to ensure that the great progress made by the Government in providing Welsh language trials is maintained. He may have in mind Lord Woolf's call for major, complex cases to be heard at particular civil proceedings centres. I do not envisage that that would in any way affect current procedures for making Welsh language facilities available. I hope that he is reassured to hear that.

Police (Transfers of Responsibility)

29. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent representations he has received from the police concerning transfers of responsibility. [11787]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Apart from the normal consultations with the police, my Department has received one letter from the Metropolitan police, which expresses concern about the progress of the transfer of certain warrant enforcement responsibilities to magistrates courts committees.

Mr. Flynn: Are the police as enthusiastic as everyone else about the future transfer of the government of this country from the Conservatives to Labour? Since the war, crime levels have risen under every Conservative Government and fallen under every Labour Government. Is it not true that criminals are now three times more likely to get away with their crimes than previously? Tory Britain today—as at every other time when the Tories were in control—is a paradise for criminals.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman should know that I had a long record prior to my coming to this place—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"]—of service in the criminal courts as a court advocate. I have therefore spoken to many of the police officers who are constituents of the hon. Gentleman and of many other Labour Members. They all recognise that there has been a great transformation in the conditions of service of the police under the Conservative Government. They are in no doubt about that.

Mr. Jenkin: While we are talking about transfers of responsibility, did my hon. Friend listen to the BBC Radio 4 "Analysis" programme, which was broadcast yesterday afternoon, about the apparent transfer of responsibility and discretionary power from Parliament to the judges? Should we not be aware also of the huge transfers of power from Parliament to Brussels that are likely to occur if the Labour party is elected to government?

Mr. Evans: I recognise the concerns that my hon. Friend has expressed over a lengthy period about the European Commission's interference in many aspects of life in this country. I think that the points made by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) are somewhat wide of the real issue, which is the debate about the transfer of responsibilities from the police to magistrates courts regarding the enforcement of fines. The Government recognise that that issue is important and that the situation will be improved by the transfer that we are seeking to carry forward.

Mr. Boateng: Putting the Minister's criminal antecedents to one side, let us look at the real situation in the magistrates courts at present. Does the Minister accept the very real concerns of the magistrates courts committees and of the police regarding the transfer of civilian staff from the police to those courts—not least because those staff have hitherto relied on uniformed police support for their enforcement role, for transportation to court of those who have been arrested, and for access to the police national computer? Will the Minister ensure, through increased negotiation with the magistrates courts committees, that the interests of justice are not subordinated once again to the interests of the Treasury?

Mr. Evans: The interests of justice underpin the proposal to transfer fine enforcement responsibilities. The credibility of the magistrates courts must be supported by placing responsibility for fine enforcement in their hands, and a number of magistrates courts committees currently undertake that work very effectively. The hon. Gentleman is right: consultation is important. It is taking place both with the Association of Chief Police Officers and with magistrates courts committees. As a result of that consultation, the implementation date of the change has been altered to 1 April 1997, as the hon. Gentleman will know. That enhances the position that the Government have set out for some time: the change will increase the efficiency of the courts and be made in conjunction both with the police and with the magistrates courts committees.

Family Law Bill [Lords]

31. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received from the Roman Catholic Church in relation to the Family Law Bill *[Lords]*. [11789]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I have received a number of representations from Catholic organisations in relation to the Government's divorce reform proposals.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Has he read the article by Cardinal Hume, published in *The Tablet* on 20 January 1996, in which he admitted that his earlier statements about the Family Law Bill were wrong, and that he did not support it in its present form but had serious reservations about it? He said that the Bill needed to be strengthened, that he opposed the idea of the no-fault clause, and that the time delay of one year was far too short.

Will my hon. Friend reassure me that he will listen carefully to Cardinal Hume's representations, bearing in mind the fact that he represents the enormously strong feeling of the vast majority of people?

Mr. Evans: I always pay close attention to Cardinal Hume's opinions. I am aware that, in October 1995, the

Catholic media office expressed disquiet that the media had been suggesting that Catholic bishops opposed the proposals in the Bill, and it reiterated the fact that the Catholic bishops welcomed the attempt to minimise damage caused by high divorce rates.

My hon. Friend mentioned Cardinal Hume's article in *The Tablet*. I have a note of an interview that Cardinal Hume gave to the "Today" programme that morning. He said:

"I have not changed my mind. That seems to me to be a misreading of the text".

Later, he said:

"I still support the Bill . . . I do not side with the critics of this Bill."

I hope that my hon. Friend also listens to what the cardinal has to say.

Mr. Alex Carlile: In his dealings on the Bill, will the Minister bear in mind the fact that, in the part of rural Wales that he and I know well, there is significant anxiety about the poor funding of conciliation services, including Relate? Will he try to ensure that one of the Bill's consequences is that matrimonial conciliation services can function at least as effectively in rural Wales as anywhere else in the country?

Mr. Evans: I recognise that it is important that we have effective conciliation services, but it is also important to recognise that conciliation cannot be forced on people involuntarily. It is also important that there should be no confusion between mediation—which is an important part of the Bill—and conciliation, leading, one hopes, to reconciliation. All those services are very important and, as my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor has said in debates in the other place, the Government attach great importance to them.

Mr. Tracey: Whether we or anyone else has misread Cardinal Hume's words, my hon. Friend should be well aware that there are singularly grave misgivings about the present terms of the Bill.

Mr. Evans: I am very keen, as is my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor, to take on board all those misgivings. I am very aware that many of those anxieties were expressed in Committee. It is important to have the detail of matters about which such misgivings are expressed because, as we found in Committee, many of those misgivings can be answered by what underpins the Bill. What underpins the Bill is, first, the wish to ensure the end of the quickie divorce—which, we feel, does not support married life, in which context my hon. Friend's position and mine are hardly dissimilar—and, secondly, the wish to take out of divorce much of the acrimony that the current system perpetuates.

32. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to make mediation binding in divorce cases; and if he will make a statement. [11790]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Government have no plans to make mediation binding in divorce cases.

Mr. Cohen: Does the Parliamentary Secretary agree with the letter from the Lord Chancellor's Department of 9 January 1996 which said:

"mediators are required . . . to protect the interests of the weaker party"

and

"required to remedy any imbalances of power"?

If mediation is not binding, will not a stronger party have a vested interest in ignoring its process and outcome? Surely the inexorable logic of the statements in the Lord Chancellor's letter is that mediation should be binding.

Mr. Evans: A mediated agreement can be made legally binding if the parties subsequently agree that should be the case. The hon. Gentleman seems to be proposing that the mediator should supplant himself as some sort of tribunal chairman or in a judge's role—not something that the Government intend to advance.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I am deeply reassured that mediation will not be binding, because, however much it should be encouraged, many people who deal professionally with divorce cases believe that binding mediation would be counter-productive.

Mr. Evans: Mediation must, by definition, be voluntary—no one can be compelled to make use of it. If a mediated agreement is reached between two parties, I see no objection to the parties subsequently carrying it forward as an agreement in writing—in which case, it would take on a legal character. We need to make that distinction clear.

Mr. Ian Brady

34. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the provision of legal aid to Mr. Ian Brady. [11792]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Decisions on the granting of civil legal aid are taken by the Legal Aid Board according to statutory tests. It is essential that decisions on the granting of civil legal aid are made independently and are seen to be free from political or Government interference.

Mr. Greenway: I well understand my hon. Friend's point, but is he aware that many people are extremely puzzled that Ian Brady has been granted legal aid to challenge in the High Court a judgment by the Press Complaints Commission, which does not have any judicial authority, while other people who appear to be much more deserving cannot obtain legal aid?

Mr. Evans: I am aware of the concern expressed by my hon. Friend from other correspondence received in my Department. I am pleased that my hon. Friend recognises that, for the reasons that I outlined, it is inappropriate for Ministers to comment on individual cases. In such circumstances, the matter is one for the Legal Aid Board. I am sure that my hon. Friend will draw his remarks to its attention.

LTS Rail

3.31 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East) (*by private notice*) asked the Secretary of State for Transport to make a statement on the future management of the LTS Rail line in light of the events over the weekend.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Sir George Young): Last Thursday, shortly before Enterprise Rail was due to take over the LTS Rail franchise on Sunday morning, after a routine audit of the system for allocating ticket revenue, the British Rail Board was made aware of certain ticketing irregularities in the company's accounts relating to the allocation of revenue from Travelcard between LTS and London Underground Ltd.

The board immediately instituted an investigation, which is still continuing. The Rail Regulator is also carrying out an investigation under his powers under section 55 of the Railways Act 1993.

In the circumstances, the franchising director decided that the transfer of LTS to Enterprise Rail should be postponed pending the outcome of the investigations. For the time being, LTS Rail will therefore continue to provide services as a subsidiary of the British Rail Board.

The House will understand that, as there remains a possibility of legal action, it would be inappropriate to comment on the specific allegations under investigation. Financial irregularities, whether in the public or private sector, are unacceptable and have no place in the modern railway.

Sir Teddy Taylor: While I much appreciate the Secretary of State's action in such a short space of time, as the alleged accountancy malpractices appear to be disgraceful and dishonest, will my right hon. Friend give a clear assurance that, before Enterprise Rail is given the opportunity to run the service to Southend and to deliver the pledged benefits of more regular services and new trains, any such alleged malpractices will be entirely weeded out and the persons who have been guilty of them held responsible? Will my right hon. Friend give the further assurance that, before any other steps are taken, the House will be given a full statement on how the irregularities occurred and, more important, the steps that have been taken to resolve them?

Sir George Young: I am happy to give my hon. Friend the assurances that he seeks. In relation to his first point, I have the franchising director's assurance that he will not be transferring LTS Rail until the allegations have been fully investigated. The franchising director, the Rail Regulator and British Rail will have to be fully satisfied that ticketing and revenue management are completely in order. As for the hon. Gentleman's second point in relation to the outcome of the investigations, in the first instance that will be a matter for British Rail and for the regulator. Should further legal proceedings be necessary, publication of full details may not be appropriate. I will, however, ensure that the House is made aware in general terms of the outcome of the investigations.

Ms Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): May I ask the Secretary of State to understand how serious this matter is, and that deliberate fraud in the public services—franchised or not—is a terribly serious matter for the country? Will he give us an undertaking that the offer to the LTS management team to allow it to run that service will be withdrawn, because it has shown itself to be a corrupt management team—[HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."]—if the allegations are true. Will he agree to reopen the tendering process and now allow British Rail to bid for this and other franchises?

Can the Secretary of State tell us whether a criminal investigation is taking place, and, if not, why not? Will he confirm that the fraud was discovered because the British Rail auditors held an inquiry and that, a few days later, they would not have had the authority to do so? In the future, how will he ensure that such fraud does not take place in companies that have been franchised?

Sir George Young: I made it clear at the end of my statement that the Government took the allegations very seriously and that there was no question of financial irregularities being tolerated in the modern railway, whether it is publicly or privately owned. In relation to the hon. Lady's specific questions, whether to re-tender for the LTS franchise is a decision for the franchising director, which I expect him to take in the light of the investigations once they are completed. Depending on the outcome of the investigations, it may not be necessary to re-tender, but it is too early to say. In relation to the police, it makes sense for British Rail to complete its internal investigations. However, British Rail has assured me that it will not hesitate to call in the British Transport police if that seems appropriate in the light of the investigations.

As for British Rail making a bid, again that is a matter primarily for the franchising director. He has, so far, taken the view that it is not necessary for British Rail to bid because of the quality of the bids that are coming from the private sector, but that is a matter which he has under review. In relation to the audit, the irregularities were detected soon after they occurred, and appropriate steps have been taken to put them right. It was the audit machinery that detected the irregularities and prompted the intervention.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it inspires confidence that the irregularities were detected and acted on immediately, which shows that our systems are working very well? Will he also undertake to ensure that the investigations are completed as soon as possible, so that the undeniable benefits of privatising British Rail can be brought to bear on my constituents, who want to see the new rolling stock and improved services that the new privatised companies are offering?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend has rightly drawn the House's attention to the benefits of franchising. Two franchises have gone ahead, offering real improvements to passengers at less cost to the taxpayer. We should not lose sight of that goal. As for his specific questions in relation to the length of time of the investigations, they will be properly carried out; there is no question of rushing them. The priority is to ensure that the investigations expose the full extent of any wrongdoing. My hon. Friend is also right to draw attention to the rigour of the audit procedure, which detected the irregularities soon after they occurred.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): Does the Secretary of State agree that, in light of the events that are now being revealed in LTS, we have clear confirmation of the folly of the current privatisation process? What guarantee can he give the House that similar practices are not being undertaken throughout the 25 train operating companies, and that they are not being allowed to maximise their revenue and profit at our expense? Will he now accept that there is an urgent need to establish a national rail authority with strong regulatory powers to ensure that we meet the twin objectives of maximising investment in our rail industry and maximising passenger and freight loading, rather than maximising profit to the shareholder at the expense of the taxpayer?

Sir George Young: As the hon. Gentleman may know, there are already two independent regulators of the railway industry, both of whom are involved in the investigations to which I have referred. There was an assumption in the hon. Gentleman's question—and, indeed, in many of his comments—that irregularities of this kind happen only in the private sector. It will be within the experience of many hon. Members that there have been problems within local authorities, housing benefit departments and home improvement grant departments. It is simply not the case that irregularities and the risk of abuse of the taxpayer occur only in the private sector. There are, sadly, all too many abuses in the public sector.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I thank my right hon. Friend for pointing out that fraud has occurred in authorities such as Lambeth, Liverpool and other havens of new and old Labour. Will he confirm that there was not just one bidder for this franchise but that others came forward with honourable proposals? Does he agree that commuters are looking forward to improvements in service and that they are fed up with the dead-beat service that they have for too long received from the nationalised British Rail?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If he examines the detail of the new services being provided by Great Western Railways and South West Trains, he will find real benefits to passengers and commuters from extra services that were not being provided by British Rail and which will be provided at less cost to the taxpayer. It is important to retain a sense of perspective.

As for financial impropriety, my hon. Friend may have seen that today's *Evening Standard* contains serious allegations of financial mismanagement in the London borough of Islington. It is not the case that problems of this kind occur only in the private sector.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Is the Secretary of State aware that there are four stations in the borough of Newham at which LTS trains do not stop? One of them is West Ham, which is served by the District line and the North London line and will shortly be served by the Jubilee line, which will provide a convenient interchange to the whole of London. Is he further aware that, when I approached the prospective management of LTS, asking it to stop trains at that station, it declined on the basis that it would lose revenue from there to Fenchurch Street? Does he agree that this state of affairs does not help privatisation or the integration of transport? Will he examine the plan for pooled fares which existed prior to the Transport Act 1947, which would mean proper services for Londoners and would avoid the risk of the accounting problems about which we have been hearing?

Sir George Young: It is worth recalling that there were proposals from LTS to increase off-peak and Sunday services and to offer fares for accompanied children travelling of only 5p. Such services are not currently available, so one needs to look at the broader picture before making a judgment. As for non-stopping trains, the matter was resolved when the passenger service requirements were set. By and large, the present service would have been carried out by the new contractors, and there were no planned reductions in service on that line.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I regret what has happened with the London-Southend-Tilbury line, but does my right hon. Friend share my deep disgust at the blanket conclusions drawn by Opposition parties about the privatisation of rail services? Will he confirm that the South West Trains privatisation in my constituency and the Great Western line privatisation went ahead successfully at the weekend, and that Stagecoach, which is taking over South West Trains, is pledging an extra £3 million to improve passenger services, punctuality and services for the business traveller?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is right. Stagecoach made a financial commitment of £3 million to improve stations and provide passenger facilities that are not available under the present regime. This morning, I received from Stagecoach a new passengers charter with performance commitments to increase punctuality on main line and suburban services. It is indeed the case that, under the two franchises that are going ahead, there will be real improvements that will be welcomed by my hon. Friend's constituents and commuters throughout the south-west.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): How does the Secretary of State square his undertaking that there will be a most rigorous examination of the big smell relating to the LTS line with the words of the franchising director earlier this morning at Waterloo station? The franchising director said that he expected the privatisation to proceed on course within three or four weeks. Is not the franchising director prejudging the inquiry, and is not that an indication that both the Secretary of State and the franchising director want to minimise the embarrassment and get on with privatisation, regardless of what is discovered?

Will the Secretary of State tell us whether any employee of British Rail who formed part of the management team has been suspended, and if not, why not? Will the people who put in alternative bids be made aware of the circumstances of the distortion of the bidding process for the LTS line?

Sir George Young: I understand that the commercial director of LTS Rail has resigned and that one other member of staff has been suspended. I made it clear when I answered an earlier question that whether to re-tender for LTS is a decision for the franchising director, which I expect him to make in the light of the investigation that I have announced.

Mr. Mackinlay: He is prejudging it.

Sir George Young: There is no question of that investigation being prejudged. No decision can be taken until the inquiry is completed.

May I say how pleased I was to see the hon. Member at Waterloo station earlier this morning commemorating the inauguration of the first two privatised rail services?

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Having got up at 4.30 yesterday morning to join my right hon. Friend on the first privatised South West train, the 5.10 from Twickenham to Waterloo—[HON. MEMBERS: "You must have been mad."] Perhaps I was mad, but that is what I did. The train was clean, punctual and comfortable, and my constituents look forward to an improved service. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that there are 179 stations on South West lines as against 16 on the Southend line—

Madam Speaker: Order. I remind the House that this is a very narrow private notice question. I shall be bringing it to a close shortly after those hon. Members who have a direct interest in that line have been called. The hon. Member must now come to the end of his question and make it relevant to the private notice question.

Mr. Jessel: Does not that make the Southend line only one eleventh as important as South West Trains?

Sir George Young: It is always a pleasure to meet my hon. Friend, and it was a special pleasure to meet him at five o'clock in the morning yesterday at Twickenham station and to share that historic first journey on a privatised train service with him. I had the benefit of my hon. Friend pointing out certain local features as we made the journey from Twickenham to Waterloo. My hon. Friend rightly puts the problems before the House in perspective by reminding us of the scale of the service being provided by South West Trains and of the improvements that will take place.

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): From the perspective of my constituents, the Southend-Tilbury line is of great importance. Barking station provides one of the few interchanges between British Rail and the underground. It is critical that there should be trust and co-operation between rail and the underground for that interchange to function. That trust and co-operation has been challenged by what has emerged this weekend.

Madam Speaker: Order. I have not heard a question from the hon. Lady yet.

Ms Hodge: Will the Secretary of State confirm that the line—known as the misery line—will not be well served if he continues the proposals to privatise it with that particular company? Will he introduce a more transparent mechanism to ensure that trust and co-operation can be built into the final authority for running the line?

Sir George Young: The hon. Lady's constituents want a reliable train service. The prospective franchisees were offering more services than those currently provided, including additional services late at night and on Sundays. We are determined to provide a better service for the nation's passengers and commuters through franchising. The evidence of the first two supports our assertion that the process can drive up the quality of service and reduce the cost to the taxpayer.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Bearing in mind the fact that rail fares have risen by 22 per cent. more than inflation in the nationalised railways, will my right hon. Friend remind the House that fares on privatised lines such as the Tilbury-Southend line, which is of direct interest to my constituents, will be pegged to inflation for four years and to increases equal to or less than inflation in the following three years, so it is vital that the privatisation of that and other lines takes place as rapidly as possible?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend has rightly reminded the House of safeguards that passengers have not had before on the level of key fares. From January this year, key fares have been capped to the retail prices index, and after three years they will go down by 1 per cent. That contrasts with the 22 per cent. real increase in fares under the last Labour Government.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): How many more crooks are involved in bidding for franchises in British Rail and how will the Secretary of State know that when the British Rail internal audit machinery has been abolished?

Sir George Young: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will reflect on the language that he used in the light of what I said earlier. It would be wrong to prejudge any legal proceedings before the investigation has been completed. Before any franchise is transferred, the franchising director has to be satisfied of the integrity of the management. Other safeguards are built in through the regulator. I am confident that we have the necessary safeguards to protect public services.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Will my right hon. Friend assure me that the investigation into the alleged fraud will not hold up progress on the franchising of the Chiltern line, which is already under way, or prejudice the position of the management consortia that are bidding to make the Chiltern line service still better?

Sir George Young: I can give my hon. Friend the assurance he seeks. There is no question of halting the franchising programme, which is making good progress. As we speak, 50 per cent. of passenger services by revenue have been let or are under offer. Final bids for next four franchises are due on 1 March. There is no evidence that any other train operating company has been involved in irregularities such as those we have discussed, so it would be wholly unjustified to arrest the franchising programme.

Mr. Keith Hill (Streatham): On the subject of arrests, will the Secretary of State confirm that the scam would have been worth up to £360,000 a year to the future owners of the private railway company? Will he also confirm that, in future, 12 private railway companies will share their revenues with London Underground and

experience the same opportunities for fraud? Can he name a single example of comparable fraud under the publicly owned railway system?

Sir George Young: I can think of several comparable instances in the hon. Gentleman's borough—the London borough of Lambeth.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Can my right hon. Friend confirm a point that appears to have been missed by most Opposition Members—that, when the irregularities occurred on the LTS line, the line was being run by public servants?

Sir George Young: It is certainly the case that the LTS line was being run by British Rail when the irregularities took place.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I am now going to move on. I remind the House that we will have a wide debate on these matters on Wednesday.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman is seeking to catch my eye on that, he should do so then.

Points of Order

3.51 pm

Mr. Foulkes: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has a point of order for me because he did not get in.

Mr. Foulkes: I have been waiting since 2.30, so I am grateful. As you will know, Madam Speaker, on St. David's day, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) will introduce a Bill that would give a right to interest on commercial debt. I understand that it has the support of the Government, yet I am told that, at the weekend, the Deputy Prime Minister admitted that, when he was a small business man, he was quite skilful at stringing along the creditors. If we now have an admission from the Deputy Prime Minister that he held off his creditors for as long as possible, is it not an example of hypocrisy—
of saying one thing and doing another?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is quite aware that that is not a point of order, and that he is abusing the time of the House.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you had any information from the Deputy Prime Minister that he intends to make a statement setting out a changed procedure for the Government paying their bills to outside businesses? Is the right hon. Gentleman advocating that the Government start fiddling their bill-paying by depriving businesses of much-needed income, which could drive them into bankruptcy, something which apparently he has been doing for many years?

Madam Speaker: I have not had any indication that the Government are seeking to make a statement today on that or any other matter. Let me make it clear to those Members who are seeking to raise points of order about statements that we are not expecting any statements today.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. During the private notice question, the Secretary of State for Transport averred that the first service provided by South West Trains was the 5.40 from Teddington to Waterloo. In fact, the first service offered by South West Trains was the 3 o'clock from Eastleigh to Southampton, and it was a bus—

Madam Speaker: Order. That is an interesting point, but it is certainly not a point of order for me. I do not carry a timetable in my top pocket so as to be able to check what the Secretary of State and the hon. Lady are saying.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It relates to the rights of the House and Government consultation documents.

You will be aware that, on Friday, the Government, out of the blue, published a so-called consultation document entitled "Broadcasting Sports Rights: Informing the Debate". As long ago as July 1994, the Select Committee on National Heritage published a unanimous report stating

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that major sporting events should be protected for the major channels. The Government's response was to state that they proposed to take no action.

The Broadcasting Bill, which relates to the availability of sporting events, has been given a Second Reading in another place. If the Government start consulting on major issues of national policy, the Secretary of State for National Heritage should, at the very least, make a statement on which she can be questioned, especially as the consultation document to which I have referred has all the hallmarks of a paper that has been put together at the last minute. It contains no address to which representations should be sent. There is no reference to a closing date for the sending of representations and no list of the bodies that have been consulted. This is playing politics on the hoof.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman seems to be raising with me a matter that, had he thought about it at the time and had he been aware of it at the time, is really one for the Leader of the House. The hon. Gentleman is seeking a Government statement. He may wish that, as may his right hon. and hon. Friends, but that is not a matter for me. It is for the Government to decide whether Ministers should make statements, and when they make them.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. If the Deputy Prime Minister ever comes to you and says, "Can I borrow some money?", will you tell him that you are tough on debt and tough on the causes of debt?

Madam Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman would get very little change from me. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that. I have nothing in my pockets.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is there anything that you can do to dissuade hon. Members from writing works of fiction about our proceedings? A book now being sold—it was written by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie)—more or less suggests that this place is full of Members drinking themselves into oblivion and bonking their eyeballs out. Unfortunately, that is not the position. I feel that we need to be protected from such unfounded allegations.

Madam Speaker: I believe that the hon. Gentleman is quite capable of protecting himself. There is an answer: do not buy it; do not read it.

Policing of London

[Relevant document: Minutes of Evidence taken before the Home Affairs Committee on 17th January (House of Commons Paper No. 155-i.)]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

3.58 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): When we last debated the policing of London, I placed before the House my vision of what the Metropolitan police can deliver and are delivering for our capital city. My vision was of even more reductions in crime; an even safer city where safer streets improve the quality of life in the capital; and a city where there is a flourishing and active partnership between the police and the public, where individual members of London's public know that they can make a real difference by volunteering to support their local police in whatever way best suits their local needs.

I said that I wanted that to be delivered by a police service that is visible, approachable and predominantly unarmed, and which provides a reassuring presence right across London. I outlined my plans and those of the Commissioner for bringing that about, and the Government's commitment to providing the necessary resources.

Today, just over 13 months later, I want to return to my vision and the success that we are having in making it a reality. I want to take stock of the objectives and achievements of the Metropolitan police in the light of that vision, and I want to explain how they fit into the Government's general strategies for law and order.

I make no apology for beginning with the Met's crime figures. When—as is the case today—the police make major advances, we should celebrate those achievements and ensure that the public know about them. The Government have never accepted, and will never accept, the depressing view that we are powerless in the face of increasing crime, and neither has the Commissioner.

Let us make no mistake: there has been a major breakthrough in stemming what many had predicted was an inexorable growth in reported crime in the capital. The significant falls are precisely where we most wanted them—in the two volume crimes that make up nearly half the crime in London: breaking into our homes and stealing our cars.

Let us look at the figures for the past two years in the Met, to June 1995. Overall, we see the biggest drop in the number of crimes—118,300—since records began. In the second year alone, there were 60,000 fewer recorded crimes in the Metropolitan police district than in the previous 12 months. That is excellent news.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): The Secretary of State referred to the figures for recorded crime. Does he agree that a sizeable proportion of the people of London fail to report crimes, because they know that their local police force is overstretched and undermanned, and even if it responds there is very little possibility of a clear-up for that crime?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Lady should know that one of the offences that has fallen sharply in recent years is that

of theft of cars. Indeed, if she had listened to what I said, she would have heard me draw particular attention to that a moment ago. Is she suggesting that people do not report the fact that their car has been stolen?

Ms Jackson: Yes.

Mr. Howard: I think that she is in a fantasy land if that is what she thinks, because she knows perfectly well that to make an insurance claim for theft of one's car, one has to report it to the police. If the hon. Lady thinks that people are not reporting the theft of their cars, I suggest that nothing that she says deserves to be taken seriously. I certainly do not propose to take seriously what she says after that intervention.

The even better news, of course, is that crime is coming down across the country. Whether measured by police recorded figures or the British crime survey, the overall position in the Met is better than outside London. For example, vehicle crime fell by 33 per cent. in the two years to June 1995. That is a drop of 79,200 offences. Theft of vehicles in London has dropped by 39 per cent. in the period from June 1979 to June 1995.

Look at burglary. The Met attacked it vigorously just as we asked it to. The Commissioner's anti-burglary initiative, Operation Bumblebee, used, for the first time, techniques such as intelligence gathering, surveillance and targeting of suspects, which previously had been used only for the most serious crime. The fact is that there have been 8 per cent. fewer burglaries in the Metropolitan district in the two years following the start of Londonwide Operation Bumblebee in June 1993, and a 30 per cent. leap in the number of crimes being solved.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I regularly attend neighbourhood watch meetings in my constituency, which falls within the Ealing and Southall police areas, and I know that the fall in the number of burglaries has given tremendous heart to local people. The police tell me that they have been able to pinpoint and target particular culprits and have them dealt with them, and that partly accounts for their great success. Does that mean that my right hon. and learned Friend's concern for dealing with those people, should they continue in their ways when they are released back into society, is a matter of concern for everyone?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend, who takes a close interest in these matters, is right to cite the targeting of persistent offenders as one of the reasons for the Met's success. Of course, if those offenders are not dealt with properly by the courts, much of the good that the police do will be undone. As my hon. Friend will know, that consideration prompted one of the proposals that I announced in Blackpool last October, which was intended to ensure that persistent burglars were properly dealt with.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): In 1994, 959 burglars were cautioned by the Metropolitan police, and were not prosecuted. I accept that, in the case of domestic family incidents, the police may have had some discretion, but some of those who were cautioned were not prosecuted because the Crown Prosecution Service did not think it worth while. The Home Secretary must tell us whether those people are included in the clear-up rates, and what is the disparity between the use of cautions for burglars by the Metropolitan police and their use by other forces in England and Wales.

Mr. Howard: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has intervened. He made a series of allegations which were reported in the *Evening Standard* last week, and which disclosed depths of ignorance previously unplumbed even by him.

If the hon. Gentleman had made the slightest attempt to check his facts, he would have discovered, first, that, contrary to what he said, the guidance that I have given is designed not to increase but to decrease the number of cautions given by the police, and that it has had a considerable effect.

Secondly, he would have discovered that the number of cautions given has no effect on the crime figures, because a crime is recorded as a crime, whether a caution, a prosecution or a conviction follows. Thirdly, he would have discovered that whether a caution is given makes no difference to the clear-up figures. Each of the three components of the hon. Gentleman's allegation was completely incorrect.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Howard: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I must then continue my speech.

Mr. Hughes: In his capacity as police authority, will the Home Secretary join me in paying tribute to the success of the Metropolitan police in combating crime in London? Wearing his other hat, will he confirm that that success has been achieved despite the fact that, according to his published figures, the grant to the Met fell this year and is projected to fall again next year? The standard spending assessment has also fallen, as has the capital addition. The Met's resources are now lower than they have been at any time in the last five years.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong, as I shall shortly demonstrate, when I deal with resources. I thank him for his tribute to the Metropolitan police, however.

The latest published figures for burglary were affected by a change in the recording criteria, and appear to show a 6 per cent. increase, but the Commissioner has told me that the more recent figures for the last quarter of 1995, compared with those for the last quarter of 1994—again, comparing like with like—show a fall of 15 per cent. in the number of burglaries of people's homes. That amounts to some 5,000 fewer offences. It seems that Bumblebee is working.

Seven major Londonwide operations to date—two involving massive joint operations with other forces—have made a significant impact. Under Bumblebee, nearly 4,500 premises have been searched and more than 3,000 people arrested. Property recovered has included firearms, high-performance cars, knives, axes, mobile telephones, forged passports, stolen licences and MOT certificates, computer equipment, jewellery, drugs, cash and electrical goods.

Operation Christmas Cracker—the nationwide Bumblebee on 5 December—was mounted by 12,000 officers from 40 forces across the country. It resulted in

[Mr. Howard]

nearly 3,500 arrests, and the recovery of property worth around £1.8 million. In the Metropolitan police district alone, 744 properties were searched, 560 arrests made, and £119,000-worth of property recovered. The Met has made a real impact on crime levels, and it is putting fear where it should be: with the burglar, not the innocent householder.

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): Operation Bumblebee has undoubtedly been a tremendous success, and great credit is due to the Metropolitan police. Does the Home Secretary agree that much of the credit for the operation goes to the successful initiative that was piloted in my north London constituency, where Bumblebee started? What was important about the initiative, however, was that it relied on a partnership approach with local authorities, my own included. That is what made it a tremendous success.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for recognising Operation Bumblebee's success. As she will know, I have always laid great emphasis on the importance of partnership between the police and the public, and that includes partnership between the police and local authorities. Of course local authorities have a part to play in these matters.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend and the Metropolitan police on the reduced crime figures, which are welcome, but will he accept that, as a whole, crime has risen in the past 30 years? Has the problem perhaps been that some of his predecessors, of both parties, have listened far too much to the half-baked left-wing ideas that still appear to be held by Opposition Members, by people in the criminal justice establishment, and even by some judges?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. I am far more interested in what is happening now, and in what we want to happen in the next few years, than in what happened in the past.

Bumblebee techniques are now being applied, through Operation Eagle Eye, to mugging—the crime that Londoners fear most after burglary. The Commissioner tells me that the Met's street crime clear-up rate has accelerated past the 15 per cent. target that I agreed with him. He tells me that, before Operation Eagle Eye, at one stage street robberies in London were running at around 850 a week. The increase has now been capped. The figure has already dropped to 500, and the Commissioner tells me that it is still dropping. Over the same period, arrests for street robbery have almost doubled.

It is all the more remarkable that all that has been achieved when the demands on the Met are greater than ever. The population of the Metropolitan police district has risen from 7,260,000 in 1990 to 7,455,000 in 1994. As the Select Committee on Public Accounts heard last November, every year, more than 1.5 million 999 calls are coming in from the public. The Metropolitan police answered 86 per cent. of them within 15 seconds over the past 12 months, and 90 per cent. of them within that time in the past four months.

That is well over 10 per cent. better than the Metropolitan police charter target that I agreed with the Commissioner for the force's policing plan. It would be hard to find a better emergency response service in any other capital city in the world.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): On my right hon. and learned Friend's points about street robbery and the success that the Met is beginning to have, courtesy of Operation Eagle Eye and such initiatives, will he say a word or two about anything that might be learned of a constructive nature from policing experience in the New York police department? I understand that some interesting experiments have been pursued there, and that a team from the Met is shortly to go there to review the position for itself. Will he say a bit more about that?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is right, and I am about to make an observation about New York. Some techniques there are worth examining, and, just a few months ago, I considered them with Commissioner Bratton. But we are too grudging about celebrating success in our own country. Compared with other major cities here and capitals abroad, London is a safe city. Other world capitals have much higher rates.

Commissioner Bratton has made great progress in New York, but, for all the most serious offences, the crime rate there is far higher than in London. For robbery it is three times as high, and for rape it is twice as high. The homicide rate there is 210 per million—10 times the London rate—and most European capitals have homicide rates much higher than that in London. Amsterdam has 84 per million; Stockholm has 54 per million; and Berlin has 39 per million. The rate in London is 21 per million.

Of course there are problems of violent crime in London, as in all capital cities, but the Met is making good progress here, too. In the 12 months to June 1995, recorded violent crime in the Met area fell to 75,300 offences. Compared with the previous 12 months, that represents a decrease of 1,260 offences. That is probably the biggest ever annual fall, and certainly the biggest since the war. The Met figure for the 12 months to November 1995 shows that the rate of decrease is now 3 per cent.

Of course, there is still far too much crime. Every crime is one too many, and we all want to see even more arrests and more detections. But the Commissioner can be justly proud of the spectacular results that he and his officers have achieved. The success of the police in getting crime down deserves our full support.

The police welcome our comprehensive strategy to turn the tables on the criminal. As the Commissioner told the Home Affairs Select Committee last month:

"The pendulum has swung back towards protecting society. The climate within the criminal justice system is more supportive of law and order."

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): If the record on detection and the prevention of crime is so great in the capital, will the Home Secretary explain why 90 per cent. of Londoners are so concerned about crime in the capital, and why two out of three Londoners believe that crime has got worse over the past few years?

Mr. Howard: It is largely because of the misinformation that is peddled by the hon. Lady and

her hon. Friends. They bear a heavy responsibility for the fact that the people of London do not yet understand how much the Metropolitan police are achieving. I hope that the hon. Lady will see the error of her ways, will help us to pay tribute to the Met for its achievements, and will help to reassure Londoners about the extent to which the capital city is becoming a safer place in which to live.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend intends to cover the issue that I am about to raise, but in case he does not, could he tell the House what the Metropolitan police are doing to combat the crime that worries every capital city in the world—that of drug trafficking, which crime touches the lives of us all?

Mr. Howard: If my hon. Friend will bear with me for a moment or two, I shall certainly deal with that later.

A key part of our strategy is investing in technology. As the Commissioner says, technology has been responsible for many of his current successes. Good and innovative policing cannot be separated from good and innovative technology.

The national DNA database went live in April 1995. The database is revolutionary. It is the first of its kind in the world, and relies on leading edge technology and the most up-to-date DNA techniques. More than 30,000 profiles have been entered on the database already, and more than 300 matches—matching DNA profiles from individuals to profiles from traces left at scenes of crime, and profiles from traces left at one scene with another—have been made in these early months of operation.

The number of samples being sent in by the police, and the already high number of profile matches, speak well for the continued success of the database. I am pleased to be able to announce that the Metropolitan police forensic science laboratory has now formally been granted authorisation to contribute DNA profiles directly to the database.

Much of the good and exciting new technology will be on display at the second annual Met technology fair that will take place from 12 to 14 March at the conference centre at 1 George street. I urge all hon. and right hon. Members to call in and see the technology behind Operation Eagle Eye, the new body armour, DNA, livescan fingerprints and the new imaging, mapping, and tracking systems of the police. Also on view will be the much-needed new personal radios that I have approved for the Met, which are already installed in the central area and delivering a much higher standard of officer safety.

Visitors will also be able to see CRIS, the Met's new computerised crime report information system, which starred in a recent episode of "The Bill". CRIS is already working in two areas of the Met, and will be implemented right across the rest of the Metropolitan police district before the end of the year. The Commissioner tells me that CRIS is already showing that it can make a contribution to the upward trend in detections and the downward trend in crime. We all want that downward trend in crime to continue. It requires the on-going commitment to resourcing the police that the Government have always demonstrated.

For the next financial year, like this year, we have agreed that the Met should have a special grant in addition to the money from the new national funding formula. We are giving it £130 million in that way in recognition of its unique national and capital city functions. The Met has unique needs, and we are meeting them. Spending on policing in the Metropolitan police district is well above the national average, and so is the number of officers per 1,000 population.

In total, we are making available £1.65 billion to the Metropolitan police in 1996-97—£20.5 million more than last year and an increase of 86.8 per cent. in real terms since 1979. In addition, we have removed altogether the 2 per cent. ceiling on the amount that the Metropolitan police can carry forward from one year to the next. Due to reductions in its rates contributions, that new flexibility is likely to be worth an extra £25 million to the Met on top of the existing maximum of £34 million that can be carried forward. That gives the Commissioner very substantial extra spending power—worth up to 3.6 per cent. of this year's budget—if he needs it.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): For the year 1994-95, which is the subject of the debate, will the Secretary of State explain why Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary reported that the strength of the police in the Metropolitan police area fell by 131 officers during that year?

Mr. Howard: I am coming to police numbers in a moment. The hon. Gentleman will know full well that we made substantial extra resources available to the Metropolitan police for 1994-95. As he also knows, the way in which those resources are spent is a matter for the Commissioner. He has the responsibility and discretion to spend that money as he sees fit. We made money available to enable all the needs of the Metropolitan police to be met, including extra officers. It is for the Commissioner to decide on his priorities within that budget.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I understand the Home Secretary's point about the additional allowance for the Met because of its additional duties. Will he confirm the real-terms increase for normal operational duties—not additional capital duties, for which there is a separate grant—year on year? My understanding is that the real-terms increase this year is less than the rate of inflation.

Mr. Howard: Had the hon. Gentleman been listening to what I said, he would have appreciated that that is completely wrong. What I said—what the truth is—was that, as a result of the various changes, the Commissioner has extra spending power worth up to 3.6 per cent. of this year's budget if he needs it. The hon. Gentleman knows as well as I do that that is in excess of the rate of inflation. That is therefore a significant increase in the budget. The hon. Gentleman's question is based on an inaccurate understanding of the facts.

Ms Hodge: Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Howard: No, I have given way to the hon. Lady once.

We should not overlook, either, the Commissioner's substantial efficiency savings, which have been achieved by reducing management overheads through restructuring the force and by civilianisation. Since 1993—this is one of the reasons why the number of officers has gone down,

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to return to the question put by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), whose attention has strayed elsewhere—the number of officers on the Association of Chief Police Officers grade in the Met has fallen from 52 to 35, and the number of chief inspectors and superintendents from 840 to 594. That is a total reduction of almost 30 per cent. In addition, about 1,000 posts have been civilianised over the same period. What all that means is more officers out on patrol. That is a key part of my vision for the Met—high public visibility of the police.

As the House knows, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's pledge to provide funding for 5,000 extra police officers is worth an additional £180 million during the next three years, and £20 million in the first year. The Metropolitan police's share of that is £3.4 million. That would have enabled the Commissioner to recruit 149 extra officers. In fact, I understand that he proposes to recruit 180 more officers, and that they will all be out on duty by the middle of this year.

Contrary to some media reports, there is no problem about recruitment. I understand that the Commissioner's latest recruitment round was so successful that the force had to wind down the campaign early, and that the applicants are of high quality.

The Met has also made real progress in attracting more recruits from the ethnic minorities. Nearly 9 per cent. of recruits to the regular constabulary are now from an ethnic background, and the figure for the special constabulary is up to around the 15 per cent. mark, precisely mirroring the ethnic composition of London as a whole.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): We all appreciate the fact that ethnic minority recruitment is improving, but does the Home Secretary acknowledge that there is still a major problem with retention in the Met? Unfortunately, many of the ethnic minority police who are recruited do not remain in the force, so there is still a problem there.

Mr. Howard: I would not for a moment suggest that all is perfect, or that there is no room for improvement—of course there is. The recruitment figures I just gave, however, provide grounds for encouragement, as I hope the hon. Gentleman will agree.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): That is an important point, and the House will be encouraged by the information that my right hon. and learned Friend has given. Does he agree that it is important that the colour of someone's skin should be as important as the colour of their eyes or their hair, and that it should be no more likely a predictor of whether or not they join the police service or become the subject of police attention?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree and reinforce everything that my hon. Friend said.

So far as the up-to-date position on establishment is concerned, at the end of January this year there were 27,719 officers in the Metropolitan police—around 5,000 more than there were in 1979, and a 22 per cent. increase in police strength—and 16,928 civilian staff, which is over 2,600 more than in 1979. At the end of last December, there were 18,769 uniformed constables, which is almost 600 above the establishment figure. The Met has more police constables than ever before.

Strength has been brought up close to establishment levels. There were 552 vacancies in the Met last month—one tenth of the vacancies in 1979. It is even more encouraging to see that the number of constables increased during that period from 16,500 to 20,833. The proportion of officers allocated to street duty has increased from 26 per cent. in 1984, when such records began, to 35 per cent. in 1995. There are more resources than ever before, and better use is being made of them.

But another and much more precious category of resources is needed for policing. I refer to the personal resources of courage and dedication needed by every police officer, and his or her family, who places the duty to uphold law and order above personal safety.

During the year—for the third time since I became Home Secretary—I had the sad duty of attending the funeral of an officer who paid the ultimate sacrifice that policing can ask from those resources. That officer was PC Phillip Walters, who died tragically last April in a shooting attack, following a call to a disturbance at a private residence in Ilford. More than 3,000 other Met officers suffered criminal violence in the past year. Every one of those attacks disgusts me.

The bald statistics hide a catalogue of valour and personal sacrifice. Let me give an example—one that is not for the squeamish. PC Barry Cawsey, a 28-year-old rugby player serving at Forest Gate, gave evidence—on crutches—last month of how he was treated by two so-called joyriders whom he tried to stop getting away. PC Cawsey was not well placed to make his arrest, but he did his best to get into the vehicle and not be shaken off. "I can't get rid of him," said one of the thugs. "He's holding on too tight". The fleeing joyriders then manoeuvred the vehicle at top speed and crushed PC Cawsey against parked cars. This young officer saw his flesh tear right down both legs and his muscles pulped. Such sacrifices are made by the Metropolitan police on our behalf day in, day out. We should always be deeply grateful for the work done by Met officers.

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): Will the Home Secretary join me in paying tribute to PC George Hammond, who died recently? PC Hammond was seriously injured 11 years ago in circumstances similar to those that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has described. Despite his incapacity—the officer suffered from kidney failure and other injuries arising directly from the attack—he fought for the retention of the kidney unit at Dulwich hospital. After his retirement from the police, PC Hammond continued to show the spirit that he had shown in devoting himself so selflessly and courageously to serving the residents of Dulwich.

Mr. Howard: I am very glad to join the hon. Lady in that tribute. That was a particularly sad case, and she is right to raise it.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Some 2,500 police officers were stabbed by knives or other sharpened implements in the past year alone. Does my right hon. and

learned Friend therefore accept that my private Member's Bill, the Offensive Weapons Bill, will go some way to deterring such appalling knife crimes?

Mr. Howard: I very much agree with my hon. Friend, who knows that the Government fully support her Bill.

Attacks on the police such as those we have mentioned demonstrate the need for the best available protection. My policy is clear and simple. Anything that helps to protect police officers and others who face violence on behalf of the rest of us—including changes to the law on offensive weapons, such as those proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland)—must be looked at seriously.

The Commissioner takes the safety of the public and of his officers equally seriously. By the end of next month, all operational officers in the Met will have been trained in the use of the new long batons and the new handcuffs. They will have seen a video, been given a personal handbook and attended specialised training sessions. Once each officer has successfully completed the force tests, he will have issued to him a protective vest to a standard at least as high as anywhere in the world.

In last year's debate, I reported to the House my decision to approve replacements for the traditional wooden police truncheon. As a result, the Met is making good defensive use of the long straight acrylic baton and—for plain-clothes officers—an expanding baton. The Commissioner tells me that there has been a decrease in assaults on his officers since the new batons were introduced, and that is welcome news.

I have also explained the measures that the Commissioner was taking, with my full support, to increase his armed response units and to allow certain officers better access to firearms. Again, the Commissioner informs me that this policy has helped him to reduce armed robberies on business premises, and the use of firearms by criminals. Those measures represented, first, an essential improvement in routine self-defence, and, secondly, a balanced response to the firearms threat in London. In my judgment, they have helped to ensure that we can continue to maintain a predominantly unarmed police force on the streets of the capital.

There remains a gap between the use of a truncheon and the lethal use of a firearm by a specialist team. We need a safe means by which an officer can incapacitate a violent criminal short of hand-to-hand combat. That is why I supported the chief police officers' decision to trial CS sprays, which can be directed at a violent assailant and put him or her out of action. The Metropolitan police is one of the forces piloting the use of sprays. The trials will begin in March, and will last for six months. They will be properly evaluated, and I await the results with interest.

I said earlier that a major part of my vision for the capital, as for the whole of England and Wales, is a flourishing and active partnership between the police and the public. Partnership is not a pie-in-the-sky slogan. It is a central and completely practical part of the Government's approach to tackling crime. It means people—ordinary members of the public and local businesses—volunteering to support their local police in whatever way best suits their local needs; and especially, it is about local solutions to local problems.

The new Metropolitan police committee, which I put in place last April to advise me as police authority, has also been busy forming links with the various local voluntary bodies. Sir John Quinton and his committee are all volunteers themselves. They give me good advice, and are well placed to promote partnerships and pursue my approach with the Met.

The best of all possible ways in which the individual member of the public can help his local police is by signing up as a special constable. One of the objectives that I set with the Commissioner in this year's policing plan, following consultation with Sir John Quinton, was a stretching recruitment target of 650 new special constables—384 more than the previous year. The Commissioner and his colleagues have, I know, worked very hard to meet this target, including a local recruitment drive, advertising, improvements in handling applications and a push for specials right across the force. The latest figures show that he has recruited well over 400 so far, and is, I understand, well on the way to hitting the target.

I shall soon be discussing next year's target for specials with the Commissioner. We recently announced a new fund, started with £4 million of Government grant in 1995-96, to help all police forces to expand their recruitment of specials, and to improve their training and recruitment processes. I understand that the Metropolitan police has made a bid for support from the fund.

I am delighted that local businesses and organisations are also recognising the value of the special constabulary. They have done so not only by encouraging their staff to volunteer but also by practical support. For example, Wandsworth special constables have been provided with a car sponsored by a local firm, TFL Motor Group, and Harrods is providing a car for special constables in central London.

In Lambeth, some £5,000 has been given by Brixton Challenge to help boost recruitment following the public disorder there. A cable network company in east London is running an advertising campaign for specials at no cost. Other local campaigns for specials have also, the Commissioner tells me, been helped by reduced advertising rates generously offered by local companies.

Such co-operation and support in London is by no means confined to specials. A whole new crop of partnership strategies is springing up throughout the Met as local organisations gear up to improve life for their neighbourhoods. The kind of partnership that I want between the Met and the public continues to grow in all areas. There are now over 12,000 neighbourhood watch schemes, and 201 business watch and 51 school watch schemes. The Crimestoppers initiative led directly to 266 arrests last year.

Some of Britain's biggest companies are joining forces in business-led coalitions against crime. Household names like Marks and Spencer, Barclays bank, Dixons, Coca Cola, the BBC, EMI, Polygram, the Novotel hotel chain and drinks companies Seagrams and United Distillers have pledged to underwrite new initiatives that aim to make our streets safer.

Partners Against Crime in Hammersmith and Fulham was launched with grants and donations of £140,000. First results of the united front will be seen in two operations to target street crime in North End road in Fulham and around Shepherds Bush Green. Security staff from one of

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the companies will be involved in the second scheme to monitor closed circuit television cameras in Hammersmith town centre.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): I am grateful for that comment, because one of the things that had so far being missing from the Home Secretary's speech was greater emphasis on crime prevention. The burglary rate in White City, which is in my area, dropped by 66 per cent. in two years—thanks to no Government funding but to money from the BBC, which was used in conjunction with the police and the local authority. We also got it down in two high-rise blocks in Shepherds Bush, despite getting only a small amount of Government money, using a concierge system, which the Government then refused to extend to the rest of the estate.

Mr. Howard: I am not sure where the hon. Gentleman thinks the BBC gets its money. The truth is that there is scope for local initiatives and partnerships of that kind. Not all successes in the fight against crime are assisted by Government money—although it is clear that Opposition Members have yet to learn that lesson. Partners Against Crime is also planning training programmes that are aimed at directing persistent offenders away from crime.

The royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea also has a partnership board, and it has just received £1.6 million in funding from the single regeneration budget. Some of the money has already been earmarked for a closed circuit television system in Earl's Court. There is also a safer cities project in the borough, setting up domestic violence units and dealing with drug-related issues on the Worlds End estate. A CCTV system is again planned, this time for the north of the borough.

Wandsworth has the highest number of neighbourhood watch schemes in London, and their work in partnership with the police is rightly imitated all over the capital. The junior citizen scheme—like the one in Westminster, which was visited recently by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State—aims to teach our children the difference between good and bad citizenship. Wandsworth has a neighbourhood special constable scheme, with recruitment part funded by the council. The number of specials on Wandsworth division has increased by 50 per cent. to 33.

Later this month, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State hopes to meet Mr. David Streven, a member of Wandsworth council staff, who is about to go out on the beat as the first neighbourhood special constable in London. The borough is also funding the introduction of CCTV in two shopping areas.

Mrs. Roche: I am delighted that Westminster is following the excellent example of my borough of Haringey in introducing a junior citizen scheme. Does the Home Secretary agree that London fared very badly from the introduction of CCTV? According to an analysis that I conducted by means of responses to parliamentary questions, it is most worrying that the lion's share of the money went to the constituencies of Conservative Members of Parliament. Can the Home Secretary assure us that London will not be discriminated against in the latest challenge? Will he also consider very seriously the excellent bid by my area, particularly Wood Green high road?

Mr. Howard: I do not accept for one moment that London was treated unfairly in the recent competition. It may have escaped the hon. Lady's notice—I know that she and her right hon. and hon. Friends spend much time in a fantasy world—that Conservative Members of Parliament represent more London constituencies than do Opposition Members. I am very confident that that state of affairs will continue after the next general election.

The use of closed circuit television cameras to detect and prevent crime is also spreading in close co-operation with local authorities and businesses. CCTV is a common theme in many of those initiatives, and it is one of the 1990s' big success stories in the fight against crime. Our investment in CCTV has increased from nothing two years ago, to £5 million last year and £15 million in the coming year.

Some £317,400 was allocated to schemes in the Metropolitan police force last year. Among the more well known are Newham, Wandsworth, Sutton, Enfield, Mitchum, Woolwich and the extensive City of London surveillance system. Our grants are expected to lever in another £667,300 from sponsorship, making a total of nearly £1 million to be spent in the capital under that initiative alone. That is on top of the sum that has already been invested in closed circuit television in Hammersmith and Wandsworth under safer cities schemes, which was also funded by my Department.

Lady Olga Maitland: I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on that investment in CCTV. Is he aware that crime in Sutton has decreased by 15 per cent. as a result of his support for the installation of CCTV cameras?

Mr. Howard: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. That result is reproduced in many other parts of the capital.

The Metropolitan police are doing their part. They are included in all seven city challenge programmes running in London, and are an active partner in all eight of London's safer cities teams. They are represented on all 25 of London's drug action teams.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I welcome the Government's action in installing CCTV in order to increase public safety. Will the Home Secretary take on board the recent incident that occurred in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard)? In that case, there was an awful murder in a tower block which had cameras installed at the entrance, but they were so old that they were unable to identify the murderer. Does the Home Secretary accept that, if cameras are to be installed, there is a case for monitoring and updating them regularly, to ensure that they remain in good working order?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support, and I take very seriously the point he makes. That is why we have issued guidance about how to make the most of closed circuit television, how to ensure that the reproduction quality is as high as possible, and how to gain maximum benefit from the expenditure to which the Government are making such a significant contribution.

Again this year we have seen tragic deaths arising from the pernicious activities of drug dealers. I have made it a national key objective for all police forces to take action against drugs. In London, I approved the Commissioner's priority to improve performance against drug-related crime. Each of the Metropolitan police's five areas now has a dedicated unit to help divisions target street-level drug dealing. They work closely with their colleagues in the south east regional crime squad, many of whom are seconded Metropolitan police officers, to hit at the source of the problems: the dealers and the importers.

Meanwhile, the Metropolitan police force continues to run successful partnership programmes against drug abusers where there are particular local problems. Operation Welwyn, in the King's Cross area, has set the standard for high profile enforcement activity. Since 1992, Operation Welwyn has led to the conviction of more than 300 drug dealers, trafficking in crack, cocaine and heroin, leading to prison sentences of more than 450 years.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Will the Secretary of State do as the Commissioner does and pay tribute to both the Camden and Islington councils and the local community groups who have made such a big contribution to the success of Operation Welwyn, which was initiated by me and by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith)?

Mr. Howard: I am happy to pay tribute to everyone who has played a part in Operation Welwyn. It is very important that all concerned play their role, and I accept that the hon. Gentleman certainly played his part in that initiative.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The Home Secretary has paid tribute to all those who have played their part, and he has outlined a whole range of useful initiatives and issues that require co-operation and consultation in London. Does he agree that the work of the Metropolitan police advisory committee might be enhanced if, in addition to his appointees, some members were appointed from police community consultative committees and other associated groups throughout London? Many of the issues we have mentioned could then be pursued in greater detail to everyone's benefit as they occur. Would that not be an improvement on the London scene?

Mr. Howard: I know how strongly the hon. Gentleman holds that view, and I understand the force behind his question. The committee has made contact with such groups and it is working very closely with them. I think that that is a particularly effective way of ensuring that I receive the best possible advice.

Finally, I shall refer to the Metropolitan police force's public order duties during the past year. One of the core functions of any police force is the maintenance of the Queen's peace. That is especially true of the Metropolitan police force, as the policing of major events and demonstrations in the capital has always placed great demands on it.

Some will remember 1995 as the year when serious public disorder broke out again in Brixton. However, they are taking completely out of perspective an isolated local incident that was contained effectively by the local police. I visited Brixton immediately following the disturbances, and it seemed to me that, in many ways, the event revealed the underlying strength of the relationships built up by the police and responsible local people since 1981.

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I thank the Home Secretary for his remarks. Does he agree that Lambeth has moved forward enormously in terms of the relationship between the local authority and the local police? There is a joint logo for Lambeth council and the Metropolitan police in areas of partnership—which would have been unheard of only a few years ago. Will he pay tribute again to the work that has been done, particularly by the new chief executive, Heather Rabbatts?

Mr. Howard: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention, and I am grateful for the opportunity to pay tribute to all concerned, and to the extent to which things have improved in Lambeth. I am sure that she agrees—indeed, it was implicit in her question—that there was an awfully long way to go from the events and circumstances of a few years ago, but, yes, progress has been made, and I am happy to pay tribute to all concerned.

I especially deplore the attack that was made during the course of the disturbance in Brixton on PC Tisshaw, whom I visited in St. Thomas's hospital the day after he was hurt. His injuries might have been much worse, however, if a section of the crowd had not held off his attackers and made a way through for his colleagues to help him. Those members of the public deserve our acknowledgment and thanks.

The community in Brixton returned to normality remarkably quickly after the disturbance. That was partly due to the excellent relationship built up over the years between the local police and local residents in consultative groups. They spoke to one another and continue to do so, and that two-way communication promotes understanding and makes the job of the police much easier.

What is worth remembering, and is too readily forgotten or not fully reported, is the immense amount of work done behind the scenes by the police to ensure that many public order problems are solved peacefully—another successful and peaceful Notting Hill carnival, another round of new year celebrations in Trafalgar square without serious incident, and the immensely painstaking and successful policing of the VE day and VJ day commemorations. The Commissioner tells me that, thanks to better stewarding and planning, there is much less risk of major disorder at football matches than, sadly, was recently the case.

The year 1995 was an excellent one for the Metropolitan police. The people of London can justly be proud of the policing service they receive, and of their and the police's successes against crime. The Commissioner and I, and the Metropolitan police committee, are committed to improving that service, and to providing even better value for money.

The Government will continue to listen to the people at the sharp end of the fight against crime, and to respond to what they say. We shall continue to ensure that the police and the courts have the powers that they need, we shall continue to invest in cutting crime, and we shall continue to ensure that London and the rest of the country have the best police service that it is possible to provide.

4.51 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): When paying tribute to the bravery of many Metropolitan police officers, the Home Secretary mentioned the appalling injuries suffered by Police Constable Barry Cawsey and the immense courage with which he gave evidence in court. My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) mentioned Police Constable George Hammond. I shall open my contribution to the debate by referring briefly to PC Hammond's story.

In 1985, PC Hammond was stabbed with a 12-in knife as he sought to arrest an armed robber during a raid on a sweetshop, and almost died. He had to receive one blood transfusion after another, mainly from blood supplies donated by police colleagues. He spent five months in intensive care and needed a heart bypass, a kidney transplant and an eye operation.

It is understandable that PC Hammond was never able to recover fully from his appalling injuries. He never returned to street patrol, although he was able to take on light police duties, and became a neighbourhood watch co-ordinator. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich, PC Hammond died last month, aged 58. His former colleagues and many representatives of the local community, whom he had served faithfully, attended his funeral, but it received only cursory attention in the national media.

We must never forget PC Hammond and the thousands of Metropolitan police officers who, over the years, have been killed or injured trying to make London a safer place for the rest of us. His story reminds us that, every time they go out on the streets, ordinary beat police officers face as much danger as those in specialist squads, and that, when they are unlucky enough to suffer injury, the trauma can continue for the rest of their lives.

At least PC Hammond survived for some years. As we heard from the Secretary of State, PC Phillip Walters, who was attacked in Ilford in April 1995, did not. He died almost immediately from his injuries and for his family and colleagues the trauma continues, not least because a retrial has had to be ordered of the man accused of his murder.

I pay tribute to the men and women of the Metropolitan police, to all the officers and civilian staff, especially to the 3,623 officers who were assaulted while on duty, and to the further 10,000 officers who received injuries from other causes while performing their duty.

I welcome the Secretary of State's comments about the provision of better protection for police officers in London and elsewhere, including the piloting of CS sprays.

I commend the work of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, Sir Paul Condon, and all his colleagues in continuing Sir Paul's programme of reform to make London's police more effective, responsive and accountable to the people of London. The success of his leadership was amply shown by the way in which he and his officers dealt with the appalling riot and other criminal acts in Brixton in December 1995, and by the way in which the people of the district and the local council overwhelmingly backed the police and refused to be drawn into any continuation of that conflict. As Sir Paul commented the day after:

"It wasn't Brixton that rioted last night, it was a small minority of thugs and criminals".

I commend members of the public who intervene to prevent crime or to detain its perpetrators. Head teacher Philip Lawrence, who was tragically murdered before Christmas, was doing no more and no less than hundreds of teachers throughout the capital do daily—trying to keep the peace and instil discipline and good behaviour in a generation of young people who have been brought up in an unruly and, in some cases, violent culture.

As the Secretary of State said, in 1994-95 there was a welcome 7 per cent. reduction in recorded crime in the capital, but that figure masks significant variations in specific crimes and how they were reported.

Partly for reasons that the Secretary of State explained, which are to do with new definitions, burglaries declined by 1 per cent. and arrests declined by 5 per cent. I hope that that does not suggest that the effect of Operation Bumblebee has peaked. Robberies increased by 6 per cent., emphasising the need for specific action to tackle street crime, such as that which the Commissioner has undertaken with Operation Eagle Eye. It is important for all of us to remember and acknowledge that robbery—mugging—is the crime that most causes fear in the minds of men, women and children in London, and that that type of crime has increased three and a half times since 1979.

Although the Commissioner's report contains much good news about the fight against crime, I know that he would be the first to counsel against any complacency.

When the House last debated the policing of London, the Secretary of State told the House that his financial settlement for the Metropolitan police

"will enable the Commissioner at least to maintain present numbers of police officers in London."—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1994; Vol. 250, c. 1443.]

Despite the fact that the Secretary of State made that promise halfway through the financial year—presumably after discussion with the Commissioner—that did not happen. As the official report of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary shows, the number of police officers in the metropolitan service declined in 1994-95 by 131, to 27,480.

I was delighted to hear the Secretary of State say that the Commissioner hopes to appoint more constables, but we shall be very lucky if, as a result of those appointments, the number of officers serving in the Metropolitan police reaches even the level that was last reached in 1992.

The decline in the number of police numbers in London in 1995 gives the lie to the pledge made by the Conservative party before the most recent general election to increase officers by 1,000. In the three years following that pledge, the number went down year on year, not up. It is little wonder that Londoners have lost faith in the Government's ability to tackle law and order, and that crime is the first concern of most Londoners—it is shown by every survey of Londoners' opinion. That that is Londoners' daily experience on the streets of their city is palpable.

As crime has increased and the fear of crime has grown even more, Londoners have had to change their daily routines. In many cases, that has had appalling effects on the quality of people's lives. The number of parents who allow their children to walk alone to primary school has halved in the space of 10 years. Seventy per cent. of parents in a survey recently conducted by Barnardos considered their neighbourhood to be unsafe for their

children to play in without adult supervision. All of us with teenage children in London feel constant anxiety about their safety.

Crime and the fear of crime has a devastating, constraining effect on how women, in particular, lead their lives. Elderly women in many parts of London feel trapped in their homes and unable to go out at night. Young women have to be instructed how to walk more safely when out alone. Although that advice is necessary, it adds to anxiety. One in two women drivers feel afraid when driving alone through the inner city.

Mr. Forman: The hon. Gentleman is making important points about fear of crime, because we must differentiate between fear and reality. Does he agree that national and local media could make an important positive contribution by reporting the sentences that courts eventually mete out to persons convicted of crime—often against the person—as fully and factually as they do the original crime? Often, there is an unsatisfactory disparity between the banner headlines given to the original crime and the lack of publicity given to the subsequent court sentence.

Mr. Straw: I agree. One problem is that the media capture the original incident but there is no follow through. As we know, the effects of crime on victims such as PC Hammond can continue for years. It would be advantageous if the press were to report sentences, where they are appropriate or inappropriate, although such is the increasing delay in the criminal justice system that it is months, and sometimes years, after a crime is committed that the perpetrator is sentenced—if he ever gets to court.

Lady Olga Maitland: The hon. Gentleman has been reciting a worrying catalogue of fears about crime. Bearing that in mind, will he explain why he and his party have consistently voted against every Government measure to tighten up the fight against crime? Surely its voting record gives lie to the old claim that Labour is tough on crime. The truth is that Labour is weak on crime and is the criminal's friend.

Mr. Straw: That was an absurd contribution, delivered badly. We will take no lectures from Conservative Members who, during the term of this Government, have presided over the fastest and largest increase in crime under any Administration since the war. Moreover, the factual basis of the hon. Lady's question was entirely wrong. The Secretary of State could, if he wanted to, explain why, in 1988, he voted against a proposal to ban the sale of knives to under-16s, when we voted in favour.

Despite the best efforts of the police, during the past 16 years, there has been more crime, and more people have got away with crime. Recorded crime in Greater London increased by 47 per cent. between 1980 and 1994, while the number of people who were cautioned or convicted fell in absolute terms by 2.5 per cent. I am all in favour of better press reporting of sentences. I am even more in favour of more offenders being caught and punished for their crimes.

Leaving aside cautions, the number of people pleading guilty or found guilty in Greater London between 1979 and 1994 fell by more than one third, or 31,000 offenders. A Home Office research study published last month, "Anxiety about Crime", found that the public were more worried about burglary and rape than about the illness of a family member, road accidents or job loss.

As crime across England and Wales rose in the 1980s, the response of some police forces, overwhelmed by the task facing them, was to appear to retreat into concern about serious crime alone. All too often, people who reported non-violent street crime such as theft from cars, vandalism, criminal damage, graffiti or general loutish behaviour were met with a response that appeared to suggest that the police were too busy to deal with their problems. In some cases, the next time residents experienced such behaviour, they saw little point in reporting it.

There must be some scale for determining the resources that the police should devote to the detection of particular crimes. It is plainly right, to take an extreme example, that the top priority for any police force should be the investigation of homicides, which should necessarily involve more effort than the investigation of the theft of a Mars bar from a local sweetshop. For too long, insufficient attention has been given to disorder on our streets and to the powerful connection between unchecked disorder and much more serious crime. The Home Office study found that levels of disorder measured by perceived problems caused by noisy neighbours, poor street lighting, teenagers hanging around, drunks, tramps and drug misuse was predictive of fears about burglary, theft from cars and mugging, and a general feeling of not being safe.

There is some recognition of the connection between crime and disorder by the Metropolitan police and local authorities. It is reflected in the Commissioner's reforms away from a purely reactive, firefighting service to problem-solving, sector policing. It is reflected also in the excellent work of all Greater London local councils in partnership with their local police. The Metropolitan police and London boroughs would be the first to acknowledge that much more needs to be done before there is a significant improvement in the quality of life for individuals and families, and before we rid of the streets of fear.

The existing criminal justice system does not deal effectively with disorder or apparently petty crime. For that reason, last June, I presented, with colleagues, the document "A Quiet Life", which gave Labour's proposals for community service orders and new composite offences of disorder, to give local police and local authorities much more effective powers for dealing with persistent disorder and criminal anti-social behaviour. I am in no doubt that, if those proposals were on the statute book, they would greatly help to improve the quality of life of thousands of Londoners.

I am sorry that, instead of recognising the sense of those proposals when they were first published, Ministers unwisely sought to rubbish them. Eight months later, Ministers acknowledge that existing arrangements for dealing with neighbourhood disorder are wholly inadequate by making proposals for change in the Housing Bill—but they are complicated half-measures, too little and too late. Disorder and quality of life issues do not appear among the Secretary of State's key objectives for the Metropolitan police or other forces. It is time that the right hon. and learned Gentleman recognised the importance of disorder as an issue and the impact that it can have on the peace and quiet of neighbourhoods and on the daily lives of Londoners.

[Mr. Straw]

Mr. Cohen: Does my hon. Friend agree that community safety orders could make a contribution to tackling racial harassment, not just in London but throughout the country?

Mr. Straw: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is worth noting that, when we published our community safety proposals, the warmest welcomes came not only from the Police Superintendents Association of England and Wales but from the Commission for Racial Equality.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): My hon. Friend was absolutely right when he referred to the problem of young men hanging around. Does he agree that that is not simply a problem in Greater London, but that there is barely a town or a village in our nation that does not have the same problem, and that the people who suffer the most from it are the elderly and women? There is a fear and a worry abroad. If my hon. Friend's proposals were accepted, that would go a long way towards helping to get rid of the problem.

Mr. Straw: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Ministers do not appreciate that much of the behaviour that causes fear of crime does not feature in the criminal statistics. As loutish behaviour and disorder on the streets have increased, so too, rationally, has people's fear of crime.

Ms Hodge: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the ways in which we could tackle disorder on the streets would be to increase, rather than decrease, police strength? That is why the decline in the number of police officers is so catastrophic for the people of London. Does he further agree that it is not simply police strength, but the cut in overtime that police officers are able to perform, that matters? Some 620,000 hours have been cut from those that police officers walk the streets of London. Does he agree that that adds to the disorder?

Mr. Straw: I accept a great deal of what my hon. Friend has said. She is right to mention the need to increase the number of police officers. I am proud to say that, while the number of police officers in London has increased by 300 a year since 1979, during the Labour Government, between 1974 and 1979, the number increased by 500 a year. Those are the facts.

Mr. Howard: Is the hon. Gentleman talking about numbers or about establishment, bearing in mind that, in 1979, the numbers below establishment were 10 times what they are now? Is he now prepared, at last, to admit that there are more police constables in London than there have ever been? As to his repeated allegations that there was a reduction in numbers last year, when will the hon. Gentleman—if he wants to contribute to honest debate—compare like with like? The strength in December 1994 was 27,611, while the strength in December 1995 was 27,719.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. and learned Gentleman suggests that I was making an allegation about police numbers, but I was not. I was merely reading out the annual report of the chief inspector of constabulary—his own chief inspector—who drew attention to the fact that, in 1994, there were 27,611 officers in the Metropolitan police and that, by the end of year that we are talking about, the number had dropped to 27,480. If the Secretary of State is worried about the fact that that was only a part of a financial year, we can examine the figures for 1992.

The figures provided by the chief inspector of constabulary show that, in 1992, there were 27,812 officers in the Metropolitan police and that, by March 1995, and contrary to the Prime Minister's pledge to increase police officers in London and elsewhere, the number had decreased by more than 300, to 27,480. Those are the facts that have been provided by the Home Secretary's chief inspector of constabulary.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is not comparing like with like. Everyone knows that police strengths fluctuate at different times of the year. To make a proper comparison, one must compare the same month of two different years. If the hon. Gentleman were to compare December 1994 with December 1995, he would find not a decrease, but an increase. However, I expect that that simple point is too complex for the hon. Gentleman to grasp.

Mr. Straw: One thing we remember from the Secretary of State's time at the Department of Employment was his ability to switch from seasonally adjusted figures for unemployment to the actual figures as and when it suited him. If he has an argument about the figures, he had better take it up with his chief inspector of constabulary. The figures come from the chief inspector's report, and I am astonished—it is now obvious—that the Secretary of State has not even read it.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: No. I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman later. I shall deal with the important point raised by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), who mentioned the example of New York. I think that there are lessons that police in London can learn from police in New York, although the two cities have very different levels of overall crime and different political relationships with the police.

The decline in the homicide rate in New York, which has been much talked about, has been matched by declines across the United States. In any event, as the Secretary of State has acknowledged, the homicide rate has decreased from a much higher base. However, I think that the decline in the amount of street crime and disorder, and the palpable sense that people there have of a more peaceful city, can in part be attributed to the measures which Commissioner Bratton and the New York police department have taken—and those measures are worthy of further study.

Mr. Forman: I was listening carefully to what the hon. Gentleman said. He said that those measures are worth further study. That is precisely what the Metropolitan police are doing. Will the hon. Gentleman go further and commit his party in any sense to pursuing the policies that are taking place in New York?

Mr. Straw: Yes. As the hon. Gentleman may know, I too went to New York in the summer to look at the

effects of those policies. It is important not to say that everything that happens in a distant city is transferable and automatically better than what is happening here. American police forces have learnt an enormous amount from our police forces, including the London police force, about community policing. As the Secretary of State said, we must not suggest that everything that happens here is worse than what happens in other countries, because, when it comes to policing, what happens here is usually better.

There are lessons to be learned from the policies being followed in New York in relation to disorder and tackling the petty disorder and petty crime that people all too often turn their faces away from, and which the police sometimes say they are too busy to deal with. I am happy to commit my party to tackling those problems.

Mr. Congdon: I should like to refer to the point about police numbers. I was not sure whether the hon. Gentleman agreed with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary's statement that, at the end of December, the number of Metropolitan police was the highest ever. Does he agree with that?

Mr. Straw: I cannot agree, based on the report of the chief inspector of constabulary. The number of police officers employed in Greater London was greatest in 1992.

The important issue of juvenile offenders is related to the issue of disorder. As the commissioner's report shows, one half of all offenders in London are less than 21 years old, and one half of those are less than 17 years old. Juveniles in London are responsible for a significant proportion of crime and for much of the disorder on the streets. The criminal justice system in England and Wales is ramshackle at best but, in my view, its defects are nowhere more obvious than in respect of juvenile offenders.

Despite a reduction in the number of cases going before youth justice courts, the delays in cases reaching court are worsening. There are ludicrously complicated rules for the use of secure accommodation, which almost defeated, for example, the police in Mansfield. They certainly defeated the police and social services in Peterlee, County Durham, for a long time. Even where the hurdles of the rules for secure accommodation are overcome, there is a severe shortage of local authority accommodation in which to put young offenders.

Even more worrying is the fact that a bed desk clerk at the Department of Health headquarters in Leeds is daily effectively making judicial decisions and balancing whether one young dangerous offender should be found secure accommodation against the need of the community to find secure accommodation for another young offender.

There is uncertainty about the very concept of criminal responsibility for those who are less than 13 years old, after the House of Lords' recent decision on the concept of doli incapax. That matter is worrying for many of those who are involved in youth justice. I understand, from some of those who are involved, that the decision means that few offenders who are younger than 13 are now even being brought before the youth justice courts. There is a lack of real involvement of parents in the system and a failure to recognise that deficiencies in parenting must be involved in huge amounts of juvenile crime and disorder.

In my view, reform both of the juvenile justice system and of the Crown Prosecution Service in London is long overdue. We need a separate Crown prosecutor for London. There must be changes in the criteria that the Crown Prosecution Service uses for bringing cases, clear and enforced time limits on the timetable for cases and an inquiry into the appalling decline in the proportion of cases that ends with a conviction or caution of the offender.

As the reaction of the people of Brixton to the December riots showed, the Metropolitan police, under Sir Paul's leadership and that of his predecessor, have done much positive work to improve relations between the police and ethnic minority communities, including the Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities in Greater London. For example, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) mentioned, racial harassment is now treated extremely seriously by the Metropolitan police service, and rightly so, but it is widely recognised that much more needs to be done in the area of community and race relations.

First, there must be renewed efforts not just to recruit ethnic minority officers, but to ensure that they remain in the service. My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) was entirely right. During the year, there was a small increase in the total number of ethnic minority officers, to 730 or 2.6 per cent. of total strength, but the Commissioner's report also shows that the Metropolitan police had to run fast to stand still. In 1994, 1,277 ethnic minority officers were recruited, but 1,384 left the service—100 more, and a higher number than the total of all officers who retired at the end of their service. That is plainly unsatisfactory, and suggests, as my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow made clear, that, although from the outside the service is attractive to ethnic minority recruits, something is going wrong when they get into the service. I know that the Commissioner is very worried about that.

Miss Hoey: I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend, but does he agree that, sometimes, there is a deliberate intention by some people—a very small number—from the ethnic minority community to target those young ethnic minority policemen and policewomen and to make their lives extremely difficult? Those young ethnic minority officers need extra support from the police service as well as from the community.

Mr. Straw: I accept that they are sometimes subject to the most appalling—and, in some cases, criminal—intimidation by other members of the community. As my hon. Friend says, that is all the more reason to ensure that ethnic minority officers have much more support that they get at the moment.

Mr. Spearing: I join my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) and my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) in expressing concern about that issue. The Newham police community consultative group has discussed the matter and, where there are large ethnic minority populations, groups like that may be able to assist in finding out why the turnover is so great. Is not that yet another reason why those groups should be more closely integrated into the advisory committees that advise the police authority—the Home Secretary?

Mr. Straw: I accept my hon. Friend's comments.

[Mr. Straw]

Secondly, we should put into proper perspective the likelihood of those from the Afro-Caribbean communities to commit crime. In my constituency, for example, or in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, virtually no crime is committed by blacks, because there are virtually no members of the black communities living in those areas. In parts of London, much of the crime happens to be committed by black males, not because they are black, but because there are large Afro-Caribbean communities in those areas and a proportion of those communities—as in white and Asian communities—engage in crime.

A recent Home Office research study called "Young People and Crime", which contains the most thorough analysis of the question this decade, suggested that there is no difference between the propensity of the black community to commit crime and that of the white community. The report shows that the cumulative participation rate in crime by young people is 44 per cent. for whites, 43 per cent. for blacks and, as it happens, 30 per cent. for Indians, 28 per cent. for Pakistanis and 13 per cent. for Bangladeshis.

The report raised another issue, which may be a small one, but it shouted at me when I read it. The Commissioner reported that, during the year, two officers died and 883 officers were injured on duty in road traffic accidents. By definition, police officers do much more mileage in more dangerous circumstances than members of the public, but on my rough calculation a police officer is 50 times more likely to be involved in a road traffic accident and receive an injury than an ordinary member of the public in Greater London. That must be a matter of serious concern for the police and the public.

It is no accident that the New York police department has been able to show such sensitivity to public opinion about crime and disorder. The police service in New York is accountable to the people of New York. There is, however, no similar accountability to the people of London for the running of their police service. This debate is the only formal occasion for the House to hold the Home Secretary, as the police authority for London, to account.

Despite the Home Secretary's profession of concern for policing in London, this debate is taking place 10 months after the year that we are discussing. Between 1992 and 1994, there was no debate at all on policing in the capital. All that would have been different if the Secretary of State's predecessor had implemented a pledge that he gave the House in March 1993:

"to establish for the first time a police authority for the Metropolitan police on the new national model separate from the Home Office and with essentially the same tasks as police authorities elsewhere."—[*Official Report*, 23 March 1993; Vol. 221, c. 766.]

Six weeks after the Home Secretary made that statement, there was a new Home Secretary, and six weeks later there was one of the fastest U-turns on records. The Home Secretary revealed that Londoners were not to be trusted with a democratic say over the running of their police service.

Instead, Londoners have had foisted on them a new, toothless quango—the Metropolitan police committee. Even the Conservative representative on the joint London Boroughs Association and Association of London Authorities delegation to the Home Secretary called the procedure for making appointments to the committee astonishing. The committee meets in private, its minutes are confidential to the Home Secretary and, despite the fact that it began to meet during the year 1994-95, no report of its work has yet been published. That is no way to treat Londoners or their police.

The Commissioner is on record as saying that he would prefer a proper, democratically based police authority for London, and the Commissioner is right. The only coherent excuse that the Home Secretary has given for refusing a police authority for London is

"The Metropolitan Police have unique national responsibilities";

and

"the national interest in the work of the Metropolitan police makes it right tht the Home Secretary should remain the police authority for London"—[*Official Report*, 28 June 1993; Vol. 227, c. 666.]

There is national interest in the work of all police forces. That does not mean that the forces of Kent or Lancashire should be centrally controlled. Nor should it be so in London. Most crime in London, as elsewhere, is local. It is only right that local people in London should have a proper say in the policing of their communities.

The Home Secretary's separate argument in favour of the current arrangements is that the Metropolitan police service has certain national functions that make it different from all other forces. The Home Secretary knows that it is the opinion of senior officers at New Scotland Yard, as it was of his predecessor as Home Secretary, that those national functions could easily be ring-fenced in the short term and continue to be subject to separate accountability. In the longer term, those national functions may in any event come under new national policing arrangements, as was suggested when the House discussed the Security Service Bill recently.

I pay tribute again to the Metropolitan police for the difficult job that they do so well. During the past 15 years, they, like the community they serve, have been engulfed by an epidemic of crime and disorder. Although Greater London has only one eighth of the population of England and Wales, a huge proportion of the nation's serious crime occurs here—one third of all rapes, half of all armed robberies and an estimated three quarters of all illicit drug dealing.

In the past 15 years, the crimes that cause the greatest fear among the people of London—crimes of violence—have increased much faster in Greater London than elsewhere and 90 per cent. of Londoners are deeply concerned about the level of crime in their city. More seriously, two out of three Londoners believe that the crime and disorder that affects them will get worse. It is no wonder that the people of London reject the complacency of the Secretary of State and feel unsafe under this Government.

5.29 pm

Sir Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): My constituency is situated in the Metropolitan police district. Our annual debate on the policing of London provides me with a valuable opportunity to speak on behalf of the people who elected me to Parliament. Uxbridge is situated in the London borough of Hillingdon, which is an outer-London borough. Of course, the problems experienced by the Metropolitan police service in Hillingdon are rather different from those in some of the central-London boroughs about which we have heard a good deal this

afternoon. I want to tell the House about some of the matters that concern my constituents, who live in an outer-London borough.

I should declare that I am parliamentary adviser to the Police Federation of England and Wales and my appointment is in accordance with the Police Acts of 1964 and 1972. I congratulate the Commissioner, Sir Paul Condon, and the men and women of the Metropolitan police service on their outstanding performance. I also pay tribute to the special constabulary and the civilian staff.

It is clear from my experience of dealing with police matters in my constituency and in central London, that there is no question whatsoever of the Metropolitan police service being engulfed by crime, as the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) suggested.

I pay a personal tribute to the bravery of the late Police Constable Phillip Walters, an unarmed officer who lost his life doing his duty to protect the people of London and I associate myself with the remarks of the hon. Member for Blackburn. We shall not forget PC Walters and other officers who gave their lives to protect the people of our great city.

In the past year, the Metropolitan police service has prevented many households and businesses from being burgled and robbed. By targeting known offenders and putting them under constant fear of being caught, it has brought much-needed relief from the misery experienced by my constituents in outer London who have lost treasured possessions. The Commissioner's report reveals a 20 per cent. reduction in burglary against a target of 15 per cent. That is a creditable performance and, together with the success of the Operation Bumblebee roadshows, it has demonstrated to the public the huge range of property that the service has recovered. In addition, the Londonwide co-ordinated searches that were carried out in June and December 1994 resulted in no fewer than 1,279 premises being searched and 987 people being arrested.

Members are keenly aware that the business community also suffers considerably from crime. Businesses welcome the drop in robbery, which causes disruption of their work and a threat to employment. The fall in robberies from 1,068 in 1983 to 644 in 1994 demonstrates the progress that has been made in dealing with that criminal activity.

One of the slightly new aspects of crime against businesses in London is the theft of computer chips. The new Bumblebee for Business campaign was launched in March, and I hope that it will be successful in dealing with that problem. When a firm loses the ability to use its computer equipment, its activities often come to a peremptory halt. I would be interested to hear from my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, when he replies to the debate, what success the Metropolitan police are having in dealing with that aspect of crime against the business community.

The public has been cheered to learn of the success of Operation Bumblebee and Operation Christmas Cracker, in which the Metropolitan police and some 40 other forces took part. It resulted in several thousand suspected burglars, robbers and receivers of stolen property being arrested in the early hours of a December morning. I say "Well done" to the Metropolitan police and all the other forces concerned. That operation cheered up many people that morning.

The Metropolitan police dealt with more than 8,700 firearms offences during the year. The Commissioner's report reveals that shots were fired at the police on 16 occasions and that they recovered 3,305 guns and more than 74,100 rounds of ammunition. The number of officers attached to specialist firearms units increased by 50 per cent. What research is the Home Office carrying out into the source of the guns which now find their way on to the streets of London and other towns and cities? Is my right hon. and learned Friend satisfied that the customs arrangements at our ports of entry are sufficiently good to detect many of the firearms that are imported and used against the police and the law-abiding community?

One important factor in the success of the Metropolitan police is the setting of targets identifying the risks that the police should be tackling. The targets are formulated first by my right hon. and learned Friend, who identifies the tasks of police forces throughout the country. Those are the key objectives. Secondly, there are specific requirements for policing the capital city and the surrounding area, such as the outer London boroughs where my constituency is located.

I very much appreciate, as I am sure do other London Members, the opportunity to have an input to the targets that the local police set for the year and to be consulted by the divisional commanders in the areas concerned. My views are based partly on my local experience, as I know what my constituents are thinking, and I am a member of the Hillingdon community and police consultative committee. I want to illustrate the great value of that and other identical committees in the Metropolitan police district. It would be useful if their profile could be raised. They get very little coverage nationally, perhaps because they work in partnership with the police rather than criticise them.

In Hillingdon, a genuine dialogue has been established between the various community organisations represented on the committee and the police. Senior officers, including the divisional commander, attend meetings and brief the committee on local crime statistics, covering problems ranging from drinking in the streets to the need to increase closed circuit television in the town centre. Ethnic minority community organisations are represented and can express their specific concerns. A regular newsletter is published covering the many issues that are raised, so that everyone in the community knows what is going on. Those committees do a good job and deserve the thanks of the House for the opportunity that they provide for real dialogue and co-operation between members of the community and the police service in the Metropolitan police area.

My local group, together with local authorities, also developed a community safety strategy with the full participation of the police. That shows what can be done by the various agencies to tackle crime and, above all, the fear of crime. In fact, Hillingdon is a safe place in which to live, but people still fear crime. The opportunity to try to deal with that fear is extremely valuable to the community. It meets the point made by the Commissioner that the police alone cannot eliminate crime and that more needs to be done jointly.

Closed circuit television, which has been installed in Hillingdon, is a good example of the police, the Government, the local authority and, in Hillingdon's case, the British Airports Authority, working together for the benefit of the public. In response to the Home Office

[Sir Michael Shersby]

competition, the local crime prevention adviser suggested that the group should target local problems at five small shopping parades. As a result, the council was successful in obtaining a grant as well as financial backing. Following the installation of CCTV, there has been a dramatic fall in the number of 999 calls. That has happened in areas where cameras have been placed. It is interesting that there is no evidence of criminal activity being transferred elsewhere in the borough. There will, of course, have to be longer-term monitoring to ensure that the preliminary conclusions are correct.

I believe that Uxbridge needs CCTV in its town centre. I have suggested to the leader of Hillingdon council that the authority should enter the next bidding round with the intention of securing money to make that possible. There should be a cross-party, united approach to tackling crime. That is why I am happy to support the work of the local community and the police consultative committee.

As we have heard this afternoon, much of the crime in the Metropolitan district has been attributed to young people. As with many issues, it is only a minority of young people who commit criminal offences, or just cause a nuisance. An effective way of engaging the interest of young people and diverting their energies into a positive direction is the provision of youth services and ensuring that there are active voluntary bodies of every sort. Unfortunately, resources for such services, both in terms of money and people, are scarce.

It is interesting to reflect that, in 1996, the level of voluntary activity is much less than it was 40 or 50 years ago, when many young people rose to the challenge of belonging to an organisation such as the boy scouts or the Boys Brigade. As we have heard from Opposition Members this afternoon, too many young people are hanging around the streets with nothing much to do. I put it to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary that there should be a national effort to harness both money and people to the task of tackling youth crime.

Mr. Howard: I am not sure that I want to get into an argument with my hon. Friend about the extent of voluntary activity now compared with 40 years ago. Is he aware, however, that a survey demonstrated that the amount of voluntary activity over the 1980s increased by about 15 per cent? There is therefore a substantial body of evidence to suggest that the amount of voluntary activity taking place now is greater than 15 or 20 years ago.

Sir Michael Shersby: I am interested to hear what my right hon. and learned Friend says. It appears to me, however, and to many people in my constituency, that the voluntary activities that are available for young people may not be entirely appropriate to divert them from standing on street corners. They need a challenge. They need something to persuade them that there is a worthwhile task to undertake. It seems that they are not being offered that challenge in quite the way that they should.

I have always felt—this is a hobby horse of mine and I shall not bore the House with it for long—that we need something like a royal rescue corps, which young people could join to be trained. They would have the opportunity, for example, to deal with civilian disasters. It worries me that so many young people do not have skills in first aid and self-survival, which were routine forms of training when I was a teenager.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the scouts, the guides, the Boys Brigade and the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme all have an important role in encouraging young people to participate in the community within a disciplined context? It is a tragedy that these organisations increasingly find themselves under pressure because of the collapse, in many London boroughs, of the youth service, which is hopelessly under-resourced and desperately seeking new resources. I note that the Home Secretary is making a comment from a sedentary position. However, if he talks to scouts and guides, they will tell him what I have described. Should we not do something about it?

Sir Michael Shersby: All the organisations that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned are doing an extremely valuable job, but we need more men and women in the community who are prepared to give their time voluntarily to exercise leadership skills. I have in mind the many men and women who have left the armed forces over the past few years, who have exactly those skills. I hope that they will find their way into voluntary organisations, which in my view stimulate the community to do something, and not the more bureaucratic, centrally controlled youth service.

As we note from the Commissioner's report, the police have made huge strides in reducing car crime throughout the Metropolitan police district. In Hillingdon, however, such crime is still a matter of great concern. In 1993, there were 6,281 thefts of or from vehicles and 2,427 cases of criminal damage to vehicles. These figures are to be compared with 75 robberies of people in public, 42 thefts from people by bag snatchers or pickpockets and 2,286 burglaries from dwellings. The figures illustrate the difference in criminal activity in an outer-London borough from that in an inner-London borough.

As a matter of interest, Hillingdon has the highest car ownership of any outer-London borough. It is a very prosperous area, of course. It seems clear that even more needs to be done by manufacturers and insurers to make vehicles more secure. I fully endorse the Commissioner's comments to that effect.

The knife culture is a terrible problem for those who live in the Metropolitan police district. In my judgment, it can be dealt with only if the police have the necessary powers to stop and search. We know that new provision was made in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to permit the stopping and searching of suspects in circumstances where a senior police officer gave authority for that to happen in a specific geographical area. Unfortunately, we do not yet have any detailed information about the extent to which those powers have yet been used. I hope that, when the details are known, they will be made available quickly to the House.

The murder of the headmaster of St. George's school, Maida Vale, highlights the need for urgent action to be taken by Parliament. I represented the Maida Vale ward when I was a member of the Paddington borough council. I know St. George's school and the surrounding area extremely well. I welcome the provisions set out in the

Offensive Weapons Bill, which has been introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland). I am glad that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has said that the Government will be giving their full support to the Bill, which received an unopposed Second Reading only a few days ago.

I must ask myself whether the Bill's provisions will be enough to ensure that our highly trained police officers are able to stop and search people, often young people, who they believe may be carrying a concealed weapon. The Bill's provisions are probably valuable but are not quite enough to ensure that the job is done. That is not in any way a criticism of my hon. Friend or the provisions of her Bill. Perhaps she will not mind me saying—I say this with the benefit of some knowledge gained through working with the police in the past six years or so—that what is really needed are provisions similar to those that exist in Scotland. I fully realise that it is difficult and that it is a sensitive matter to consider giving the police in England the same powers as the police in Scotland, but it would be valuable if my right hon. and learned Friend and his colleagues directed their thoughts to the possibility of reducing the level of suspicion that a police officer must have before stopping and searching a suspect.

At present, in England, an officer must be satisfied, in accordance with strict criteria laid down under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, that a person has on him or with him a prohibited article before searching that person. If the officer searches and is wrong, he can be exposed to an action for civil damages. That deters the searching of suspects in a number of cases. Those inhibitions do not appear to exist in Scotland.

Although I understand just how difficult it is to make such a change, because of the sensitivities of the ethnic minority community in England, I believe that it should be considered. The support of the ethnic minority community should, in my view, be sought. After all, members of that community are as much at risk from being stabbed with a knife as anyone else. Every citizen has to trust the police to use their powers fairly. Unless that trust is given, the problem of knives will not be overcome. I hope, therefore, that some sensible modification of the PACE rules can be considered. I believe that that, taken with the provisions of my hon. Friend's Bill, could bring an end to the knife culture.

We have an outstanding report from the Commissioner and his colleagues. I wish them every success in the year ahead.

5.51 pm

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I am pleased to have this opportunity to say a few words about policing in London, and particularly in my own area.

We have heard about the startling increase in reported crime in recent years, notwithstanding any isolated decrease in a particular period. I shall not go through the statistics, which we can all cite, about the increase in crime or the decrease in some areas. Something on which we can all agree is that we are all aware, from our constituency surgeries, letters and personal contacts, that the fear of crime continues to grow.

Policing is a major issue in my constituency—containing, as it does, a part of Brixton. Any comparisons between the disturbances on 13 December and the riots of 1981 and 1985 are utterly bogus. Last December was not a spontaneous reaction by the local community to allegations of oppressive policing; it was incited by a tiny criminal minority and was joined by opportunistic looters, white and black, and a small number of people who were caught up in the hysteria of the moment.

I understand that, on 23 November, a successful anti-drugs operation was mounted in Brixton, and that a small number of people involved in the drugs trade were angry about that. It is widely felt that the unhappiness among drug dealers was a factor in the outbreak of violence against the police on 13 December. Local people and businesses in the area where the drugs raid took place were delighted with the action of the police, and I hope that the authorities will proceed and succeed in their efforts to prosecute those responsible, including anyone found guilty of incitement to riot.

Police and passers-by were attacked, cars were set alight and small businesses were looted and burnt. When I visited, it was heart-breaking to see businesses that had been built up over a number of years simply vanish overnight, particularly those of small traders who could not afford insurance or had not insured themselves. Buildings containing the offices of the community police consultative group and the publication *The Gleaner* were also subjected to arson attacks.

As I have constantly made clear, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) and hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, the vast majority of the community in Brixton—black and white—utterly condemn the violence. I hope that the Home Secretary will continue to commit himself to redoubling efforts to improve relations between the police and the local community after the tremendous efforts and successes of recent years. I hope that the Minister of State and the Home Secretary will also join me in recognising that Brixton is a bright and thriving area which is on the up. It is a part of London that is rightly attracting more businesses and inward investment.

The legitimate demonstration, which I believe was hijacked on that evening, concerned the death in custody in Brixton of Mr. Wayne Douglas, which came soon after the death in custody at Vauxhall police station of Mr. Brian Douglas—no relation. Deaths in police custody are a genuine concern for many, particularly in the black community, and that must be recognised. I am pleased that a working group to address that issue has been established in Brixton, containing members of the Lambeth community police consultative group, the Metropolitan police and the Police Complaints Authority. I hope that the Home Secretary will consider seriously any report or recommendations that come out of that work.

I make a suggestion that might well assist in allaying the concerns of the community following a death in police custody. It could be in everyone's interest for the police officers involved to be suspended from duty during the subsequent investigation by the independent Police Complaints Authority. Such a routine suspension would not prejudge any investigation or reflect in any way on the officers, but it would help to reassure the public. Great difficulties result from misinformation, which spreads around the community very quickly indeed.

It is in all our interests to speed up the process of the Police Complaints Authority. Although we must have respect for due process, there is concern at the length of

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time that it takes to investigate such incidents. There is concern at the way in which information is released, how little of it can be released, when it can be released, and to whom. There are problems with the work of the coroner and the way in which coroners are involved. There is also the problem of the subsequent consideration of prosecution by the Crown Prosecution Service.

As well as paying tribute to the people of Brixton for their resilience and determination to continue to build a better community, I wish to comment on the contribution, in the aftermath of December's disturbance, of Nicholas Long and Lloyd Leon, the chair and vice-chair of Lambeth community police consultative group. The local council adopted a most responsible tone when it dealt with the situation, with the chief executive and the leaders of the political groups on the council all determined to speak with one voice.

Such a display of consensus would have been unthinkable in the past, when Lambeth was the last council in London to refuse to join the community police consultative group. I hope that the Home Secretary—and also Conservative Members who are quick to use the borough of Lambeth as a way of getting at the Opposition—will recognise the great leap forward that Lambeth has made, especially the new chief executive, Heather Rabbatts, and various councillors, particularly Jim Dixon, who deserve recognition for their commitment to driving forward that progress.

I hope that the Home Secretary will also recognise the innovative collaboration between Lambeth council, the Metropolitan police and the community police consultative group in developing a multi-agency approach to a range of issues affecting the quality of life in the area. The project was formally launched in November. As I said in an intervention on the Home Secretary's speech, I believe that, a few years ago, it would have been inconceivable for the logos of the Met and Lambeth council to appear in the same heading, on documents committing the two organisations to working together.

The purpose of the partnership is to further that multi-agency approach. It will focus on tangible results. Work is already under way to improve the service given to victims of domestic violence and racial attacks, to tackle noise pollution, to see what can be done about bullying in schools and to establish joint strategies to deal with the perennial problem of prostitution. A police inspector has been seconded to the partnership, and for the next three years will work in the town hall alongside council officers.

At the launch of the partnership on 9 November, Brixton divisional commander Peter Clarke said:

"It is a partnership that will harness the energy, optimism and diversity that make Lambeth such a vibrant and exciting place in which to live and work. We must put the past behind us and move forward together in a new spirit of trust, co-operation and understanding."

The partnership will also help to tackle the serious problem of street drug dealing in the centre of Brixton. For too long, Brixton residents have had to put up with blatant drug dealing, and the violence that accompanies it. Innocent members of the public have literally been caught in the crossfire. There has been a series of long-term operations, using undercover police and new technology, to ensure the integrity of evidence presented to the courts.

The latest operation, which I mentioned earlier, took place in Coldharbour lane in November. It had the support of the community and drew many expressions of thanks from residents and traders whose lives had been disrupted. The enforcement effort will now be backed up by better street lighting and closed-circuit television in the town centre, financed by Brixton Challenge. That has come about as a direct result of collaboration between the police, Brixton Challenge, Lambeth council and the community.

The Lambeth safer cities project is yet another example of multi-agency work succeeding in practice. Like other hon. Members, I hope that the Home Secretary will look favourably on applications for funding for more CCTV in my area: I do not think that he will find an area in greater need of that extra security.

I have one gripe, which is infuriating, and which I am sure is shared by many other hon. Members. Just when an area is becoming used to the police officer in charge, and just when that officer is becoming used to the area, building up work in the community and getting to know the nuances of that community, he or she is moved on. I see that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) agrees.

I regret the departure of Superintendents Gallipeau and Wilson, and the fact that Superintendent Clarke is leaving Brixton after so short a time, albeit because of a well earned promotion to the rank of commander. I welcome his successor, Superintendent Peel, to the area, but I question the wisdom of moving Superintendent Godsave from his post at the same time. I had hoped for more consistency at such a crucial time for community-police relations in Brixton.

I hope that our other superintendents in Vauxhall, Superintendents Rees and Matthews, are not about to disappear as well. I have brought the matter up before, but I am never given a satisfactory answer. Of course members of the police force must be promoted and move on, but I think it misguided to keep them in an area such as Brixton for no more than just over a year. I also think that there should be informal meetings enabling Members of Parliament and community representatives to discuss who will replace the officer who is being moved. That would be one of the benefits of the establishment of a police authority for London, which my party supports. More sensitivity and continuity are needed in the appointment of divisional commanders.

There is no reason why Londoners who want their own police service should be treated differently from people in any other part of the country. I hope that the Minister will respond to that point when he winds up. Why should we in London not benefit from the same democratic accountability as the rest of the country?

I also feel that appropriate value should be placed on the role of experienced senior police constables acting as community or beat officers. Police constables in my area, such as Barrie Critchley, Alastair Reid and Mike Lacey—who have worked at the forefront of beat and community policing for a long time—do tremendously good work in building and maintaining links with residents and the business community. I also pay tribute again to PC Dunne, who gave his life in the service of our community. The anguish with which local people reacted to his death showed how strongly they feel about their community policemen and policewomen.

A rapid response is essential. Although we shall never see a policeman on every corner, so long as we have dedicated officers such as those I have mentioned, people will feel more in touch with the police—especially when they observe the energy, devotion and time that many young and, indeed, older police constables put into the running of initiatives such as the Lambeth summer project. Much of that work is done in their own time, and their dedication to local people bodes well for the future. The Lambeth summer project enables young people to see what is involved in working with policemen and policewomen. I also pay tribute to the continuing work of the excellent neighbourhood watch schemes in my area.

The role of sector working parties has already been mentioned. They can play an important role in allowing the community to deal face to face with officers policing their area, and to tackle problems on their estates directly. I especially welcome the excellent working party in the Waterloo area, which has involved not only the local community, businesses and traders but Waterloo station and the transport police, and, indeed, everyone with an interest in the area.

Various police operations are of particular use to my constituents. Operation Bumblebee has been tremendously successful in targeting burglaries. In Brixton alone, some 500 fewer burglaries were reported in 1995. Operation Eagle Eye has been controversial, and I know that the community police consultative committee is concerned about the amount of information and statistics being supplied by the Commissioner. Perhaps he and the Home Secretary will take that concern on board.

It should be stated openly and repeatedly that Operation Eagle Eye is not a random stop-and-search exercise. It involves the targeting of the tiny number of persistent offenders who are responsible for the vast majority of muggings. The police would do the community a disservice if they did not target that particular crime, which I know is of great concern to my constituents. I broadly support Operation Eagle Eye for that reason. The great majority of people have no sympathy with muggers; like me, they are more interested in the rights of the victim than in those of the criminal.

I express genuine disillusionment with the level of co-ordination between the various regimes in which many different agencies with an interest in community safety must work. It is a positive step that those agencies are working more closely than ever before, but that is not enough. As legislators, we must recognise that the systems within which we expect those different agencies to work are not compatible. One local case that I am dealing with—this draws on a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw)—involves regular meetings between the police, social services and the local housing department on how one young thug can be stopped from making the lives of a group of elderly residents in a sheltered unit a misery.

There are delays in the system. Despite arrest after arrest, there still seems to be no way of keeping that young thug away from the people whom he has been harassing until he reaches the magic age of 18 and an injunction can be sought. Meanwhile, the unlucky residents are being failed by the system. It is simply not good enough that in this day and age, with all our technology and sophisticated systems, we cannot stop a small number of young people causing misery to so many others.

Noise nuisance is another example. We all know that it is a terrible problem in London. Even with the best will in the world among the various authorities, the existing statutory framework is inadequate to enforce the law. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn has espoused some constructive ideas for changing the statutory framework for dealing with noise nuisance and other anti-social neighbour behaviour. I hope that the Home Secretary will realise the sense of those proposals. I welcome the private member's Bill proposed by the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on noise nuisance, and I hope that it will reach the statute book as quickly as possible.

Overall, we need a more co-ordinated approach, not simply to the way in which existing agencies work together, but in reviewing the regulations and laws that govern their actions. We can all define the problems, but unless we give the police and others the tools for the job, the solutions that we want will not be delivered.

I put on record again the improvement in the London borough of Lambeth, in the work of the local authority and the police, and in the workings of the community police consultative committee. I pay tribute to the dedication and commitment of all the Metropolitan police officers working in my borough. We know that there will always be bad apples—they even exist in Parliament—and we must get rid of the bad apples in the police and, indeed, in Parliament, but that does not mean that the police overall are not working extremely hard and in an extremely dedicated fashion to help the people of my borough.

We want our police service to improve and to be given the support and recognition that it needs, because without that police service we shall all feel much less safe in London. I welcome the progress that has been made, especially in my borough.

6.12 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): I greatly appreciate this opportunity to thank the Metropolitan police. In the past year, with the Met police, I have been privileged to pilot the police and Parliament scheme, which is born out of the successful Parliament and Armed Forces Fellowship and the Industry and Parliament Trust. During that time, I have been allowed to spend some 25 days with the Met, both at Scotland Yard and out in the suburbs.

I have been out on patrol with the police. I have sat with them in the charge room. I have been allowed to hear their private conversations in their canteens. I have visited the police scientific research and development unit near St. Albans and the air support unit at Lippitts Hill. I have witnessed public order training and crowd control. With my own eyes, I have seen some of the grim evidence available in the paedophile unit at Scotland Yard.

I have spent time with flying squads, special branch, surveillance and intelligence units, the traffic police, the fraud squad at Holborn, the firearms unit and the murder squad. With the Federation Against Copyright Theft and the Met police, I have been out on a raid against a pirate video factory. I have also spent a day with the river police. I do not wish to see again—but appreciated at the time—the pictorial evidence they have of their work.

I have also spent time seeing the less glamorous, more mundane, but equally vital operations undertaken by the people who support those running the computer data bases

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for the police. They provide the information that the men on the beat need to do their job. I expect that every hon. Member would wish to join me in offering a vote of thanks to the civilians and police who are engaged in anti-terrorism, in protection and in explosives disposal. Much of our safety depends on their work.

I am grateful to the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and to all those at Scotland Yard who have made that experience possible, to Bill Troke-Thomas, to all the men and women on his team at Ealing and Acton, and to the others who have worked hard to make the pilot scheme both informative and challenging. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will be able to learn from the scheme—as, I hope, I have done—both in the Metropolitan police area and, most probably, in county forces.

I have a general impression, as hon. Members would expect, of a highly professional, dedicated, hard-working and fair police force. It does its best to make the most of sometimes limited resources, in the knowledge that the modern criminal is sometimes using more sophisticated electronics and communications systems than are currently available to the police. They and the people who resource them are working hard to correct that.

In the past year, the Metropolitan police force has had to accommodate change in structures, while at the same time waging its war against crime. The results have been impressive. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary outlined some of them earlier. Operation Bumblebee has led to a fall in recorded burglary of many per cent. In the past two years, there has been the biggest fall in recorded crime for 40 years.

The other thing I have learnt—of the many things I have learnt—involves the dangers that the men and women of the police force face from the effects of alcohol and drug-related crime. In April last year, Police Constable Steve Collins, a young man whom I had met at his police station only a few days before, was out on patrol in a car with a woman police constable. They saw a car that they believed to be stolen. They pulled it in. Steve Collins got out and went to accost the driver. The passenger in what was a stolen car leaped out, and, without any compunction, drew a gun and shot Steve Collins in the gut. Fortunately, that young man lived, is fully recovered and is back on duty. I was told, with black police humour, that, on his first day back at work, he was punched on the nose.

The police welcome the opportunity to use longer batons. Police in Ealing and Acton certainly welcome the trial use of CS gas. When I visited the black museum at Scotland Yard, I could not help noticing on the wall the roll of honour of policemen and women killed on active service, and the fact that two thirds of the people on that list, running from 1900 until the present day, had been killed since the abolition of capital punishment.

It is a fact of police life in London, and probably throughout the United Kingdom, that today's professional criminals go about their business carrying weapons as a matter of course. That is the threat that policemen and women face on the streets of this and every other city of the country every day of the year on our behalf. Many policemen and women—they do not complain much—feel that the dice has been loaded too heavily against them.

I am now going to do what I promised myself and some of those policemen and women I would try not to do: cherry-pick just a few of the issues that have been raised with me. In doing so, I know that, if they read any report of this, those whose concerns I have not raised will say, "Why did he miss mine out?" I can only say that, if I were to touch on all those issues, I should be here for rather longer than I promised.

The one issue that more than any other fundamentally concerns men and women in the Metropolitan police is that of disclosure. I know that that is currently being addressed by legislation, but the police find it quite intolerable that ingenious—for want of a better word—lawyers are able to go on fishing expeditions on behalf of the defence in the knowledge that, by so doing, they will waste time and money, cause confusion and delay, and perhaps—who knows?—secure an acquittal for a guilty man.

Some three or four weeks ago, I watched a video of an armed raid. Two armed men were robbing a jewellers in Regent street, and they were under surveillance from the time they entered the shop. The extremely courageous staff slightly upset police plans by chasing the armed robbers out of the shop with fire extinguishers. The two men were pinioned on the pavement, and the bag that one of them was carrying went flying. It was all very clear.

The two men were held on the pavement, arrested, and handcuffed and, heads lifted, they were identified straight to camera in an unbroken sequence. The camera zoomed in on the bag that had flown from the hand of one of them. A police officer opened it and revealed the guns and the handcuffs that the robbers had intended to use on the shop staff. Nothing could have been clearer but that those two men entered the jewellers intent upon armed crime.

The judiciary, the judges who criticised my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary for some of his measures, in their wisdom decided that in this case the police should name the informant who gave the tip-off. The police know perfectly well—and, of course, so do defence counsel—that, if the police ever named an informant in such a case, their sources of information would dry up. The police had no option but to drop the case. The men were released and are now free, walking the streets of London and presumably planning their next armed crime. The police cannot understand how we can allow them to be treated in that way by the judges, the courts and the system.

The police also find it strange that so many criminals are able to salt away the proceeds of crime; that the system does not work fast enough; and that our banks operate differently even from those in Switzerland—all of which sometimes makes it difficult for the authorities to gain sufficient evidence to be able to say, "Yes, that money, that car, that boat and that house were paid for solely out of the proceeds of crime, and can therefore be confiscated." We need to address that, to make certain that those who commit crimes cannot serve a couple of years in gaol and then enjoy the fruits of their criminal labours.

I should like our police to be allowed to do what American police, and certainly those in Washington, can do. They should be allowed to have the benefits of the proceeds that are seized as a result of successful arrests and convictions. In their fight against crime, they should

be allowed to use the cars that criminals have been using. That works well in the United States, and is a tremendous encouragement to the police, who feel that they are getting a little bit of their own back.

I suspect that I will not be popular with my Front-Bench colleagues, with certain echelons in the Metropolitan police and possibly with people elsewhere for saying that the principle of transferability is incomprehensible. I spent a little time with the fraud squad. I met teams of very experienced detectives, who told me that, even with the experience that they had built up by the time they joined the fraud squad, it takes perhaps two years to become fully conversant with the intricacies and technicalities of the crimes with which they have to deal. That is equally true of many other specialist departments: it is a cry that I heard throughout the Met.

Those officers have deep and detailed knowledge and experience, but it seems to me as a layman that, using the HMI 1993 tenure guidelines, almost arbitrarily after five or possibly seven years—if we are allowed to stretch it a bit—we can say, "Chum, you are going back into uniform and back on the beat, or back into uniform anyway, to do something else." That does not make sense, and it could make nonsense of training and efficiency arbitrarily to put people back into uniform at the peak of their specialist efficiency. That seems quite wrong. The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Ms Hoey) touched briefly on that in connection with community policing, but I suggest that it goes much wider.

Of course we must create room for manoeuvre, for advancement and opportunities. We cannot have a block in every branch of the Metropolitan police or, indeed, in any other police force. But, by the same token, simply to say, "You have done your time and you must now move," will certainly do a disservice to the policing of London.

I should like to touch briefly on the question of inspectors' pay, because in that there is a lesson for us to learn; I have learnt it with hindsight. It is that, if it was right to buy out inspectors' overtime, it was most certainly wrong to do it retrospectively. It has benefited some men and women in uniform who work reasonably fixed hours, but some other people, especially detectives, who are used to working long hours and earning overtime, have overnight had their incomes dramatically reduced.

That is not right. We cannot suddenly subject loyal officers who have organised their domestic commitments on the basis of one set of expectations to a different set of contracts. But that is what we have done, and it has caused considerable concern and, in some cases, serious financial difficulty. It has been suggested that the buying out of overtime may be extended to sergeants. If that happens, I hope that we do not make the same mistake again. We have dissatisfied inspectors, and in some cases we shall have dissatisfied sergeants.

The Minister knows my concern about the misuse, the abuse, of material that has been obtained by closed circuit television and about—I hesitate to call them videos—the junk that is marketed under the name of "Caught in the Act". Closed circuit television is clearly a vital tool in the police armoury in the fight against crime, and it is vital that the public have confidence in that tool and understand why and how it is being used. They must know that it will not be abused.

In our review of the Data Protection Act 1988, we should consider the case for covering by that legislation material that has been obtained by the use of closed circuit television cameras so as to make it a criminal offence to use such material for any form of personal or public gain in the way that was tried and, happily, in that instance, failed.

I mentioned that I had spent some time with the fraud squad. It has taken a battering in the courts, and has been subjected to press ridicule. The fraud squad consists of a number of dedicated officers who work in highly specialised departments and have achieved very many unsung successes. It is always the big, bad, complicated cases that go wrong and get reported. The press does not find the successful results of painstaking police work quite as attractive.

I stand to be corrected—I think that I wrote it down correctly when I heard it—but I understand that fraud costs the United Kingdom £18 billion a year. I believe that I am right in saying that it costs the country more than the total of all other crime. If that is so, we need to put more resources, not fewer, into curbing fraud at every level. From this place at least, the fraud squad deserves the accolade that it appears to be denied by Her Majesty's press.

I was very interested to learn about the working of the air surveillance unit. Air surveillance is another valuable tool, not only in traffic control, but—sometimes—in the solution of armed crime. "Eyes in the sky" are extremely valuable in dealing with public order disturbances as well.

It seems quite extraordinary that our police air force has to fly from Lippitts Hill, and that it is not permitted by London authorities to have a floating helipad on the Thames in the heart of the City. I am not suggesting that helicopters should be based on the Thames all the time, but there is a very strong case for seriously reconsidering the establishment of a helipad—alongside HMS Belfast, for example. We should use the river corridor, as any other sane city would, to enable the police to do their job better.

Unless things have changed since I visited Lippitts Hill, police helicopters using air-to-ground cameras are able only to transmit pictures back to command control at Scotland Yard, where the information is relayed to the controller on the ground at the scene of an incident. If that is so, at little greater expense, it would and should be possible to have a mobile ground unit that is capable of receiving pictures at the scene of the incident from a police helicopter.

When I visited a firearms unit, it struck me as bizarre that arms dealers do not keep standard records. I am not suggesting for one moment that the professional criminal would not, could not or will not obtain the weapons that he or she needs from some source. It is far too easy to go into virtually any market in northern France, buy a handgun fitted with ammunition and bring it back across the channel.

We make it doubly easy for criminals, however, if they are able to go to a crooked gun dealer, hire for a day a handgun and eight rounds of ammunition for, say, £500, take it back at the end of the day like a tool from a hire shop, and say, "Thank you very much, but I didn't need to use it," or, "I used it, and here's another £300 to launder it." The gun can be taken away, washed out, have its

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barrel profile changed by repeated firing, and passed to another crooked gun dealer in another part of the country, where it can be used again.

When firearms units visit gun dealers to examine records, they do not find any standard forms, any record of what has come in and gone out, or any detailed information from which they can determine whether the records have been falsified. There are no detailed records of the disposal of guns that are taken to be destroyed. Instead, a shoe box full of slips of paper—apparently—in no particular order is handed to them. They are told, "Okay, sunshine, look your way through that." They have to spend painstaking hours doing such work, because there appears to be—again, I stand to be corrected if it is wrong—no official system for keeping records. Standard records may not greatly assist the police, but if they help slightly, the matter should be addressed.

I did not intend my speech to be a litany of demands. We should recognise that the policemen and women of the capital city do a difficult, demanding and often dangerous job. Such a job can be done only with the full consent and support of the public, and, on behalf of the public, with the full consent, and most certainly the support, of the House.

6.34 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I join those who have paid tribute to the police for all they do. I pay tribute to the Commissioner at the top and to the home beat officers—who in hierarchical terms I suppose are at the other end of the scale—who patrol the neighbourhoods where we live. I add my tribute to the local troops who look after my community. The range of service that they give is as all-embracing as that described by the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale). Like him, I do not want at all to suggest that the people who do the difficult and often frustrating work in squads such as the fraud squad are any less deserving of support and encouragement than those who work in squads such as the flying squad.

The hon. Member for North Thanet specifically addressed the issue of helicopters and the use of the river, and he also mentioned the river police. The river police are certainly an important part of the network of police services. Those of us who live near or along the river appreciate them very much.

I have a hunch that the police in London have very nearly regained the reputation that they used to have, which is still enjoyed by the other two public services—the ambulance and fire services—which are both hugely appreciated. Seeing the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) sitting on the Opposition Front Bench reminds me—if I needed reminding—that there is a great, lively, if not fiery, debate going on about the level of support and resources that we give our fire service. That is why there is proper concern about any suggestion of reducing the support and resources that we give to our police. That is why the debate about resources—although technical—is very important. I shall return to that, but briefly, because this debate is not the best forum in which to barney and banter about statistics that deserve to be considered elsewhere. Such statistics could easily be misleadingly misquoted.

Those of us who live and work in London are very conscious—as we all should be—of the risks that the police take on our behalf. I therefore join the tribute paid to the police officer who died last year in service of the citizens of London, and send my condolences on behalf of my party to his family and colleagues in the force.

We must view what is happening in London against the background of the changes in its population. Interestingly, the most recent figures come not from police documentation but from last week's King's Fund report, in which I observed the following telling statistics on our capital city.

First, we are a relatively younger community than much of the rest of the country; there are considerably more people aged between 25 and 44. Secondly, our population will rise over the next couple of years by about 175,000, and in inner London it will increase at double the rate it does elsewhere. We need to take that into account in policing.

Thirdly, in the next few years the number of people aged over 85 will increase by almost 25 per cent. We have a very large number of older citizens in the capital, many of whom live on their own. Fourthly, unemployment is 43 per cent. higher than the national average. Since that impacts most acutely on young people and especially young men, it is obvious that, if we not address the problem of high unemployment, a huge resource of human energy is liable to be misdirected.

The police want to ensure that their resources are not a lottery. The funding formula should not be arbitrary or extraordinary. In principle, I welcome the new formula set out in the police grant report, which we debated and voted on last week and which breaks down how we calculate what the Met police receive. I still contend that, if one takes out the additional money that comes to London because of the unique nature of policing in the capital—as extra money comes to London for many other things—it is at best arguable that the resources are being reined in, rather than growing.

That was the burden of an answer given to the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) on 18 January. He was told:

> "In the current fiscal climate of budgetary constraint in the public sector the MPS is not expecting growth; the focus of management is on value for money and gaining more from the resources available."

The reality is much more about redirecting resources than about giving the Met police more, though they are responding positively to that. The nation and the people of the capital would rather pay a little more for a well-policed capital city than cut back in the interests of a tax cut here or an election bribe there.

Under the formula one or two years ago—this was touched on last time we debated the subject—large resources were directed to the outer boroughs, where there was far less crime, which seemed unfair to the inner boroughs. The people of London need to know that the resources are spread evenly to start with, but that they then follow the need—the victims and the crimes—so that those who are most at risk are commensurately protected.

The figures certainly suggest that there has been a reduction in the number of officer hours spent on street duty in each of the London divisions each year since 1988-89. The figures are given in overall man days, and the average was 13,684 in 1988. It increased in 1989, came down in 1990, 1991 and 1992, and went up again

in 1993, 1994 and 1995, but it is still lower than in 1988, at 13,384. Those figures were supplied by New Scotland yard and checked today. I accept that the percentage of officer time spent on street duties has increased from 31 to 35 per cent., which is welcome—I do not cavil about that—but on the average day, fewer people are acting as police officers back in our police stations than seven years ago.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): What is the hon. Gentleman interested in—people acting as police officers, or people out on street duties?

Mr. Hughes: I am interested in both, because one cannot have one without the other. There always has to be someone back at base—the custody officers, desk sergeants and so forth. There have to be both. It is important that the balance is changed, but we should not pretend that the overall number has increased, as it has decreased slightly.

What have been the successes of the past year? The first is more police on the street, which is positive. The second is the fact that there are more special constables. The Minister will know that, in my annual meeting with the Home Secretary, I have argued that we should and could do more to recruit specials. He is sympathetic and receptive to that, but we could do much more yet.

The third success is that the Met police's target for dealing with burglary was hugely successful, which is much appreciated. Fourthly, as I said from the beginning, it was right that the Met then went on to deal with street robbery, which is an extremely offensive crime that often targets some of the most vulnerable people. The Met was right to do so, even though, out of caution rather than anything else, it probably got the way in which it announced what it intended to do slightly wrong. Fifthly, the knives amnesty has been a good thing and has been relatively successful.

Like the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby), judging not only from my perspective here, but from that of my local police and community consultative group, which I attend regularly, I must, however, point out that police statistics must be compiled in a more user-friendly way, rather than by picking only this month or this year compared with last. They need to be cumulative, easily accessible and comparable across the capital and between divisions. We are getting there, but we are not there yet. Clear statistics that can be used for accurate assessment of the crime trends would be welcome.

I pay tribute to some of the divisions in my constituency for successfully reaching and exceeding targets. Southwark is the principal division, followed by Walworth, Peckham and Kennington—I list them in the order in which they have the most impact on the area that I represent. I also pay tribute to their officers, chief superintendents and troops.

Like other colleagues, I must also pay tribute to the community liaison officers. The Minister knows that a long-serving community liaison officer is hugely appreciated. Andy Jagger, a local police constable who retired last year, was a hugely valued member of the police service. People like him give the service a good name. Andy Jagger and Boyd Schofield, among others, have served well on patches like mine for decades. They know everyone, they do such a good job and they are very useful.

Last year, the police did an excellent job, as they did the year before, working with young people at Easter and in the summer on the Southwark youth project. That is exactly the sort of activity with which the police are keen to get involved. It is sad that they have had to pull out of work on sporting events because of the priority of other duties, and I hope that that work will be reinstated.

Many good things are going on at all levels. The public perception of crime and of the dangers in London is lagging behind the successes. It is a little like school reputations, which take a few years to change round. I will not take issue with the Government or side with the anti-Government lobby on this subject, as we are making considerable strides in London. We need to build up that reputation, but to do so on the basis of accurate statistics that people can see, as well as measures on the ground that they can sense around them.

I have a short list of complaints. I join the hon. Members for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) and for North Thanet in complaining about the fact that senior and relatively senior police officers are moved so frequently. They are no sooner there than they are gone. I know that they have careers and promotion prospects and that they often do not want to go, but it is unsettling for communities and, if a chief superintendent is only somewhere for two years or a local inspector for a year, the sense of professional commitment cannot be built up.

There is something wrong with police stop-and-search activities. Clearly, young black people and black people in general are being stopped so much more frequently than people from the other communities in London. Black families need some assurances that that is being tackled, as the figures are clear and it is unacceptable.

This may be controversial, but I think that the police also sometimes go over the top when carrying out drugs raids—I have said so to my local police. For example, to use 100 officers to raid a local establishment in my patch the other day, out of which four charges have arisen—none among the most serious—seems to be over-egging the pudding. I can understand the public pressure to expose the clubs in which Ecstasy is peddled.

The devil is not the individual user but the dealer—particularly the commercial dealer. If one asked people of my borough or any other whether they thought it was a good use of police time for 100 officers to be involved in a raid on a night club in Wandsworth or Southwark to look for even a relatively large number of Ecstasy tablets, I believe that they would say that it was not. We must reconsider our priorities. I am all in favour of catching those who import and retail them, and make a lot money from lethal drugs, but 17, 18 or 19-year-old users should not be not a particularly high police priority.

Mr. Maclean: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that 17 and 18-year-old users must be supplied from somewhere, and that some night clubs are major sources of custom for dealers, who can make thousands from their evil trade? Is not Ecstasy a death-dealing tablet?

Mr. Hughes: It is, although not to the extent of tobacco or other drugs. We must put matters in perspective.

Mr. Congdon: Be serious.

Mr. Hughes: I am quite serious. The figures are entirely clear. They show that the number of deaths from

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Ecstasy is small compared with many other drugs, including drugs that the Government promote or allow to be promoted. Let us not get the balance wrong. The Minister is right to say that dealers must be clobbered, but 100 police officers are not necessary to pick up one or two dealers in a club. My point is that that is a huge use of police resources. If the police know the dealers, they can arrest them in a club perfectly easily.

The policy on closed circuit television is odd. CCTV should have been deployed in some parts of London but has not been, whereas places where crime is lower have received money for CCTV. Something is badly wrong with the mix.

Some other matters concerning policing in London clearly need to be remedied. I shall not elaborate the argument, but we need a democratic police authority—every other part of the country has such an authority—and I have no doubt that one will be established soon. We need a better sequence for consultation on Metropolitan police strategy. The police and community consultative committees and the police and neighbourhood forums need to take part early on, so that the strategy each year is properly formulated. It is good to have such a consultation process, but it would be better if it were carried out in good time.

We need a guarantee that someone will be on the desk at every police station at any hour of the day or night. I have taken this matter up locally and found that that is not always so. One must sometimes wait a long time for all sorts of reasons. Police station desks should have someone available all the time.

We need to tackle the fact that, for historical reasons, a conspiracy of silence often allows people who commit the most serious crimes to get away with them. Peer group pressure means that grassing on others does not happen, and we must make sure that every facility is provided to make it more likely that people will give information. If someone is stabbed, attacked or, worse, murdered in a pub or club or on the street, we should not have a situation where 50 people were there but nobody saw anything. That can best be avoided by better appealing for information locally, or by making an appeal particularly to the pride of a local community.

In relation to racial incidents, we must ensure that last year's problems with Operation Eagle Eye are not repeated. The figures concerning both the victims and the perpetrators of racial attacks must be given objectively, factually and accurately. There is no reason to keep the figures secret.

The most important groups are the young and the old. It is clear that a huge number of crimes are committed by a minute proportion of young people, who can start their criminal activities under the age of 10. They then play truant from school and are out on the streets. Young people hanging around are not the criminals: only the young people who are out of control, either on their own or with others, are the real bugbear of life in our capital city.

The hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) intervened to say that that matter must be dealt with by a network of projects, including out-of-school assistance, homework classes and, in particular, the youth service. Training and employment opportunities will help to keep youngsters on the straight and narrow and stop them becoming diverted into a life of crime. Vulnerable youngsters often join gangs such as the one to whom Philip Lawrence lost his life defending one of his pupils. Sadly, more gangs are seeking to recruit more youngsters outside more school gates.

Such gang members harm and hurt the elderly most. We had a successful campaign in Southwark a couple of years ago against street robbery in which we tried to get across the message that street robbers are cowards. Young people—or anybody else—who jump out on elderly people on their own at a bus stop, going home or in a lift are the scum of the earth, and there should be no remission of their punishment. While the police have a good record in responding to community feeling, it is about time that the rest of us made it a priority to defend the old and the vulnerable. They are the most afraid in our capital city, and many of them have given the most to this city. We must make the streets safe for them again.

The minority of young people who are troublemakers should be dealt with and their parents made to take full responsibility, while the majority of elderly people who are afraid should be given the opportunity once again to be free citizens of London. We must make pensioners the priority as we try to beat crime. That would be a good test of whether the Government's policies were working for the rest of us.

6.56 pm

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): May I begin with an apology to the House for my enforced absence from the early part of the debate, as I was called away to duties upstairs on the Public Accounts Committee? I missed some of the remarks of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), and I must tell my right hon. Friend the Minister of State that I may have to leave again during his speech.

This is a most important debate, and hon. Members on both sides of the House will welcome the fact that, this year, the business managers have enabled it to held on a Monday. I recall too many occasions in the past when similar debates were held on Fridays. We can now have something of a prime-time discussion of the policing of the metropolis, although it is unfortunate that there are fewer London Members in the Chamber than many of us would have hoped.

We have an opportunity today to discuss with the Home Secretary, as the police authority for London, what is happening and what we think should be happening to the police on the streets of London, and to reflect what our constituents are saying about the priorities for police operations. It is also a good day to pay tribute not only to the chief officers, who must manage the London force, but to those great stalwarts, the home beat officers and all the people who participate in the consultative committees and the sector working parties. They form a most important network of communication in the policing of our great city.

I congratulate the Commissioner and the Metropolitan police force, as did my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, on the enormous success of Operation Bumblebee. There is no doubt that that has reaped a great harvest of arrests, convictions and returned property. I was invited to the Operation Bumblebee roadshow for south-west London, which was held at Sandown park racecourse.

I found strange the enormous amount of property that had been recovered in swoops on burglars' premises in various parts of London but not reclaimed. Senior officers wondered whether it would ever be reclaimed. People do not mark their property. It amazes me that some of them do not realise that it has disappeared or do not seek it more assiduously when it is stolen.

The roadshows, where the public are invited to come and see whether any of their lost property has turned up, are good. I have encouraged the Commissioner—and I again publicly ask him—to hold more Bumblebee roadshows in all the 32 London boroughs so that people do not have to travel too far to be able to inspect property and, if it theirs, to start the process of laying claim to it.

It has been mentioned that the Commissioner sets the priorities and the prime objectives for police operations each year. He consults the 84 London Members of Parliament and the police consultative committees in the boroughs. In their turn, the chief officers in our areas ask us what we think about the various aspects and the way in which they are setting priorities.

For as many years as I can remember, in my area of Kingston upon Thames and Surbiton, the No. 1 priority has been domestic burglary. It remains so this year and so it should. My constituents, whenever I talk to them or when they write to me, have no doubt that they want police to set the prevention of burglary as the No. 1 objective, but if the police and our good citizens cannot prevent it, they want burglars to be pursued and arrested.

An allied problem is that many elderly people fear attack on their homes by burglars. That fear is over-accentuated—unfortunately, sometimes, by the many television programmes about crime. Although they deliver good returns in catching the perpetrators of crime, the issue of whether elderly people are being excessively frightened by such publicity deserves discussion.

Nevertheless, the police should be aware that there is a fear of attack, as there of vandalism, especially in the quieter streets. Hon. Members who represent the more suburban parts of London will have seen much evidence of mindless vandalism, graffiti and, even worse, damage to people's houses and gardens—garden walls that have been pushed over and damage to motor cars.

I must pay tribute to a constituent of mine, a doughty individual who lives in Tolworth, Mr. Donald Parker, who for a long time has campaigned against mindless vandalism in the streets. He operates almost as a sheriff in his road. Early last year, he collected a petition of residents of the road which he asked me to present to the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. A result of his efforts, the local police superintendent met Mr. Parker, myself, and officers, including the home beat officers, with the result that policing has almost eliminated vandalism in that area.

The efforts of the local people have caught the perpetrators who, for too long, had managed to escape because information had not been co-ordinated. Thanks to those local efforts, vandalism has been rooted out of that road for the time being. However, the efforts of the local people and the neighbourhood watch need to continue. It is good that we have such a thriving neighbourhood watch network across London.

The visibility of the police is regularly mentioned by my constituents. I was grateful for the pledge of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at our last party conference to have 5,000 more police officers over the next three years. In London, which is covered by that undertaking and is, to us, the most important part of policing in Britain, I understand that the commissioner is to put 180 more full-time police officers on the beat.

We must also consider the contribution of the special constables. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, together with the commissioner, wants 650 special constables to be recruited in London—of whom, apparently, 400 have already been recruited. That is something to which local neighbourhoods can make a great contribution.

Wandsworth council has always put a high premium on the visibility of police on the beat. That led Wandsworth, a year or two ago, to talk about extending its parks police to patrol on the streets and be more visible. It has recruited special constables. Local business has donated one vehicle, as a start, to assist with that operation. I believe that that has also happened in Knightsbridge, where a store has contributed a vehicle to assist the special constabulary. That is the sort of police visibility that our constituents want.

I was slightly surprised by the attitude of the Liberal Democrats. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) spoke in a slightly confused manner about his party's approach to police officers on the beat. I thought that he was calling for more such officers, but then I discovered a policy document that was produced by the Liberal Democrats in September 1993. The document, entitled "Tackling Crime Together", contains the rather extraordinary statement:

"increasing the number of police officers has had no measurable impact on the level of crime. Putting more police officers on the beat will likewise have little effect in reducing levels of crime, although there may be other arguments in favour of it."

That argument would not carry any weight with my constituents, who want to see more police on the beat and more evidence of police surveillance in public places. In that regard, I signal—in the best cross-party spirit—that I shall support the efforts of Kingston council to secure a grant from my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), for installing closed circuit television cameras in the main public areas of Kingston and Surbiton.

There is no doubt that closed circuit television contributes greatly to combating crime and to ensuring that the police obtain evidence of criminal or less violent, anti-social acts committed on our high streets and around our stations. Those of us with pubs and young people's clubs in our constituencies know the sort of crime that can centre around them. My right hon. Friend should note that, at the next round of grants, I shall push hard to have closed circuit television installed in Kingston.

I now turn to the extremely important issue of illegal drugs, which I raised by way of intervention during my right hon. and learned Friend's speech. We must move to combat the sale of drugs in all areas. I am afraid that nowhere in London—be it leafy suburbia or central London—seems to be free of the hazards of drugs and drug peddlers. Whenever politicians from all over the world meet to discuss our fears for the future, without exception the main topic of conversation is drugs. Drugs are far too easily available these days. They come from many parts of the world and cause great harm, especially

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to our young people, often pushing them to the point of mental illness and suicide, and shattering families, local neighbourhoods and groups of old friends.

I believe that the schools and youth clubs should undertake many more initiatives in conjunction with police forces to provide information to those who wish to root out drugs. At the end of last week, I attended a first-class seminar at the well-known Tiffin girls school in my constituency. The parents association and the staff at that school organised a seminar which was addressed by experts from the excellent Kaleidoscope project in Kingston, which is an anti-drugs counselling service. Staff from the centre told parents what to look for if they suspected that their children were using drugs, and alerted them to the signs of drug pushing and supplying.

As a parent of four, I found the seminar most revealing and informative. I believe that more schools, in conjunction with the local education authorities, should provide that kind of information to parents. There should certainly be an exchange of intelligence between head teachers, teaching staff and police forces when it is obvious that drug pushing is occurring outside the school gates and when children are entering schools with drugs that they have procured in clubs, pubs and on the street.

Extending the role of the security services is one of the Government's most important initiatives against drug peddling. It will form part of the intelligence network that will prove increasingly vital as the drug threat to this country grows. I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on introducing the Security Service Bill and I hope that that law and order legislation will be supported on both sides of the House.

7.17 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I begin by returning to a point that was raised a number of times during the debate: why we are debating the policing of London in this manner. I shall not dwell upon that issue, but it is important to stress that the Home Secretary is the police authority for London.

Ms Hodge: Where is he?

Mr. Gerrard: Exactly. The debate is taking place and the police authority is not in the Chamber. We have debated the subject three times since the general election of April 1992—that has been the sum total of the direct input of elected representatives from London on the subject of policing in London.

The previous Home Secretary accepted that London needed a police authority, but a few weeks after his predecessor left that office, the present Home Secretary established the current quango, which does not meet in public, does not report to anyone and operates completely in secret—in fact, it operates virtually as a creature of the Secretary of State: it is not accountable to anyone else.

We have heard how the Metropolitan police have special national functions that are distinct from their local policing role. Although we all acknowledge that fact, I believe that it is often exaggerated. I have noticed little evidence of the activities of the diplomatic service in my constituency, and I suspect that the story is similar in many constituencies throughout London. The problems are exaggerated.

I am convinced that, before the previous Home Secretary, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), decided that he was willing to go down the road of a police authority for London, he well knew that the Metropolitan police would be prepared to accept one and had considered what might be done to their structures and functions to cope with the separation of national functions, if necessary.

In the past three weeks, Sir Paul Condon, giving evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee, said that that remained his opinion. He said:

"I remain on record and have been for a number of years saying that I believe that the Metropolitan Police Service and the arrangements for accountability should replicate as closely as possible the accountability processes outside of London".

Sir Paul Condon made an interesting comment about his reasons for wanting to develop closer accountability and closer links with the community:

"if we are to improve confidence in the police service, if we are going to deal with a significant emerging group of alienated young people in London and the communities they are drawn from . . . we"

need to

"move towards . . . different and tighter links into the democratic process in London."

When the Minister replies to the debate, it is incumbent on him to answer again the question, "Why does London have to be different?"

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said that he believed that in recent years the people of London's opinion of the Metropolitan police had improved. There is some truth in that. A few years ago, there was an extremely worrying distrust of the police in many communities in London. There has been a shift since then; we should acknowledge that fact and give credit where it is due—to the police and to people in local communities who have worked with them.

In London, people's beliefs about crime trends make them afraid. A recent survey showed the extent of that fear. The crime figures for 1994-95 show a drop compared with the preceding year, but I suspect that many people in London pay more attention to the longer-term picture, which is far from comforting. There were 852,700 offences in 1990-91 and 837,000 in 1994-95—a small drop in four years.

We all welcome what has been done in Operation Bumblebee and the like. As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) earlier, I was grateful not to have entered a secondhand shop that I was nearly tempted into in Hoe street, Walthamstow, which turned out later to have been run by the police for the purpose of attracting people in to sell goods to the police. I have no wish to appear on their video, even if I was going in innocently to make an inquiry about something in the window.

The small decrease in figures for the past year or two conceals worrying trends, especially the increase in crimes of violence, which are up from 36,000 in 1990-91 to more than 43,000 in 1994-95, the increase in robbery from 18,000 to 26,000 in that period, the increase in sexual offences and the increase in crimes against the person, which worry and frighten many people. As hon. Members have said, the use of firearms has increased, as has drug-related crime. It emerged that many of the burglaries that the police solved in Operation Bumblebee

were carried out to fund the purchase of drugs. There is a close relationship between drugs and the commission of crime.

The recently published youth crime report, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), contained evidence that there were not the disparities between black and white youth in the commission of crime that are often the subject of popular myth, but it also showed that a generation of young men were not growing out of crime by their late teens, as their predecessors had done. There has been, and continues to be, a high rate of offending among 14 to 17-year-olds, but previously people tended to drop out of crime as they entered employment and formed stable relationships. Worryingly, more than 30 per cent. of young men aged 25 are now involved in some type of crime.

The report comments that, as the number of young people in employment declines, the capacity for the world of work to provide a rite of passage for young males diminishes. If the report is accurate in saying that people are not only becoming involved in crime when they are 14 to 17 but continuing into their 20s and 30s and turning into career criminals, the trend is extremely worrying.

There are worrying trends in racial attacks and racial harassment. Last year, 5,500 such incidents were reported—8 per cent. more than in the previous year. Given some Government policies, I fear that there will be a further increase next year. I wonder what the effect will be on some of the thugs in east London of seeing asylum seekers begging in the streets. That is Government policy, which will come into force next week, and I suspect that it will be used by racists and people who are responsible for racial harassment and racial attacks as an excuse to step up their activities.

I compliment my local police force in Chingford—the police division with which I communicate most often—on what it has done in the past year or two, especially to tackle racial violence. There has been an enormous improvement in the way in which the division tackles racist crimes compared with 10 years ago. It has also tremendously improved the way in which it deals with several sensitive matters such as domestic violence and mental health disorder.

In common with everyone who is connected with the problem, I am convinced that racist crime and racial attacks are significantly under-reported and that 5,500 incidents is far from the true scale of the problem. People are not yet entirely confident of what the police response will be. That leads to under-reporting.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn mentioned recruitment, and especially retention, of ethnic minority officers. The fact that, in the last year for which figures are available, more ethnic minority officers left the force than were recruited to the Metropolitan police shows that we are running to stand still. I am also worried about the increasing number of black police officers who, before industrial tribunals, allege racial discrimination against them within the police. I have been involved in a complicated case of that type. There is a problem.

I have no doubts or worries about attitudes at the top of the Metropolitan police. There has been continuous significant improvement for some years. When I talk to senior officers, I detect a sea change in attitudes to ethnic minorities compared with 10 years ago. The problem is ensuring that change is reflected on the ground. The experiences of some black police officers to whom I have spoken is that it is not—that they are subjected to insults and harassment from their colleagues. There is no room for complacency. Senior ranks need to keep up the pressure, to make sure that black recruits in the average police station do not suffer the harassment that some of them still have to tolerate.

As to public confidence in the police complaints procedure, I have no doubt that, in the long term, an independent complaints procedure is needed so that the police are not left to investigate the police. Many people in London question why the Metropolitan police fight complaints and take cases to court. In 1994, according to press reports, the Metropolitan police paid out £1.4 million in damages and costs. Recently, £90,000 was awarded in a case of assault, false imprisonment and malicious prosecution. Out of 304 civil actions, the Metropolitan police won just 24. There must be a question mark over the reasons for fighting some of actions in the first place. Damages and costs of £1.4 million is a lot to pay out of the Metropolitan police budget in one year.

I will not get into the argument of whether or not there were one or two extra policemen on the beat this year, or will be next year, but I return to my earlier point about control. The Home Secretary decides how resources will be allocated to police forces throughout the country, yet the right hon. and learned Gentleman himself is the police authority for London. The lack of a police authority for London means that there is nobody to argue the specific case for Metropolitan police resources in the way that police authorities outside London are able to do.

As to police and local authority co-operation, again there is an enormous difference compared with 10 or 15 years ago, and nobody would object to that. My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton mentioned a case in my constituency of a woman who was murdered in a tower block, when the closed circuit television picture was not good enough to provide a clear picture of persons who might have entered and left the block of flats at the time of that murder. Money is needed not only to install CCTV systems but to update and maintain them. It is not good enough to install a camera and think that is the end of it.

Mr. Cohen: My hon. Friend is correct to say that I intervened in the Home Secretary's speech on that point. Although the right hon. and learned Gentleman said that money is being put into CCTV, he did not respond to my specific point that money should go into a programme of monitoring existing CCTV systems. If I cannot get the Home Secretary to his feet to make a commitment in that respect, I hope that the Minister will return to that issue later.

Mr. Howard *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. There cannot be one intervention on another.

Mr. Gerrard: I will be happy to give way to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Howard: I am delighted to respond. I made it perfectly plain to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) that we had issued guidance designed to ensure that CCTV schemes are brought up to date and

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made to operate as effectively as possible. Now it emerges that Labour Members want more money. Have they checked with the shadow Chancellor? Are they aware that claims for more spending are completely banned by Labour, which is trying to hoodwink the public into thinking that Labour is the party of low taxation? We ought to have the full facts before Labour Members start asking for more Government money.

Mr. Gerrard: My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton was making the point that, if CCTV cameras do not work, one might as well not have them. Unless money is available to keep CCTV systems functional, they are not worth having. It is like the argument about the national lottery money, which is available for capital projects but not for revenue to keep schemes running.

Some points that I and other hon. Members make may be seen as criticism of the Metropolitan police, but there is only one debate like this each year. If we do not use it to express our concerns, there are few other opportunities. We all want to support the Metropolitan police and to see them operate efficiently. Constituents in the poorest areas of London suffer the worst consequences of crime. People on estates are victims of some of the worst vandalism, break-in rates and consequences of drug dealing. It is not in our interests to have a police force which operates less than efficiently.

The biggest threat to improvement and further progress, judging from today's debate, is the complacency reflected in the Home Secretary's opening speech. He claimed that everything is all right and getting better, that there is no need to worry and that it should be left to him as the police authority to do all that is necessary. That was more or less the implication of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's speech, and it is not the way to achieve a more efficient police force in London or permanently to reduce crime levels.

7.37 pm

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): The debate on policing in London must be conducted in the context of the significant extra resources that the Government have put into law and order nationally. Funding of the police service has increased by 96 per cent. in real terms since the Government came to power in 1979, which is no mean achievement and deserves recognition. I welcome the proposed 5,000 additional police over the next three years and the £260 million increase in funding in the coming year, which is 4 per cent. nationally.

Hon. Members acknowledge that the police do a first-class job. It is equally clear that the Metropolitan police have the toughest job of all as the force that serves the capital and all the difficulties that it brings. London is a large city with a substantial daytime community. We know the problems presented by organised crime, particularly in respect of drugs and firearms. I would not argue that London is badly treated in funding terms, because police expenditure per head is £228, compared with a national average of £97. I do not think that colleagues from other parts of the country would say that London is badly treated in terms of funding.

The situation is much more difficult, of course, when we examine changes in funding from one year to the next. I listened carefully to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary when he explained exactly how the funding for London is to change. I noted with interest his statement that extra spending power—as much as 3.6 per cent.—will be available for the coming year in a variety of different forms. I certainly welcome the increase.

The distribution function is carried out by the Commissioner and is based on a formula, but I must confess that I am not always clear about exactly what the basis is. The latest information that I have is based on a written answer in *Hansard* of March 1993, which contains some revealing figures, although some of them might have changed since then.

The figures reveal that Croydon, which is the largest and best London borough, has a population of 314,000 and 590 police officers in its two police divisions. Lambeth, which is an adjoining borough, has 245,000 people—far fewer—and 970 police officers. I am not in any way complaining that Lambeth has more police than Croydon, but is that ratio right? In Croydon, the ratio works out at 1.9 police per 1,000 population; in Lambeth, it is slightly less than four police per 1,000 people.

What is interesting about the figures is that the national average is 2.2 police per 1,000 people. I highlight those figures because, for the reasons that I have mentioned, such as its size and the scale of crime, one would expect London to have a higher ratio. However, is the balance between inner and outer London necessarily right?

I have taken the opportunity to examine the number of burglaries in 1993-94 and assumed that there might be a correlation between burglaries and the number of police officers. Croydon had slightly fewer than 6,000 burglaries, while Lambeth had just under 8,000. The difference is not massive, and it would probably not justify the difference in manpower. I think that Members of Parliament from London constituencies should consider that.

In the previous debate on the Metropolitan police, in December 1994, the Home Secretary told the House that the number of police in London had increased from 22,000 to 28,000. I was pleased to hear those figures broadly confirmed again in this debate. The monthly variation is not significant—contrary to what the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) tried to demonstrate—but there is no doubt that the general trend is an increase in the number of Metropolitan police officers.

I must put one qualification on that figure—it must be considered in the context of the number of posts that have been civilianised. There is not much point in having additional policemen and policewomen if they are doing office jobs that could be done by civilians. There could, therefore, be occasional small dips because there has been more civilianisation. With the new powers available to divisional superintendents to allocate their manpower budgets as they think fit, I would expect variations. As more duties are carried out by civilians, more police manpower will be freed up so that police officers can be on the beat, which is what the people of London want. People in London want to see the police on the beat, patrolling the areas in which they live.

I recognise that it is essential for the police to have modern computers and communications systems. Their importance must never be forgotten. In the debate in 1994, we were told that the Metropolitan police were on target

for a trunked radio system to be fully operational by 1998. In his reply, I trust that my right hon. Friend the Minister will be able to confirm that that system will be operational by the target date.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary rightly placed emphasis on the fact that there has been a significant decrease in crime during the past two years. None of us is complacent about the decrease, because the struggle to reduce crime is tough. There is no doubt that the police must be given credit for their improved crime fighting and their useful targeting of resources.

I must say, however, that I was somewhat surprised that the targeting of resources on known offenders in target areas was not normal practice before, and that the police had to be dragged into using modern-day techniques to deal with crime. That is why the Government were absolutely right to introduce the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994, which forces the police to set targets and objectives. I am sure that that Act will lead to further improvements in the future.

The 1994-95 figures for the Metropolitan police show an overall decrease in crime of slightly more than 7 per cent., but we cannot be complacent about the figures for specific crimes. There were 41,000 crimes against the person, 6,000 sexual offences and 28,000 robberies. My hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) mentioned people's particular concern about burglary. I think that it is quite right for the Metropolitan police to target burglary and to try to reduce the number from 173,000.

I strongly welcome the increased co-operation between local authorities and the police. I remember the bad old days, in the 1970s and the 1980s, when many councils in London, particularly Labour-controlled councils, refused even to allow the police into their schools to talk to children. The idea of consultative committees sitting down and working with the police was anathema. There has been significant progress, and police consultative committees are doing a first-class job, as are the neighbourhood committees under them.

In Croydon, we have sector police consultative groups, in which many local people play key roles. I should like to pay tribute to the police who have been involved in community liaison in my borough. We have an excellent team there, under Chief Inspector David Hewetson and Alex Cashin, a very long-serving police constable who has done excellent work in the community.

Earlier in the debate, some hon. Members rightly spoke about the problems of racial harassment and about the need for good relations between communities. I am convinced that the work of community liaison officers, who visit various local groups and attend the community functions of Asian and Afro-Caribbean groups in particular, has done much to ensure good community relations in Croydon. When there have been incidents that have caused great concern, I know that the community liaison officers have gone into action, got alongside the various communities groups and done a great deal of good work. That work is similar to that which the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) described in relation to Brixton following the recent riots.

I echo a point made by the hon. Member for Vauxhall, and make a special plea to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary in relation to moving chief superintendents on too quickly from the areas in which they serve. These days, the police depend far more on good relations with the local community and with community leaders. It is frustrating for all concerned to find that, once good relations and trust are established, the chief superintendent must move on because of a career move or for whatever reason. It is a real bone of contention if those chief superintendents are moved on too quickly. Of course they cannot stay in the area, even if many of us might like them to, but it is important that they are not moved on as soon as they have established good relations.

In the debate in December 1994, the awful murder in New Addington of Sergeant Derek Robertson was mentioned. There have been other murders since then. The police in Croydon are divided into two divisions—south Norwood and Croydon. It is fair to say that that murder, which happened shortly after some horrific knife attacks on officers in south Norwood, had a profound effect on the attitude and approach of the police in south Norwood. I am pleased that the new chief superintendent is doing all in his power to try to improve the morale of his staff following those awful incidents.

The level of casual violence against the police—violence in various forms—is most disturbing. The most recent report to the Croydon police consultative committee gives separate figures for the south Norwood and Croydon divisions and shows that, in November and December, 37 officers were injured in the course of their duties in the Croydon division and that 24 were injured in the south Norwood division. Those figures are disturbing—it seems that too many people are only too keen to attack policemen and policewomen with fists, bottles or knives. I should like the courts to impose heavier sentences on anyone found guilty of assaulting a police officer.

The type of crime in London also gives cause for concern. I happened to see in the *Croydon Advertiser* on Friday that, in 24 hours last week, there were three armed raids and two serious stabbing incidents. That level of crime is probably mirrored across London, and we should all view it with gave concern.

I shall not say too much about drugs, although I recognise that they are a serious problem. My hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton hit the nail on the head. I know that much good work is being done by the police and others in schools in Croydon to try to improve young people's understanding of the dangers of taking drugs.

The huge success of Operations Bumblebee and Eagle Eye has been mentioned, and I am sure that all hon. Members welcome it. More has to be done to reduce even further the number of burglaries. As my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton said, what people fear most is coming home after a night out to find that their home has been burgled or, perhaps even worse—fortunately, it occurs less frequently—waking in the middle of the night to find someone in the process of burgling their home. Such crimes are awful, and too many people have had to put up with them.

The Metropolitan police serve London as well. I have, however, expressed some concern about the allocation of resources between inner and outer London, and hope that the Commissioner will take such concern into account.

The foundations for improved relations between the police and the community have been well laid, and we are seeing the benefits in terms of greater co-operation

[Mr. David Congdon]

between the two. I pay tribute to the police for their work in dealing with the terrible crime of racial harassment. Such crime is difficult to solve because people are often not prepared to come forward as witnesses. Several people have come to see me, complaining of racial harassment. When I have spoken to the police about such cases, they have always handled them sensitively and professionally in a genuine attempt to solve them.

Difficult neighbours, noise and the like have been mentioned. They are serious problems, but if there is a racial element to them, they can be much worse. Such cases need sensitive handling by the police, and I believe that they have struck the right balance by working closely with local housing authorities to deal with the problem.

7.53 pm

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): I join other hon. Members who have congratulated the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on his stewardship of the Metropolitan police, especially during the year under discussion. Of course, we all warmly welcome the small reduction in recorded crime in that period.

I was extremely concerned about what I would call the rather complacent attitude of the Home Secretary towards policing in London. If the same reduction in recorded crime that he reported to the House were sustained, it would still take us 15 years to reach the level of recorded crime that the Government inherited when they took office. That is a long time for Londoners to have to tolerate unacceptably high levels of crime. The Government cannot be trusted on crime, any more than they can be trusted on other aspects of public policy.

My contribution to the debate will focus on two aspects of great importance to my constituents and to the people of London in general. The first is the number of front-line officers working in London and the predicted resourcing of the police service in London in the coming year. The second is the police service's accountability to Londoners.

The Home Secretary is very good at claiming that he has significantly strengthened the front-line resourcing of police in London. If I may say so, he is at best disingenuous; at worst, he would appear to be misleading the House by selecting figures that may suit his argument but which do not, in my view, paint the full picture. The figures that we have are those that we gleaned from the annual report of the chief inspector of constabulary at the Home Office. I think that those returns can be trusted by all. They are not figures dreamed up by a partial group of Labour party supporters; nor are they compiled on the instruction of a senior Minister who is trying to justify what he wants the public to believe.

Mr. Howard: They are neither dreamed up nor unreliable—they are just out of date.

Ms Hodge: I fail to see how figures relating back to 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983, right through to 1995, can be said to be out of date. Either the Home Secretary is claiming that they are inaccurate or he is not. I would suggest that they are not inaccurate and therefore cannot be said to be out of date. They go back 15 years.

Mr. Howard: This clearly needs to be spelled out to the hon. Lady in words of one syllable. She began by accusing me of misleading the House—I do not know whether you noticed that, Madam Deputy Speaker, but that is how she began—

Mr. Dobson: No, she did not.

Mr. Howard: Yes, she did. That was how she began this part of her remarks. She made that serious charge, which I am slightly surprised that she was allowed to make, with reference to figures that I had cited—*[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) want to say something?

Mr. Dobson: No; I want you to shut up.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is making an intervention; we cannot have one intervention on another.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Lady made her point by referring to figures that I had given earlier and which she was challenging, as she is perfectly entitled to do. I am trying to point out that the reason why the figures that I gave differ from those that she is citing is that the figures that I gave are more up to date. The figures in the document to which she is referring take us to April last year, whereas the figures that I was using take us to December last year and are therefore more up to date. It is perfectly simple.

Madam Deputy Speaker: There seemed to be a note of criticism in the Home Secretary's remarks. I was listening carefully to what was said and did not think that the hon. Lady's remarks were such that she should be pulled up for using unparliamentary language.

Ms Hodge: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for protecting me. I had selected my words extremely carefully. As my hon. Friends have said, the Home Secretary tries to produce seasonally adjusted figures, and the House is used to that. I repeat that the Home Secretary may have selected figures that suit his argument, but they do not paint an honest and full picture of what is happening to the resourcing of police in London.

The figures that I have before me demonstrate—the Home Secretary has not denied it—that police strength in London has not been increased substantially. It has not even been held at a level appropriate to the need. In 1990, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon became Prime Minister. In his speech at the party conference in October 1995, the Prime Minister made a commitment that he would increase the police strength throughout the country, and one presumes that that includes the police strength for the capital. The record speaks for itself. When the right hon. Gentleman became Prime Minister, the Metropolitan police strength was 28,126. By 1995, that figure had fallen to 27,574. As I read those figures, that means there are 500 fewer bobbies on the streets of London than when the right hon. Gentleman became Prime Minister.

That reduction has occurred at a time when there has been an unprecedented increase in crime levels in the capital. Yes, there was a reduction in the levels of recorded crime last year and, of course, every responsible hon. Member welcomes that, but the figures are still running at record high levels. The Government's failure

to invest in policing in London—shown by the cuts in police strength and by the cuts in the Metropolitan police's budget, which they will have to absorb next year and in ensuing years—is selling Londoners short on their policing.

No wonder the fear of crime is so high. No wonder there is a loss of confidence in the police in London. No wonder the Home Secretary is the least trusted man about town.

Mr. Howard: Can the hon. Lady explain how a 3.6 increase in spending power can be characterised as a cut?

Ms Hodge: I am extremely happy to respond to that point, because the Home Secretary has made it several times. The 3.6 per cent. increase in spending comes partly from an underspending in the current year. That is partly how it is being financed. However, every other police force has had a real increase, as promised by the Home Secretary, of 3.6 per cent. London has been given less additional money than elsewhere and Londoners will be expected to fund the Metropolitan police in a way that they have never been before—from an underspend that was no doubt encouraged by the Home Secretary.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Lady is piling inaccuracy on inaccuracy. It is simply not true to suggest that every other police force has an increase of 3.6 per cent. The hon. Lady simply does not have a clue what she is talking about.

Ms Hodge: If that is not true, the commitment given by the Home Secretary that he would increase the police budgets of every police force by 3.6 per cent. was also not true. I understand that that is the commitment he gave.

We have 500 fewer police in London, but between 1991 and 1994-95, sexual offences have increased by 26 per cent.—those are my figures. We have 500 fewer police in London, but crimes of violence have increased by 16 per cent., and we have 500 fewer police in London but, in the borough of Barking and Dagenham, the number of burglaries has more than trebled in the past 16 years. In 1979, one in 34 households in my constituency experienced a burglary, but by 1995—the most recent figures I have available—that figure had increased to one in 11. That is a terrific increase in an outer-London borough. The same pattern exists for violent crime in my constituency. In 1979, one in 82 people in Barking had been the victim of a violent crime. By 1995, that had almost doubled, to the horrifying figure of one in 45.

I am sure that other hon. Members are also being visited at their surgeries by an increasing number of people coming to complain about disorder in the streets. Groups of residents come to talk about young people collecting on open spaces and about their fears as they watch, unprotected, the vandalising of cars and street furniture. Disorder on the streets is a growing problem which can only partly be addressed if we increase the presence of police in our streets. With the cuts in police strength in London, the ability of the Commissioner to deliver an increase in police presence in ordinary streets is undoubtedly curtailed.

Mr. Howard *indicated dissent.*

Ms Hodge: The Home Secretary may shake his head, but it is true.

The failure of the Government to develop a proper policy on youth crime has had a horrendous impact. I have met the police and shopkeepers from Barking town centre and I have been told that a family of three sons, all of whom are under 18, is probably responsible for about 50 per cent. of the petty crime and burglaries that take place in Barking town centre. That is a very small number of people responsible for a very large amount of crime. Yet, despite 16 years in government and a constant pretence of being tough on crime—especially youth crime—the Conservative party has done nothing to assist the people and businesses in my constituency to tackle the very real problem of crime in the centre of Barking.

Lady Olga Maitland: Bearing in mind the hon. Lady's concern about juvenile crime, does she support the Government's policy to put young people into secure training centres if they are persistent offenders? Perhaps the hon. Lady could explain why the Labour party voted against such a measure during the passage of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Ms Hodge: The hon. Lady has been misinformed in her contributions to the debate today. The Labour party supports secure training centres for young people. My quarrel would be with the failure of the Government to deliver a policy that they have been promoting for a number of years. We have heard the Home Secretary, in the Chamber and outside, talk about investment in secure training centres for young people for a long time, but we have yet to see that put into practice. The suggestion that Opposition Members have not supported that is just wrong.

Let me raise another issue of concern not just to my constituents, but to those who live and work in London. We have heard much about the fear of crime, particularly among women. For every woman who is assaulted on the streets of London, there are probably 1,000 who are so frightened that they put themselves under voluntary house arrest. That is totally unacceptable. The lack of confidence in the Government's ability to tackle crime in the capital city has increased the fear of crime among women.

There are many implications. Not only are some women too frightened to leave their homes, but women are less likely to use public transport. That has a bad environmental impact on the capital city, and leads to the capital becoming clogged up with traffic at the expense of those who really need to travel by car. We must judge the Home Secretary's record of policing in London against that background.

I distinguish between operational management by the Commissioner and the responsibility for policy that I presume the Home Secretary still believes he has. I am sorry that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has left the Chamber.

The increase in police strength since the Conservatives took office has been too small adequately to meet the needs of London. Figures from the annual reports of Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary, which are available in the Library, taking into account the decrease in the years since the Prime Minister took office, reveal that the increase was only 4 per cent. That is simply not enough to address the massive rise in crime. When we compare what the Government have delivered for London over the past 16 years with what they have done this year

[Ms Hodge]

and intend to do next year, we reach the simple and clear conclusion that the Home Secretary and the Government cannot be trusted with policing in London.

There will be fewer bobbies on the streets this year and again next year. Those on the front line in the battle against crime will be doing less. According to the commissioner's report, the Metropolitan police have cut overtime by 620,000 hours. On a crude calculation, that represents about 400 policemen and policewomen, so Londoners have 400 fewer bobbies on the beat simply because of the cut in overtime. It is a hidden cut, but it represents a real reduction. There are 400 fewer dedicated men and women serving the community in London. If we add that to the 500 we have lost since 1990, we begin to unravel the truth behind the Government's hollow rhetoric about tackling crime.

From what we have seen of the budget figures that are being considered at present, the position can only get worse. The new formula that has been devised for distributing resources for policing has made matters worse for London. This year, London lost £115 million. The loss has been protected by a dampening grant of £85 million, but that is simply a short-term palliative and £30 million has gone. Next year, a further £30 million will go and London will be progressively deprived of much-needed resources.

Mr. Congdon: I am intrigued by what the hon. Lady is saying. Is she saying that London, at a figure of £228 per head compared with an average of £97 per head nationally, is under-provided? If so, is Labour pledging to increase the total funding available to the police above the 97 per cent. increase in real terms since 1979, or is she suggesting that London should have even more of an increase over and above other authorities and that, in effect, we should rob other cities to pay London? Is that what she is suggesting, or is it another spending pledge by the Labour party?

Ms Hodge: The hon. Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) spoke about the lack of policing resources in his own constituency, so it is rather surprising that he now attacks me for talking about policing resources in the capital. He should also know that it is nonsense to make a crude comparison between spending per head on policing in London and that in the rest of the country. The Metropolitan police have a number of national duties over and above those covered by other police services.

Finally, I was referring to the distribution of resources. I should have thought that every London Member who cared about London would have joined me in saying that London will lose the money it desperately needs to provide a more secure place for people to live and work by having an effective police service.

The Government claim to be the party of law and order. If that is the case, why are they cutting police strength in London and the police budgets for London? Why is London the only police service not to receive the minimum 3.6 per cent. increase in funding that the Home Secretary promised all police services? Why are the Government letting London down? It is now part of the well-worn political lexicon, but it is a classic example of a Minister failing miserably to do what he says.

Could all that have happened if there had been a properly accountable police service in London? I think not. If London had a proper democratically accountable police authority, we would not be facing the crisis of confidence that exists in every community in London. The accountability of police in London is wrong.

It is wrong in principle, as every police service should be democratically accountable to the community that it seeks to serve and the people who foot the bill for that service. London council tax payers pay a precept, yet they have no say. It is wrong in practice because a necessary precondition for an effective police service is the consent and support of the community that is being policed. London lacks the transparent institutional link between the community and the police that must form the basis for building the trust and consensus that are required for effective policing.

It is particularly wrong because of the present Home Secretary. Theoretically, the Metropolitan police should be accountable to the Home Secretary and, through him, to Parliament. Our problem in London is that the present Home Secretary weaves and dives every time anybody suggests that he is responsible for anything. He may be trying to cover his own back, but he does so at the expense of Londoners. The creation of yet another unelected quango stuffed with Conservative yes people is an insult to Londoners.

When I asked the Home Secretary a series of questions about the newly formed Metropolitan police committee for London, he replied:

"These are matters for the chairman of the Metropolitan Police Committee.".

Therefore, I dutifully sought a reply to my questions from the chairman of the Metropolitan police committee only to be told that he could not reply to my questions because his advice is confidential. That was in the name of accountability—what a farce.

The Metropolitan police committee for London has not yet celebrated its first birthday, yet it is already clear that the band of unknown men and women plucked from the Government's politically partial list of the good and the great is bound to fail. The committee was dreamed up as a sop in response to the legitimate protests of Londoners that the police service is not accountable to them. The committee is not succeeding, and it will not succeed. Indeed, it can never succeed.

The committee's members are selected, not elected. As I read the list of members, it is difficult to find a good reason for their appointment to such an "august" body. The members include, for example, a retired general from the Falklands. The members have no legitimacy in the eyes of London. The chairman is Sir John Quinton—I have no doubt that he is an honest and good man—who assures me that he has never paid a penny into Conservative party funds. He knows all about London. He lives in Chenies in Buckinghamshire, which is the last Conservative-controlled shire. His background and experience are utterly relevant to policing the capital!

Sir John is a banker by trade. He is chairman of Wimpey plc and the non-executive director of an East Anglian building society. When I asked him to describe how he kept in touch with Londoners and their needs when it came to policing, he said that he obtained a useful insight from people he came across at his local tennis club. When I asked him how he saw his role, he gave me his mission statement. None of us has seen that statement because it is confidential. It appears, however, that he saw

his job as providing the best possible police service in London within existing resources. That seems fine but surely that is the job of the Home Secretary—or is it not?

The Metropolitan police committee costs London council taxpayers nearly £400,000. What for? What is the added value of the committee? I do not know and its members cannot tell me. The chairman tells me that it is consulted on matters such as whether a firing range should be bought or a new helicopter. I am sure that these are vital matters, but the chairman cannot tell me what input, or effect, he is having, for example, on next year's policing plan for London.

I understand from what I have read in the newspapers that there is a row going on between the committee and the Commissioner on next year's policing plan. Perhaps the Minister will enlighten us when he replies. What is the nature of the argument? Why do we want a police committee for London? We want a committee that acts as the public voice in policing matters. Instead, the Metropolitan police committee meets in secret. It gives advice to the Home Secretary that we shall never see. It has yet to publish a public report. How can that be said to reflect the voice of Londoners?

The situation becomes worse. When I asked Sir John Quinton whether he carried out surveys to test customers' views on policing—our views—he said that the committee did not carry out its own surveys but used those of the Metropolitan police. It seems that the committee has no independent means of testing Londoners' views.

When I asked whether the committee was taking a view on the effectiveness of existing police consultative groups, Sir John said that he had not interfered with the way in which the Metropolitan police consults these groups. When I asked how he incorporated Londoners' views in his report, he replied that, if his report was heavily criticised by the people of London, "we shall take account of it." That reflects the inadequacy of the current structure.

In answer to a question put to the Home Secretary in October 1995 by the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), the Home Secretary replied:

"I am confident that the Metropolitan Police Committee will play an important part in improving the way in which policing in London can involve the community."—[*Official Report*, 19 October 1995; Vol. 264, c. 471.]

Given the way in which the committee functions, however, it does nothing to involve the community any more in the policing of London. Unelected individuals who have no clear locus and no democratic constituency cannot improve the way in which policing in London involves the community. They are not doing that and they do not pretend in their mission statement to recognise that as their legitimate role.

We know that £400,000 would buy us an extra 20 policemen and women for London. I believe that that sum would be better spent on extra police officers rather than on a committee that is unelected and unaccountable, and ultimately will be unsuccessful.

8.26 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate. Having taken part in similar debates in previous years, I hope that the annuality of these debates can be restored. As Opposition Members have said, there was a period of, I think, two or three years recently when these debates did not take place. I hope that those who manage the business of this place will ensure that in future these debates are annual. They give us a useful opportunity to take stock of law-and-order issues as they affect our constituents. They enable us to make some constructive suggestions about how such difficult matters can be handled in future.

I make no apology for the fact that I shall make a rather parochial speech. I do so deliberately, because I believe that law-and-order issues are often matters of local concern. I believe also that the best policing is local, in many instances. I shall speak from that point of view.

I do not know what your experience is, Madam Deputy Speaker, but on the basis of recent contacts in my constituency, it seems to me that the fear of crime and the reality of crime are still, alas, all too evident among the general public. In my part of south London, however—that is Sutton, and specifically the constituency of Carshalton and Wallington—considerable progress is being made by the excellent local police force of Z division, under the command of Superintendent Duncan Croll, and more locally still by the sector police under Inspector Trevor Shepherd, who covers much of the Carshalton area and some of the Sutton area within the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), and Inspector Rick Algar, whose officers police the Wallington sector.

I pay a warm tribute, as have other hon. Members, to the local police for all their efforts in the difficult area that we are discussing, and to the law-abiding majority of my constituents, who give the police their support. A point well made throughout the debate is that it is not possible to achieve real law and order in any modern community without the full partnership and support of many agencies and that of the general public.

As we shall never have enough resources to do everything we want and need to do in crime prevention and detection, it is clear that crime will be controlled, and ultimately reduced, only through partnership among the police, courts, parents, teachers, local authorities, youth workers, politicians and, above all, the general public, whether mobilised in the shape of neighbourhood watch or in any other good local schemes. Both my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam and I are pleased to receive the minutes of the police liaison committee in Sutton and to attend its meetings whenever we can, as we did last week, and to see the valuable way in which all its members, under the excellent chairmanship of Mrs. Heather Shaw, contribute to useful dialogue between representatives of the local community and the police who serve it.

As recently as last Friday, I made another visit to Wallington police station, the vital police station in my constituency, and benefited greatly from a useful exchange of views with Inspector Algar and his officers. I took the opportunity to go out on patrol in the Roundshaw area of my constituency with the beat officer concerned, PC Graham Curtis, and his colleague, PC Robert Butters.

[Mr. Nigel Forman]

That experience underlined to me the importance of partnership on the ground with officials from the housing department, youth workers and all those who can have a positive influence, especially on young people. With such a police presence, which is reassuring and well focused, it is possible to make greater efforts in youth club activity, neighbourhood watch and common citizenship, which ensures that crime is kept below the level that it would otherwise reach in the absence of such arrangements.

I was struck by what PC Curtis told me from his observations about the architecture of some of the estates that were built in the 1960s and 1970s. As the London borough of Sutton and the private sector have been successful with the single regeneration bid, we should be able to design out many of the opportunities that exist for crime in the architecture of large estates, just as, alas, they had been designed in when they were first built.

The good news about law and order in my constituency is demonstrated by the significant fall in reported crime for the second year running, and by the significant improvement in the clear-up rates on the most sensitive categories of crime. The clear-up rate is still not as good as the officers would wish, but it is getting better, and, with the support of the local community, it could get better still.

The police have had considerable success in targeting known criminals, which has already been mentioned. In one local example given to me today, a young man apparently admitted, once in custody, to 600 other vehicle crimes in addition to the ones with which he had been charged. Clearly, those factors affect the clear-up rate considerably.

I note the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam about the value of closed circuit television. She said, quite rightly, that there has been considerable success with the CCTV that was installed in the Sutton high street area. As soon as resources permit, I should like to see that technology spread to other parts of my constituency, to ensure that we do not simply displace crime and anti-social behaviour rather than eradicate it altogether.

I am confident that CCTV has a positive effect, but it needs to be spread as widely as possible to maximise the return on the investment. That can be done satisfactorily only as long as there is a strong partnership and understanding among the council, youth workers, teachers, the probation service, and projects to combat problems such as drugs through the youth awareness programme.

All that is good news, but the House will not be surprised to learn that there remain some important concerns on law and order in my constituency. Perhaps the most frequently expressed is that there still do not appear to be enough officers on duty at any given time. I do not know whether the problem is made worse by the common funding formula.

It would appear from what my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said earlier today that there will be a real increase in the coming year of 3.6 per cent., which, as he rightly pointed out, is ahead of the current rate of inflation. He also told us that some 35 per cent. of all officers are now on street duty. That is very welcome, but my constituents would like the proportion to be higher still. They would wish that the common funding formula for the Met did not have the effect, as allegedly it does, of deterring Londoners from enjoying the police protection that they believe the special problems of the London area deserve.

It is a sobering thought that in the greater part of my constituency that is covered by the Wallington sector live some 60,000 people, in some six square miles of densely populated suburbia. Yet at any given time, if one were to carry out a spot check of the number of officers on duty, whether on bicycles, on foot or in quick-response vehicles, the true figure would be about six. Even though they do a marvellous job, and it is even more important that there is a partnership with all aspects of the local community, it causes genuine concern, especially among the lay public.

Furthermore, if we are to have the common funding formula, it is important that we do not penalise success in policing, in areas such as Z division—my own area—where, mercifully, the reported crime figures are not as high as those in other areas; indeed, they are falling when compared with the less fortunate areas, where the rate of crime is still high and rising.

In so far as we seek to resolve the problems with resources as and when they come available, we should do so on the basis of differential expansion rather than zero sum calculations, where, if one part of the metropolitan area gets relatively more resources, another part must get less.

I believe that we need to upgrade and extend the use of new information technology, which is already proving successful. That would certainly assist the officers in my constituency in dealing with what they regard as a blizzard of paperwork, and it would release more of them for active duty on the streets and in quick-response vehicles. They have argued strongly both to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam and to me at recent meetings that it would assist them in combating street robbery.

There has been one good step in that direction. I understand that, in dealings between the local police and the Crown Prosecution Service, there is a tendency to use what are called abbreviated files, whereby some four elements are used in a particular case rather than 15, which was previously the position.

In so far as police officers have to deal with urgent and violent crime, it is important that they are suitably protected. I was glad to hear what my right hon. and learned Friend had to say about that. I welcome the forthcoming trial of CS aerosol sprays. I hope that, when it has been properly considered, it will be available to officers.

The advantage, as explained to me, is that it is better designed to restrain or put off somebody who threatens a police officer physically, without necessarily doing excessive damage to that person, which might be the case with long-handled batons. It would be a welcome accessory for police officers.

It must, of course, be accompanied by tougher powers to deal with the carrying of knives and other offensive weapons. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for her Bill. It was significant that, in the recent amnesty, in the Sutton and Wallington police stations alone, some 108 knifes and other weapons were collected.

In the long run, the continuing battle against crime must involve all of us—all members of the community. The police do their best, and we now have a professional and dedicated police service in Z division and in other parts of the country, but the police on their own cannot do everything. Notwithstanding modern technology and all the other modern techniques, the real key must be the partnership of which I have spoken, involving all members of the law-abiding community.

If we establish such a partnership, the level of crime will continue to fall steadily, as it has in recent years. Moreover, after a due delay, the fear of crime that disables and perplexes so many people will also be reduced, and people of all types and ages will be able to enjoy their pleasures and go about their business freely, without being dogged by that fear.

I commend the Metropolitan police for their efforts.

8.40 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) on, as usual, making a thoughtful speech. I agreed with much of it, especially his opening remarks about "designing out" crime on housing estates. As he said, we need to invest money for that purpose. Closed circuit television, entryphones and street lighting can all help.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) paid tribute to his local police force. As my hon. Friend's neighbour, I am happy to pay tribute to my local force, which has a good record in tackling racial and domestic violence every day, as well as more unusual crimes. It also has a good record on community policing.

The Waltham Forest panel of lay visitors has raised two important issues. The first is the detention of immigrants in police cells. In a report, the panel stated that in the summer of last year, four detainees were kept for as long as 80 hours in cells that were suitable only for detention for up to 24 hours. That, said the panel, imposed an unnecessary strain on both police and detainees—including other detainees being held in police cells.

Such lengthy detentions are unacceptable. Police cells, after all, are not prison cells; nor are they immigration detention centres. It should be borne in mind that the detainees have committed no crime.

The panel's second point relates to forensic medical examiners. Its report states:

"We have noted that many female detainees for cultural or personal reasons have expressed a preference for the services of a female FME."

Female FMEs, however, are not available. I wrote to the Minister of State, Home Office, who is responsible for prisons. She replied in September, saying that the Metropolitan police currently employed 117 FMEs, of whom only 25 were women.

The letter added:

"If the sex of the person being examined is different to that of the FME, a chaperon is always present."

The next sentence—with which I take issue—states:

"The Commissioner tells me that custody officers are sensitive to the individual needs of detainees, and if a female FME is requested they will do their best to oblige."

I do not think that that is good enough. The panel referred to "cultural or personal reasons"; some of the women involved may have been victims of sexual assault, and should have the right to be examined by a female FME if they request it. I shall not go into the details of women being shackled in prisons, but one of the obscene aspects of that is the fact that they were shackled to men. It is just as bad for a forensic medical examination to be carried out by a man against the wishes of the woman concerned.

The number of police officers from ethnic minorities is still very low, as is the proportion. At the time of a report issued by the Commissioner, only 11 police officers out of a total of 237 in Leyton were from ethnic minorities—4.64 per cent. In all divisions, out of 19,693 police—including school crossing patrols—only 625, or 3.17 per cent., were from ethnic minorities. In that context, the police are not representative of the wider community they serve.

According to one report, some 60 per cent. of London's black 16 to 24-year-olds are out of work. There is discrimination against black people in general in terms of employment, but there is clearly discrimination against them in terms of police employment as well. If the police do not have enough officers from ethnic minorities, they will not have the necessary links with the ethnic minority communities where some crime occurs, and they will not be able to achieve the necessary results. My police chief tells me that many London police forces cannot take on more ethnic minority officers, because they are "downsizing".

The 1990 Trust—in conjunction with the National Black Caucus, the Association of Black Probation Officers, the Society of Black Lawyers and the Black Police Association—wrote to me about police recruitment. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow, the trust pointed out:

"a higher proportion of ethnic minority officers quit the force compared to white officers."

According to the Black Police Association,

"a large and increasing number of Black officers are forced to take the Met to Industrial Tribunals."

The trust also quoted from an article in *The Guardian*, published in late 1994, which referred to police attitudes. Mike Bennett, chairman of the Metropolitan Police Federation, complained of

"a growing feeling in the police force that white heterosexual officers are an endangered species".

As the figures show, that was a very silly comment. Such attitudes need to be tackled.

The Conservative Government have a bad record on crime. Only one crime in 50 now results in a successful court conviction: that represents a 15 per cent. drop since 1980. The Government have cut compensation for victims. A woman who had been raped in a near-fatal attack received about £75,000 under the old scheme; now, she would receive only £7,500. A police officer who was the victim of crime would probably receive only a tenth of what he would have received under the old scheme.

The number of offences has risen by 47 per cent. since 1979 in London; within that figure, the level of violent crime has risen by 199 per cent., and the level of criminal damage by 116 per cent. The clear-up rate still hovers around 16 per cent.

The Government boast that the number of police officers has increased over the same period, but that is because the crime rate has soared. I will not go into the

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details of the police formula to which my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) referred, but it seems that there will be cuts. The Association of London Authorities speaks of cuts of £30 million last year, £30 million this year and the possibility of £30 million in each of the next six years. That must be reflected in police numbers.

Deaths in custody are an important issue. The verdict of unlawful killing that was returned at the inquest into the death of Shiji Lapite a couple of weeks ago was the second unlawful killing verdict returned on deaths involving Metropolitan police officers in three months. The Lapite verdict was made on 25 January; that on Richard O'Brien was made on 10 November last year.

Those verdicts are a terrible indictment of London's police service. Both juries accepted that unlawful, excessive and reckless force had been used by the police officers concerned. Both coroners expressed their concerns, in the form of coroners' recommendations, about the restraint techniques used by the police, and referred the files back to the Crown Prosecution Service. Decisions by the CPS on the cases of Brian Douglas and Wayne Douglas, who also died at the hands of the police, are awaited.

At the Lapite inquest, it was astonishing that police officers' evidence was that they were unaware of the dangers of neckholds and had received no training about those dangers, despite the fact that the Police Complaints Authority and the Association of Chief Police Officers had expressed concern about them.

On the day of the Lapite verdict, the Met paid out £90,000-worth of damages to three people assaulted by officers, one of whom had applied a neckhold. I will not go into all the comments and into what the coroner said about those cases. In the Shiji Lapite case, the officer admitted kicking the head

"as hard as he could".

The coroner described a "gross disparity" between injuries sustained by Lapite and what the officers said was the case.

The police seem to have learnt nothing from those deaths in custody. In 1981, Winston Rose, a mentally ill man in my constituency of Leyton, died after suffocating on his vomit. In 1983, the same happened to Nicholas Ofusi. Those deaths in police custody from suffocation put out warning signals. In my opinion, they spell malpractice. Both the recent deaths of Shiji Lapite and Richard O'Brien raise questions about the police's lack of accountability. Action has not been taken to prevent future brutalities.

The "Spitting Image" programme has a question and answer feature either side of the break. The question in the forthcoming week could be, "Who issued no statement of apology following those verdicts, including that on the unlawful killing of Shiji Lapite, but instead, the day after the Lapite verdict was returned, issued an attack on the largest-selling black newspaper, *The Voice*, for complaining about racism in the Met?"

The answer would be Sir Paul Condon, the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. His reaction to those deaths in custody and to having to pay out those amounts of compensation are little short of shameful. He has a lot of good will, but he will lose it if he does not take firm action in relation to such deaths.

In a parliamentary question, I asked the Minister whether he would ban the use of neck "choke" holds, which have been banned in other countries. The Police Complaints Authority has produced evidence, and given it to him, saying that such holds are deadly. To his shame, in one of the worst answers that I have received in the House—and we receive plenty of bad answers—he said that he would not ban neckholds, despite all the evidence and the case of Shiji Lapite. That is a shameful episode.

The police must deal with the issue of deaths in custody or, as I said in a parliamentary question, they will supply a blue touchpaper for riots that no hon. Member wants to see.

8.54 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): Like many capital cities, London is a city of crime, yet its streets are freer of crime and safer to walk down than most streets in cities of comparable size throughout the world. The reason is the work that has been put in over the years and, more recently, by the Metropolitan police in particular. That is a great tribute to them.

There are, of course, numerous causes of crime and many solutions are needed, but the single most important requirement is effective policing. That means, first, having a police force that, fundamentally, consists of good, honest and well-trained men. I am glad to say that that applies to the Met—its expertise is improving by the day.

Secondly, the police force needs to be of the right size. We have heard today that the Metropolitan police force is large and growing. It has about 5,000 more officers than in 1979; it got 259 extra policemen in 1995-96, and 180 more are promised in the coming year, so the size is increasing. More to the point, however, a record number of men are at the sharp end on the streets because officers have been released by civilianisation. We have the highest ever number of uniformed police constables on the streets. That applies in most regions in London, as well as across the board.

Thirdly, the police force needs to be correctly utilised. It needs to be targeted in the most effective way. That requires community policing—police on the beat—sector policing and the structure that supports that. It requires expertise, with police working in specialised areas to deal with, and to target, specialised crime. It requires police to be released from jobs that can be done by civilians so that they can concentrate on what one might call—as I am sure they would call it—real police work.

The results have been as follows. First, the police can more effectively deter crime by being visible on the streets. Secondly, they can produce a higher detection rate, which can be achieved, in particular, by expertise and specialised units in the force. That not only deters crime, but ensures that the people who are guilty of crime and who are detected are punished, often being removed from society. They cannot, therefore, at least for a while, commit that crime again. The results of those effective policies can be seen in the crime figures. As the Home Secretary said, over the past two years the crime rate throughout London has declined by 13 per cent. That means that more than 60,000 fewer crimes are now being committed in the capital than were being committed two years ago. That is no small matter.

That trend is reflected in my area, which is covered by Bromley police division, where there has been a decline in the number of crimes over each of the past two years,

and the figure is improving. There has also been an improvement in the feelings of ordinary citizens in terms of their being safe from the effects of crime. The policies have produced real and sustainable benefits.

The detection rate has improved. It has nearly doubled from 12 to 23 per cent. which is also a good source of comfort. Of course there are differences within the borough and I am concerned that some areas are still showing signs of an increase in crime. In addition, some crimes are not showing the same decline as the general trend. Those areas need targeting, and to that extent I support my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) who rightly drew attention to outer London and the need for police resources and manpower to be distributed in a way that will tackle crime most effectively. I am not criticising the present level of resources, but it is wise to keep a close eye on those resources to ensure that they are best deployed.

Benefits flow from community liaison. In my area there are three police community liaison bodies: the Bromley police consultative committee, the Beckenham sector police discussion group, and the Penge area police community working party. Those three groups work effectively. I am a regular attender at the meetings of all three. They help to keep the police in contact with the views of ordinary people but they have other functions as well. They are part of the process of policing in a democracy and in that sense they are an important part of that system. They also help the police and the community through a two-way flow of information. More than that, in some cases they directly assist in protecting the public and assisting the police in carrying out their duty. In that context, I think especially of the neighbourhood watch groups in the area, which perform a useful function. I add my thanks to those, in the House and outside, who volunteer their time and effort to support neighbourhood watch.

The three discussion groups, or police-community liaison groups—whatever we call them—are useful from the politician's viewpoint because they enable local councillors and hon. Members in London boroughs to meet regularly not just one local police officer but officers throughout the hierarchy to discuss semi-formally the various problems that are emerging, as well as hearing community feedback. I praise the chairman of the Beckenham discussion group, Peter North, for his consistent work over a number of years. I welcome and thank the new chief superintendent for the borough, David Martin, for his commitment, even early on in his new post, to police-community liaison work.

The police do not work in a vacuum. They cannot carry out their job effectively without the backing of the whole law and order framework. Sensitive and useful reform of sentencing, the courts, rules of evidence and so on are essential. The Government's work on that over the past few years is reaping benefits and dividends that the police recognise. The toughening of sentencing policy, the improvement in the balance between defendants and prosecuting authorities in the courts and changes to the rules of evidence have succeeded in ensuring that the police can do their job more effectively. Those measures also ensure that their morale is improved, and they bring back confidence to the general public.

I pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary for his personal work in this area. He has led, guided and determined the direction that should be taken. He has proved to be the most effective Home Secretary that I can remember. I support his plans to introduce minimum sentences, after consultation and after taking into account the views of people who are intimately connected with the enforcement of the law. That would also help the police in London in their difficult role.

Various innovations in new technology in terms of communication and of detecting crime, and the introduction of genetic data banks are already proving that they are useful in deterring and detecting crime. They are a useful additional armoury for the police in their difficult role.

Of course closed circuit television has a very important part to play. I suspect that its role will massively expand in coming years. In Bromley, there is an excellent example of its use in the town centre, where a new CCTV system has already prevented and detected crime. I am glad that the London borough of Bromley is planning next to introduce it in Beckenham town centre in the middle of my constituency. I hope that that is only the beginning, because I would like the use of such systems to be extended much further. They play an important role in making our society safer.

Sensitive reforms and innovation bring about a dramatic turn in the battle against crime, which is now being won. The benefits of the new measures and of Government policy are reflected in figures which increasingly show that things are moving in the right direction.

9.5 pm

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): There is no room in a debate on policing in London for self-satisfaction or complacency on any side. Crime and the fear of crime are part and parcel of the reality of the daily lives of those whom we represent. Whether one considers the number of police in December, as the Home Secretary would ask us to do, or the figures for April, the reality is, as the Home Office itself has accepted in its report "Anxiety About Crime", fear of, and anxiety about, crime are at their highest ever levels. That is the backcloth against which we debate policing in London and judge the Home Secretary's performance.

We owe the police, who are in the front line of the battle to reduce that anxiety and fear, a debt of gratitude. We owe them our gratitude and support—unconditional but not uncritical support—in the battle that they wage. In doing that, we owe it to them to be frank about some of the challenges that remain. At the forefront of those challenges is a continuing democratic deficit in the policing of London.

Reference has been made to Sir Paul Condon's views on that issue, and with good cause. When answering questions put by the Home Affairs Select Committee, he made it clear, especially in relation to the alienation of young people, that he felt that we needed to be prepared to look at ways in which to revitalise the links between the police and democratically accountable local bodies. That need is very clear to anyone who has any experience of working with young people in our city and anyone who has any knowledge or appreciation of the crisis that affects the youth service and voluntary youth work in London today.

Young people offend for a number of reasons. There is a complex pattern of causes of juvenile crime. There is no doubt that devilment is part of that pattern, but idleness

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and alienation play their part, too. One of the benefits of a properly resourced youth service, which enables partnership at local level between the local authority, the voluntary youth service and the police, is that it enables them to show young people another way.

When I was a young community lawyer, I sat on Westminster youth council. That council consisted of people from the uniformed sector, church youth clubs—one of which I represented—and local authorities. They sat with the police. Graham Dark, who, as hon. Members may remember, was head of security here, sat on Westminster youth council as a young inspector.

A whole cross-section of people in the local community were determined to ensure that young people had options and alternatives to the idleness that is all too often at the root of offending, that they were brought into the system, rather than alienated from it, and that they had some sense of responsibility to the local communities of which they were a part.

The fabric of that youth and community service has been stretched to breaking point and the increase in offending among young people must be seen in that context. We look to local authorities and to the Government to begin to tackle how we rebuild communities and a youth service that can act as a forum in which young people, the police, youth workers, the churches and the uniformed services can get together and show that there is another way.

Until and unless that is done, much of what we do and say about policing and young people will be to no avail. The local authority has a vital role to play. A police authority for London would also have a vital role to play—the fact that one does not exist is of profound regret. It does not end there. The lack of a police authority for London also acts as an obstacle to the development of strategies to prevent crime.

Recently, the Home Secretary visited Wembley, where the Chalkhill estate is due to be redeveloped. There is a partnership between local neighbourhood watch schemes, the police and people who live on the estate and who are desperately concerned about crime and offending. It has been a fruitful partnership.

I must pay tribute to Gloria Gold, who is the chairperson of the St. David's close and Barnhill road residents committee. Like many other people in London, she is involved in her local tenants' and residents' group and her local neighbourhood watch scheme. She is concerned about the pressure on resources, in terms of the provision of police officers on the beat. More importantly, she is concerned that the local authority does not seem to be giving the police and the local community the backing that they both seek to ensure that the developers provide for a police post on the estate. That is absolutely vital. I have taken up the case with the Minister, and I am grateful for his response.

The local divisional commander, Mr. Bligh, has obtained the promise of resources. All that is needed is a willingness on the part of the local authority that such important considerations for policing and crime prevention should be built into the development plan.

Just as we saw all too often in the 1960s and 1970s that crime was built into estates, so with co-ordination and effective strategies based on partnership, we can help build crime out of the estates. The fact that Brent council is not taking every opportunity to do so is a failure that it may come to regret.

My plea, which is echoed by other Members of Parliament and communities throughout London, is that we build on the partnership that is beginning to grow in our capital city—a partnership against crime.

We recognise that challenges remain. Reference has been made to recruitment into the police from a broader cross-section of the community, and that is a real challenge. The Metropolitan police still has some way to go in addressing that issue in terms of its equal opportunities policies, but it is supported by the community and this House as it does so. The real concerns about deaths in police custody remain, as do concerns about stopping and searching. Metropolitan police research into that matter has shown that a disproportionate number of young black people are picked up during such stopping and searching exercises. That is undoubtedly a cause of the suspicion that continues to exist in some sections of the community towards the police, and it also undermines the attempts by the police to recruit more young people from ethnic minority communities.

The challenges are there, but they can be overcome with goodwill and determination. Nothing is more likely to underpin our efforts to overcome the problem of crime and the fear of crime in our community than some sign that the Government have learnt the lessons of history and are prepared to give London what it demands—a directly elected police authority.

9.15 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): A serious and thoughtful debate has been somewhat marred by the unrealistic claims of Labour Members that the Government are somehow responsible for rocketing crime. I note that Labour has produced a briefing note for its Members which runs to only one and a half pages. The briefing shows the paucity of Labour's arguments, and demonstrates how it is clutching and clawing at the air as it tries to produce figures to substantiate its point of view.

The truth is that Labour is full of hot air, signifying nothing. Interestingly, the briefing contains not a single mention of Labour's failure to support Government legislation to take tough action on crime and on thugs. The Government have a positive record of tackling crime, and we know that we have the public's confidence to carry on in that regard. No one can blame the Government, however, for the criminal actions of some people, and society must look to its conscience on that matter.

I am concerned about juvenile crime, and the Metropolitan Police Commissioner's report is disturbing. Twenty-eight per cent. of all notifiable crime is carried out by 14 to 20-year-olds, while 53 per cent. of those arrested for robbery and 50 per cent. of those arrested for car crime are from the same age group. I feel that parents and schools have a key role in setting standards and insisting on law-abiding behaviour.

Mr. Soley: While I agree about the need to a set a good example, does the hon. Lady agree that that would be easier if we did not have a Home Secretary who was

constantly at war with the courts, losing cases before them, undermining and sniping at them and generally undermining the rule of law?

Lady Olga Maitland: The most important thing is that we have a Home Secretary who is totally dedicated to tackling crime. My right hon. and learned Friend has introduced legislation to deter crime and to deal with bullies who try to flout the law.

Young people and young criminals should be taught not just the three Rs in school, but the difference between right and wrong. School bullies should not be tolerated; school authorities have turned a blind eye to their activities for far too long. There are no excuses for committing crimes—we cannot blame socio-economic factors. The vast majority of poor people in this country would regard such a view as frankly insulting.

We cannot blame the police for amoral attitudes in society. Their duty is to protect the public, and our duty is to give them all the support and back-up that they need. That is why the Metropolitan police can spend £228 per head tackling crime, which is a generous figure compared with just under £100 per head in the regions.

Spending has increased by 87 per cent., even allowing for inflation, since 1979, which means that more officers are available for operational duty—contrary to the remarks of the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge). A further 5,000 police officers are due to come on stream over the next five years, following my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's announcement at our last party conference. The job of the police is to deter crime and to make sure that it does not pay; our job is to give the judiciary the necessary framework to impose heavy penalties. Above all, we must put the victims first. The Government have done all that.

I especially endorse the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) about the hard work of the police in the borough of Sutton, where I am proud to be Member of Parliament for Sutton and Cheam. I endorse my hon. Friend's tribute to Chief Superintendent Duncan Kroll and I pay tribute to Chief Inspector Broadhurst, the senior officer at Sutton police station. They have a proud record. Reported crime has fallen significantly for the second year running: reported burglary is down 13 per cent. on the 1994 figures, reported vehicle crime is down 6 per cent. and clear-up rates remain above the Metropolitan police average, which is 30 per cent. both for total offences and for burglary.

I am glad to report that the Sutton burglary posse is now on the run. Those persistent juvenile offenders—young thugs aged 12 to 14 who build up hero worship among their peer group for burglary, taking and driving cars and plain stealing—are on the wane. That is largely due to improved policing and tougher sentencing, with more offenders being sent to secure units. They have now left town. That is the direct result of Sutton's policing policy of targeting known offenders. Their families, friends and movements were known to the police who, using good intelligence, decided to focus on the relatively small number of individuals who committed a disproportionate number of criminal offences.

Such tasking has had a considerable effect, because the police were able to build up a complete picture of young offenders—their life style, friends and movements—and put them under sufficient surveillance to be able to catch them red-handed. They have also been tackling car crime. Tasking is being focused in a similar way to make sure that young people do not take and drive away cars in the great numbers that they used to.

I am concerned about the large number of 19 to 21-year-olds who are vulnerable to the temptation of taking high-performance cars—whether stolen or belonging to their families—careering down motorways and causing the most terrible accidents. Car manufacturers should look to their consciences. Do they really need to sell cars capable of speeds of up to 180 mph when the motorway speed limit is 70 mph?

By the same token, it is important that we should focus on drug dealers, suppliers and the locations where drugs are known to be supplied. That has to be backed up by more health and education, which has been shown to be a better way of getting the message home than the law and order route alone.

I applaud the Sutton initiative on closed circuit television. That is undoubtedly the result of the input from the Government, who have made an overall investment of £15 million. It has changed the face of Sutton's town centre. Crime is down by 15 per cent. and the confidence of local shopkeepers is up. CCTV is an important innovation which has been introduced to car parks and, one hopes, will be extended to other high streets in the area.

I pay particular tribute to the 3,000 Metropolitan police officers who have been grievously attacked by criminals. It is essential that the police receive proper assistance to protect themselves as they go about their duties. Thugs take advantage of the fact that police officers are unarmed.

Stabbings constitute the majority of injuries to police. At Kilburn police station, I watched a training video about how police should deal with a knife attack. It was based on real-life experiences, with first-hand accounts from victims—both men and women—which are humbling to us all and should be compulsory viewing on television. If that video were shown on television, people would have a better understanding of the high risks that police officers run on their behalf. Those accounts emphasise how important it is that my private Member's Bill, the Offensive Weapons Bill, passes through Parliament, as it will play a key part in eliminating the knife culture.

Young thugs should not be allowed to get away with knife attacks. Society should say, "Enough—we have decided that you should clear off; it will end today." The knife culture is encouraged by peer group pressure and the propaganda that it is masculine to carry a knife. That must come to an end. Severe penalties should be introduced for those who carry knives and the police should be given greater powers of arrest. That will change the future face of society in London and make it safer.

9.25 pm

Mrs. Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): This has been a good debate, in which London Members of Parliament have shown a passion for and commitment to safety in our capital city. It is a pity that the Home Secretary has taken so long to come to the House and be accountable to hon. Members for the policing of London. In some 40 months, this is only the third time that London Members of Parliament have had the opportunity to test

[Mrs. Bridget Prentice]

his accountability. That says very little for the Home Secretary's concern about democracy and open government.

We have come to expect Ministers to say one thing and do another. With regard to an accountable police force for London, with the Government it is a matter of one Home Secretary saying one thing and the next Home Secretary doing another. Perhaps the Minister of State will tell us whether we can have fixed dates for debating policing in London.

It is astonishing that the Home Secretary is against proper accountability of the police service in London when senior police officers favour it—as indeed do the majority of people in London. As my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) said, why does London have to be different from the rest of the country? In a witty and devastating attack on the Metropolitan police advisory committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) explained exactly why we need proper accountability.

Throughout the debate, it has been quite clear that all hon. Members have the greatest respect for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and his staff and for the way in which they have approached the serious problems in our capital city. I remind the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) that there are female as well as male police officers. My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) made a very telling point when he talked about the effect that the changes to criminal injuries compensation will have on police officers.

London suffers because some believe that its streets are paved with gold and that opportunity and wealth hang from every tree. However, London's scale and size is matched only by the scale and size of its problems. With 9.5 per cent. of the population out of work, unemployment is a bigger problem in London than in many other parts of the country. The Government's increasing practice of providing care in the community has hit London hardest and placed many at risk from serious crime. London and Londoners are confronted with a higher proportion of serious crimes—murder, rape, armed robbery, fraud and drug-related offences—than elsewhere in the country. Londoners do not need that. Officers of the Met have worked closely with councillors and community groups—the people of London—to try to combat those horrendous offences.

There have been notable successes. Before discussing some of the other issues that are of great concern to the people and the police of London, I pay tribute to the police in achieving results against considerable odds. Operation Bumblebee and Operation Eagle Eye have achieved and are achieving considerable success. I pay special tribute to Chief Superintendents Ken Chapman and Jane Stitchbury and their officers in the Lewisham and Catford divisions. Members of Parliament representing Lewisham work in close partnership with them and could not do our work so well without them.

In Catford division there has been a considerable increase in the clear-up rate due to the introduction of dedicated proactive teams. Nevertheless, the police believe that they are under-resourced and could do more if they were fairly treated by the Government. Unlike other police authorities, the Met will not receive part of the special grant that will guarantee at least a 3 per cent. increase in funding. They have been specifically excluded. My hon. Friend the Member for Barking, in a robust speech which obviously rattled the Home Secretary, made that argument extremely well—indeed, she rattled him so much that he had to leave the Chamber.

If, in response, the Minister says that the police will be able for the first time to carry over reserves, I say that, although that is true, it does not properly reflect the costs of providing a police service in London. The "crime management" formula assumes that similar crimes in different areas take the same amount of resources to solve. No allowance is made for variations in the time it takes to solve crimes and, in a densely populated city such as London with, among other things, a transient population, it is more likely to take more time to resolve problems.

We are equally worried about the "community relations" part of the formula, which is distributed purely on the basis of resident population. The consultants, Price Waterhouse, suggested that factors such as council estates, ethnic origins and levels of crime should be taken into account.

Much of the work that the police do is not reflected in the performance indicators. The chief superintendent in the Lewisham division said that a disabled woman's daughter has to call the police out at 3 am to help her put her mother back into bed. Because of the severity of that woman's disability, it takes five officers to help the daughter do that and preserve that woman's dignity. That is not reflected in the performance indicators, but who else is there for that family to turn to?

What about the case of Officer John Dine in Deptford, who has built up such a trust in his community that people whose first language is not English ask him to fill in their forms for them? That is not recognised in performance indicators, yet that is part of the police service.

Why has the Home Secretary rejected his consultants' advice on that issue? Why should the Met be prevented from qualifying for the specific grant because it has a rate refund this year, when other authorities are perfectly at liberty to carry forward reserves?

Last time we debated this subject, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) predicted that there would be a reduction in the number of police officers. Sadly, her prediction has proved all too true. The original budget for 1996-97 provided for 27,808 officers. The latest figures provide for 27,674—134 fewer officers. The Commissioner will try to deal with that at inspector and sergeant level to protect the number of bobbies on the beat. He has said, however:

"the impact on divisional policing will be significant and will undermine the ability to maintain proactive initiatives to meet local priorities."

I recently requested figures for street patrols. They show that, in 1995, the percentage of time spent on street duties was 35 per cent. Given that only one third of police time is spent on the street, it is little wonder that the Commissioner—with, I am sure, the support of the majority of Londoners—is doing everything that he can to protect that part of the service. Perhaps the Minister can say what initiatives the Home Secretary is taking to help the police spend less time on administration and more time on the street, catching criminals.

Another success in crime prevention has been closed circuit television. My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey), in an excellent speech, described

the use of the safer cities initiative in her constituency. Many police officers remain concerned about which areas in London will be covered—as are the small businesses that would benefit most. The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) also raised that point.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green said, the guidelines have been biased against London, giving priority to smaller centres of population. Can the Minister reassure Londoners that he will take their fears seriously and play fair with London in distributing funds for CCTV, so that the capital gets its fair share? Crime in London has too high a cost for the Government to duck their responsibilities. Crime against business is a problem not only for individual business men and women but for their employees, the economy and the country.

The Forum of Private Business survey showed that more than 40 per cent. of businesses throughout the country were burgled last year, yet the figure for London was an astounding 61 per cent. Businesses are increasingly having to incorporate the cost of crime in their budgeting, with £525.6 million spent on crime prevention in 1994-95. London businesses are increasingly refused insurance cover, or are hit with exorbitant premiums. At the same time, shutters and closed shops encourage vandalism, graffiti and fear. It is estimated that crime costs businesses more than half a billion pounds every year, and that only two thirds of that sum is recovered. The message is clear: under the Tories, it is not the criminals who pay for their victims, as the crime tax hits the capital's economic and employment prospects.

It is clear that Londoners, in common with people throughout the country, have a considerable fear of crime. My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall made a thoughtful speech on that issue and she was absolutely rig'it. A Metropolitan police survey showed that half the respondents felt threatened by crime in their areas. Asked whether they felt safe walking home after dark, the number who felt very safe fell from a previously poor 23 per cent. to a staggeringly low 16 per cent. Thirty-seven per cent. of Londoners were "quite concerned" about crime, and 55 per cent. were "very concerned". Two out of three Londoners believe that crime in the capital will worsen. That is an appalling indictment of Government policies. We know also that 49 per cent. of women are afraid to walk down their own streets at night.

It is time to give our streets and public places back to our law-abiding citizens. That can be done. A number of hon. Members mentioned partnerships between police and local authorities. It is a pity that the hon. Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) did not feel able to congratulate his Labour council on its excellent work in that regard.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) spoke eloquently of the need for partnership to develop further. If I may give a plug for my own authority, there have been a large number of successful partnership schemes between the council, police and local community—so much so that good liaison and response has become part of the fabric of policing in Lewisham. The police in Lewisham—as elsewhere in London, I imagine—believe that it is vital to increase public confidence in the police. As Superintendent Ken Chapman said, "that boils down to increasing police visibility."

Confidence may be falling because the service remains under-resourced while its domain is extended. The police and the public want more bobbies to be putting in more hours on the beat, but that is difficult because of the increase in paperwork and the developing administrative role that the police are taking on, in addition to the increasing pressure on the police as other groups and support networks are eroded.

Many police officers feel increasingly frustrated by the amount of paperwork that they have to do, which is often thrown back in their faces when the Crown Prosecution Service decides not to proceed with a case. The police officer is then expected to go back to the victim and explain why a vandal, thief, mugger or worse is to get away with it. When will the Government review the way in which the Crown Prosecution Service works so that it enhances and supports the work done by the police, rather than causing deep distress and growing cynicism among the police and the public, and particularly among victims?

There have been a number of tragic examples of people being returned to the local community from care in hospitals when clearly they are not able to cope. Those people regularly end up on the streets. I do not wish to go into the details of individual cases, but due to cuts in council and other services the police inevitably end up picking up the pieces. The reduced network of other support agencies means that the police, instead of being a service of last resort, have become the only resort. Cuts in local government funding have meant that community organisations such as youth groups have to be closed or scaled down. Valuable preventive safeguards are therefore lost. The Government have done and are doing nothing to tackle that problem.

If we are to give people—children, the elderly and vulnerable, women, ethnic communities—and small businesses a stake in their community, we must surely begin by giving them a safe environment. A safe environment is one in which the elderly do not fear to go out at night and one in which women can choose which form of transport they use without concern. A safe environment is one in which our children are not pressured into petty theft or drug taking and in which our ethnic minorities no longer fear racial harassment and victimisation. A safe environment is a community in which the police, the council and the people work together in partnership to prevent crime and to deal with it.

It is clear that we do not yet have a safe environment in London, and that Londoners are not safe with the Tories.

9.42 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I congratulate the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) on her first appearance at the Dispatch Box as a Labour Front-Bench spokesman. I shall enjoy debating with her, in my current capacity, for some years to come, while she remains in that capacity.

I must tell the hon. Lady that the hollow laughter that met her peroration at the end of her speech was not directed at her. It is just that my hon. Friends have longer memories than she does. Nearly all Opposition Members who have spoken in the debate have called for more money to be spent on the police and have pretended that they will be the guardians of the British police service, but Conservative Members recall that, during the last days

[Mr. David Maclean]

of the previous Labour Government—after practically destroying the morale of the British police force—they left the police 7,500 officers short. They left the Metropolitan police 3,740 officers short. Lectures from the hon. Lady on whether the police are safe with the Government therefore ring rather hollow.

What is the constitutional position? Due to its unique position, the Metropolitan police accounts for its performance to the House through the Home Secretary. I believe that this debate has shown the rightness and wisdom of continuing that arrangement. That accountability is not, as several Opposition Members have suggested, merely a matter of a once-a-year debate. The Home Secretary and I answer more than 150 letters or questions from hon. Members about the Metropolitan police each year; the Home Secretary meets all the London Members of Parliament in their party groupings; we discuss the annual policing plan; we meet local authority representatives to discuss financial issues; and we present to Parliament the Metropolitan police estimates, the Metropolitan police accounts and the Commissioner's annual report.

Mr. Straw: How can the Minister make such preposterous assertions when only five Tory Members from constituencies in Greater London have bothered to turn up to hear him winding up?

Mr. Maclean: If that is the thrust of the attack from the man who wants to be the future Home Secretary, frankly I find it rather pathetic. I can understand that. Because of the savaging that the hon. Gentleman has had from my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary over the past few months, he is scared to sit on the Front Bench unless he has a phalanx of colleagues around him. They are even there to protect him from poor little me.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) spoke from his personal experience of the Metropolitan police, gleaned from his attachment as part of the police parliamentary scheme. He referred to concerns about the tenure of specialist officers. The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) raised her concerns and the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) made a related point about the length of time senior officers spend in divisions.

The operational deployment of officers is, of course, a matter for the Commissioner but, as I think hon. Members recognise, there is a trade-off between giving officers continuity of experience, whether in a particular locality or in a particular speciality, and ensuring that training and promotion needs are met.

As the hon. Member for Vauxhall noted, the divisional commander at Brixton, Peter Clarke, is leaving his post on a well deserved promotion. I know that the Commissioner is alive to local concerns and that he will always listen to local people's representations, but in the last analysis he has to weigh up all the relevant considerations—including, in the case of specialist squads, the chief inspector of constabulary's recommendations on tenure. Reasonably frequent turnover guards against complacency and staleness.

I should like to mention some of the exciting new technological and hardware back-up that we have made available to the Met over the past two or three years. Hon. Members have mentioned some of them. My right hon. and learned Friend made it clear how vital it is for professional policing in the late 20th century that police officers are supported by the latest developments. The Commissioner sets great store by that and we have supported him to the hilt.

I shall, as an example, describe some of the backstage equipment that supports Operation Bumblebee, one of the most successful operations that the Met has run in the past 12 months. Just before Christmas, the Marylebone division of the Met organised a seminar on computer-related crime, at which it introduced Tracer, which it billed as "the thief's worst nightmare."

Tracer carries a DNA-style code. It is made up of millions of microscopic particles dissolved in water, each carrying a special chemical code just like DNA. The solution is simply brushed on to the item that is being marked. Its presence is revealed under ultra violet light. When a burglar tries to remove the Tracer marks, he faces millions of particles in all the awkward cracks and corners which have to be removed before the stolen property can be disposed of. Burglary of computers, especially computer chips, can be highly lucrative. The introduction of technology such as Tracer will make a real contribution to minimising the success of the computer thief.

The counter-action partnership initiative offers advice on how to cut crime in the high street, and commercial robberies have been cut across London by 31 per cent. Now Dixons and the Met, via the consumer electronics security initiative, are looking to the electronics industry to co-operate in making its products—which are highly desirable to criminals, who have created a flourishing marketplace for goods that are easily stolen and quickly re-sold—much more secure. That top technology is benefiting the law-abiding in society and getting at the criminal.

Operation Eagle Eye is underpinned by technology. All 25 of the divisions that are involved in Eagle Eye will, by the end of this month, have received a range of sophisticated equipment, including high quality video cameras and powerful computer systems.

An officer involved with CRIMINT—the crime intelligence system—was quoted as saying:

> "With CRIMINT we are in a new world. I was recently asked if I knew something about a certain car. In the old days I would have had to hunt through my cards. I would probably have said, 'Yes, I do, but . . . '. With CRIMINT I was able to answer the question in about fifteen seconds. And with CRIMINT things just don't go missing.".

That is the answer to the hon. Member for Lewisham, East, who asked what we were doing to speed things up and reduce paperwork. That is just one example. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary mentioned CRIS, which is another.

My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) asked about business crime. I mentioned the partnership with commercial interests. The Oxford street partnership is another exciting initiative, in which major retailers are using Metropolitan police targeting techniques and are as successful against shop thieves as the Met has been.

My hon. Friend also asked about firearms research. Research funded by the Home Office at the Oxford university centre for criminological research concluded that there was no particular illegal firearm and that there

was no Mr. Big. We remain concerned about illegal firearms getting into the hands of criminals and the police and Customs and Excise remain extremely vigilant.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) mentioned the increasing use of firearms. I am sorry, but that is not the case. Firearms were used less in crime in the Metropolitan police area last year than in any year since 1983.

My hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) mentioned fear of burglars among old people. He is right to point out that the fear is more widespread than crime. The people who fear crime least are young men who hang around street corners. They are also most likely to be the victims of crime—they are most likely to commit offences against each other. Nevertheless, all our studies show that older people, who most fear crime have the least to fear from it.

Hon. Members and the media have an obligation to try to get across to elderly people the message that they do not stand a great risk of being burgled and that, if they are burgled, they do not stand a great risk of being attacked in their homes. Only a small percentage of old people are attacked in their homes during a burglary.

My hon. Friend mentioned the initiative by the Met to recruit more specials. I congratulate Wandsworth on revising its plans on policing the borough and for taking an initiative to increase visible policing in the area. The answer was not to use the parks police but, as Wandsworth has now decided, to back the Metropolitan police by recruiting more special constables. My hon. Friend also highlighted the view of the Liberal party that putting more officers on the beat would not help the fight against crime. Liberal Members must regret those words.

I was pleased to hear the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey praise the Met on its success and admit that there were more officers than ever before on street duties. The number of man days allocated to street duties has increased consistently since we started measuring operational duties in 1984.

With regard to stop and search, I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman has not read the evidence of Sir Paul Condon to the Home Affairs Committee. He was asked:

"Do you feel that the concerns which have been expressed by the black community that a disproportionate number of black people are subject to these police powers are justified? If, as I understand it, the powers are exercised on reasonable suspicion, why is it then that there is only an arrest with one in ten of those stop and search procedures?"

He replied:

"I will answer that, but I will start just slightly off at a tangent. The one arrest out of ten stops is consistent, but I would argue my officers are colour-blind in its application, and the one in ten arrest is of all suspects regardless of whether they were white, Afro-Caribbean, European Asian, whatever. Now, if the figures reveal massive over-stopping of young Afro-Caribbeans and no arrests, then I would perhaps be prepared to accept your assertion."

That was a rather robust put-down to the suggestion that his officers were biased in stop and search.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey will also regret his remarks tonight on drugs raids. He suggested that the police use too many officers. There is a world of difference between arresting a burglar, when one can get by with two or three officers, and raiding a night club where there may be 500 to 700 fit young people. Ecstasy may be on sale and there may be not one or two harmless users, but a dozen hardened pushers of a drug that kills. While I might be happy to go on a burglary raid with two or three other bobbies, I would want 200 around me on that raid and the highland light infantry thrown in to cover my back.

In some ways, I am glad that the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) said what she did. It will give Conservative central office scope over many months to quote some gross inaccuracies. The hon. Lady's speech was a tissue of fantasies. It reminded me of the propaganda maxim that, if a lie is to be told, make sure that it is a big one. I think that the hon. Lady will regret her remarks. Her allegations have no credibility. Her remarks about policing in London were about as accurate as her assertion that there were no problems in the child welfare department in Islington. Let the House judge the hon. Lady's credibility. I do not say "honesty" or "integrity": I merely ask the House to judge her credibility.

The hon. Lady made great play, in ridiculing an answer that I provided, of the number of occasions that the Metropolitan police committee had met to carry out public consultation in London. She had great fun at the committee's expense. She began her attack with the suggestion that, when she asked me about what the committee had done—for example, what publicity materials had been prepared, whether it would consult the boroughs' police consultative committee and when and with whom the committee had held public meetings, my answer began:

"These are all matters for the chairman of the Metropolitan Police Committee."

She continued to make fun by suggesting that the Metropolitan Police Committee gives confidential advice to the Home Secretary so, therefore, she was prevented from getting at the facts. The hon. Lady quoted only the first line of my reply. I said:

"These are all matters for the chairman of the Metropolitan Police Committee.

However, I understand that since the inception of the Metropolitan Police Committee the members have met representatives of the Association of London Government, the Outer London Metropolitan Police Consultative Association and the Government office for London, made more than 40 visits to individual police and community consultative groups, lay visitors' panels and community groups, held a meeting for all PCCG chairmen, open to the press and public, and held nine full formal meetings, and several meetings of sub-committees on remuneration matters and performance indicators."—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1995; Vol. 268, c. 606.]

Mr. Dobson: Keep going.

Mr. Maclean: I have had to keep going, because the hon. Lady chose to misrepresent the facts. If this evening is an example of how accurate the hon. Lady can be in quoting from something in *Hansard*, how accurate was she when she said that there was a commitment—a promise by the Home Secretary—that every force would get a minimum increase of 3.6 per cent? There is no such commitment. She said that there are fewer bobbies on London's streets. That is not so. She alleged that there is less money for London police. Again, that is not so.

[Mr. Maclean]

Then we had the wonderful, magical pronouncement that Labour supports secure training centres. No wonder the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) had to leave the Opposition Front Bench. The hon. Lady's pronouncement is patently not true.

I move on to police numbers in London, which has been the crux of the debate. What is the Labour party's quibble? What is the castle that it has built from which to make its case? Labour Members say that, in March 1995, there were 131 fewer officers overall in the Metropolitan police than in 1994. Let us put that in perspective. It seems that Labour is now the great defender of police numbers.

In 1979, the Metropolitan police was 3,797 bobbies under strength. That shortfall was brought about by a Labour Government. England and Wales were 7,500 short. In 1979, the Metropolitan police had only 16,500 constables. We have steadily increased the number of bobbies in London with the result that, at the end of March 1995, the Metropolitan police had 21,433. The Metropolitan police now has 5,000 more constables—bobbies on the beat—so we shall not take lectures from the Opposition about 131.

The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) quoted from the report of Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary. Again, he quoted only the table. He did not go on to quote the paragraph that says:

"The impact of the reorganisation programme is beginning to become more apparent, with further reductions in the number of senior and intermediate ranks . . . This continues the trend since 1992, which has seen an increase in constable strength of 1,892 (up by 396 constables in 1994)."

The Labour party does not seem to understand that.

Opposition Members do not understand that the Met has deliberately streamlined its senior management. It has cut 260 senior management posts and 429 sergeant posts. With the cuts at senior level, there are 600 more constables in the Met. That is the truth—

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sheffield Supertram

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

10 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): My debate relates to the Sheffield light rapid transit railway, otherwise known as the Sheffield supertram. The purpose of the debate is to draw the Government's attention to the problems that surround the supertram project, particularly those that are experienced by my local authority and its council tax payers as a result of the somewhat complex funding formulae that apply to the supertram. The supertram is funded through the South Yorkshire passenger transport authority, which is made up of representatives from the four local authorities in South Yorkshire—hence my speaking on a subject that is perhaps more in line with Sheffield.

The light rapid transit railway is located in Sheffield but funded by the South Yorkshire passenger transport authority. I should like at the outset to make it clear that the project was entered into by all concerned in good faith and with a commitment to ensure its success. That good faith extended to the local authorities, the passenger transport authority and, of course, the Government, who gave a commitment to fund it in full. Indeed, the rationale for supertram that existed when the Government agreed to finance it was accepted by all the parties involved. The Government made a financial commitment to supertram on the evidence available at the time, as did all the other parties involved. They accepted the original business plan and assumptions in terms of construction, operation, financing and the timetable for the project.

Although the system currently has problems, it is important that we do not to lose sight of the fact that the project was completed on time and within its budget. Despite the problems, that is something of which we can be proud. The Government's commitment to funding the supertram system has not been disputed by them or by local authorities other than when certain problems have arisen. Successive Ministers have reiterated and given assurances that the revenue support grant funding—the local government funding—would cover the costs that would not eventually be reimbursed through the sale proceeds or through operational revenues.

At the moment, however, there are no operational revenues, and the sale prospects, or the sale value, looks very poor. That has caused debt to accumulate which was not envisaged throughout the construction of the project. Supertram is not currently profitable. Because there are no operational revenues, the sale prospects are looking bleak. That is where the problem lies, and it is where my local authority—and perhaps one or two other local authorities in South Yorkshire—faces difficulty. I am sure that the Minister will agree that it was never intended that the construction costs of the project would fall on the local authorities, but the fear is that that is precisely what will happen. Those costs were to be financed by operational revenues and, of course, the sale.

The Government may say that they committed themselves to funding the construction only, but, as I have said, even that cost is now falling on the local authorities. With the Minister's permission and yours, Madam Speaker, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) may say a little about the construction period shortly.

The project was delivered within its budget of some £240 million, of which about £80 million took the form of trading credit approvals. It was envisaged that those would eventually be repaid from operating profits; the interest and minimum revenue provision would come from operating revenues, and the rest from the sale proceeds. During the construction period, the interest payments on the trading credit approvals were capitalised—they had to be, because no revenues were available—and that built up further heavy debts.

I understand that the total cost of the trading credit approvals and the capitalised interest is currently around £97.5 million. So far, the Government have funded the trading credit approvals, but that is now ending because, in the Government's eyes, the construction period is over. The bulk of the figure would have been met from the sale proceeds; the sale was expected to take place soon after the completion of the project, and the proceeds from a profitable operation would have been substantial. Now, however, there is some doubt about whether the profits of the operation would meet anything like a third of that £97.5 million.

Even if the sale proceeds produced £35 million—a figure that has been mentioned to me—other costs of privatisation could leave as little as £17 million, landing local authorities with unfunded liabilities amounting to more than £80 million. My authority's share of that, in terms of interest payments, would be between £2 million and £3 million per annum—assuming that no further debt is incurred by the system this year or next year.

The Government have refused to issue further trading credit approvals to fund the interest payments. Because no profits or revenues are available, the position may become even worse. I understand that the cost of operating losses is also unfunded by the Government, and that the interest on those losses has also been capitalised. It seems that local authorities must bear the cost of interest on operating losses as well as the construction costs. The sale value is not looking too clever, and there are no operating revenues to pay off what should have been paid off from the end of the construction period.

The Government's current deadline for the sale of supertram is early next year. That does not allow much time in which to turn the position round and make the system profitable. If the losses continue, the sale value is likely to be minimal, and it is feared that very little will be recouped to bite into the construction debt and the interest on the capitalised losses.

If the sale proceeds are insufficient, the local authorities will be left with a huge debt—anything between £40 million and £100 million—which they will have to service in future. As I have said, a debt of £2 million to £3 million will fall on Barnsley district council. Similar amounts will fall on the other local authorities in proportion to their share of the total debt. Moneys from the council's revenue support grant and its council tax, and money available to the local authority will be spent every year on interest to fund supertram, depending on how long the council is left with that debt burden.

That means that services in my local authority, which are being and have been cut for the past five years because of the shortfall in funding against budget, are likely to be cut further simply to fund the supertram system. The sum of £2 million to £3 million will be paid with no benefit to Barnsley council tax payers because the supertram system does not extend to Barnsley, although the council accepts its responsibilities in the South Yorkshire passenger transport authority. The worry is that we are facing the debt, but have nothing to show for it. We entered the system in good faith, as did all the other local authorities, and we never envisaged that that level of debt would fall on us.

I understand that revisions to Supertram's business plan are being made to determine when or whether it will make a profit. Without that profit, it will be unattractive to buyers and cannot pay its way. The local authorities involved and the SYPTA must take on board the fact that it is essential that someone now does a feasibility study to determine how soon the system can be brought into profit to ensure that it is saleable before it is offered for sale, to maximise sale revenues and to reduce the debt. It is essential to show that the system may make a profit.

If the system is to be sold next year, I fear that it will be too soon to generate any repayment of the debt, and that, because of the losses and the system's lack of profitability, the sale will be at a low value and will not recover sufficient money even to cover the operating losses, let alone the debt on the construction costs, bearing in mind the projected figures that have been supplied to me by my local authority.

It must be accepted that any new system has teething problems. I accept that this is the first tram system, running side by side with motor vehicles, to be built for the past 50 years. There is therefore the novelty of the new system. There are the traffic systems in Sheffield. There has been substantial construction in that city to accommodate supertram. Obviously, there will be a need for time to allow the system to bed in and to operate properly. Traffic priorities may need to be altered and some co-operation must take place with the other public transport systems in Sheffield to ensure that the project runs at a profit, but that will take time. I ask the Minister whether the sale timetable is realistic, given the debt level and the need for the project to show a profit and to generate a sale value.

No one disputes that the project should be sold, as was envisaged by the original business plan. The questions are when—whether we sell it now and cut the losses or wait and give it a timetable to achieve profitability and hope that it generates a sale value. At the same time, we must determine how the local authorities will fund the debts that they face. Difficult decisions need to be made as to whether to wait for profitability or to stop those losses now, to stand the losses and not to allow them to generate any further, or to find a way of getting round the debt burden that is placed on the local authority. I understand that Sheffield district council is taking steps to examine the operation of supertram, traffic management, car restraint, and pedestrianisation, and that the SYPTA and supertram are working hard to improve its marketing. I believe that steps are being taken to try and deal with the problem.

As I have said, all parties entered into the project in good faith. My local authority agreed to go along with it, but it now faces huge financial burdens not of its own making from a project that it did not construct and that does not operate in Barnsley. An annual debt of £2 million to £3 million is a substantial proportion of Barnsley council's budget, bearing in mind the financial difficulties that it has. I appeal to the Government to accept that their commitment fully to fund supertram was given to all the local authorities before they or the Government envisaged

[Mr. Eric Illsley]

the current problems. They should look to see whether further assistance can be given to the local authorities to get matters sorted at the moment. Perhaps they could also consider funding the local authorities, as happened before, until the system can be put into a saleable condition with operating revenues to reduce some of the debt.

10.15 pm

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) for the fair way in which he presented his case. He has obviously mastered much of a complex financial deal. More importantly, he said that South Yorkshire in its totality has borne much of the brunt of the financial arrangements, although it has not had any benefit from the supertram. Supertram runs from one side of my constituency to the other, so I am able to tell the House all about the problems we have had with traffic management since supertram was installed.

As my hon. Friend said, the authority in Sheffield is trying to make sure that, in terms of traffic management, the effectiveness of supertram is maximised. I am sure that everybody welcomes this innovative system, which hopefully will have a beneficial impact upon the environment of the major city of Sheffield.

In a letter dated 2 February to the leader of Sheffield city council, Mike Bower, the Minister quoted from a letter sent by the former Minister of State, Department of Transport, now the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, to the local authority on 13 May 1991. The quote in the Minister's letter read:

"'No authority to continue capitalisation is likely to extend beyond the construction period'".

That is true, but the letter of 13 May continued:

"ie, later than a year or two after entry into operation of the Supertram system."

One could ask what was the operational date, but it had been interpreted as the date on which supertram was up and running, and October last year is the effective month. Therefore, there are two interpretations of the examples that the Minister gave of the construction period in his letter of 13 May 1991. I hope that the Minister will take that on board, and say that last October was two years after the total construction of the programme.

I hope that the Minister will agree that the letter of 2 February would be a way to solve the problems. We all accept that the financial arrangement was complex. In addition, supertram was the first project of its kind in the UK and was built on a green-field site, as it were. The letter referred to a joint working group and said that that might be one way to get at least an understanding of the problems, and probably some pathways out of them. I suggest to the Minister that that joint working group should not just consist of civil servants, but could also involve politicians from the Department of the Environment and the Minister's Department, and representatives from local authorities in South Yorkshire.

I am sure that we all want to find a solution to this problem, because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central said, the four local authorities in Rotherham, Doncaster, Barnsley and Sheffield are in a serious financial situation. If the Minister can respond positively to that suggestion, I am sure that it will be welcomed in South Yorkshire. If he does, we shall respond as well.

10.18 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I congratulate the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) on having secured a debate on the undoubtedly important subject of the South Yorkshire supertram, and I welcome the contribution to the debate made by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn).

There is no doubt that the supertram is a highly attractive modern tram system. It provides a real alternative to the car, and I am quite sure that in due course it can be a great success. I have ridden on it. It is comfortable and pleasant, and the people I met when I rode on the system liked it and welcomed it.

Although the supertram can be a good thing, it is not particularly a good thing yet, as the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central so accurately defined. There is general agreement on a number of ways in which the system can much improve. It has been said that marketing might be a good place to start. It is a matter of record that the public relations department of supertram told the press:

"the people of Sheffield are just a load of whingers".

As the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central will know, there is some apocryphal evidence of how a man who was tipped off his bicycle received a letter telling him to get off and push next time. Supertram needs to understand that it is the servant of the public, not the other way round.

To achieve its obvious potential, the operating environment in which supertram works, to which the hon. Members for Barnsley, Central and Sheffield, Central have referred, is important. For example, the park-and-ride sites that the local authorities promised for the tram should be provided. We should ensure that the traffic light priority system works, so that the one feature of a light rail system that should be taken for granted—the quickest way in which to access the city centre—is realised.

It is being found that the private car and the bus are able to make the journey to the city centre more quickly. Journey time is fundamental to the operation of such a system. If one wonders why the system has so miserably failed to meet its operating objectives, I respectfully suggest that that might be the reason. I know that both hon. Gentlemen, for whom I have the greatest respect, appreciate the common sense of that argument.

In Manchester, only trams, buses and taxis have access to whole swathes of the city centre. That will be the case to some degree in Leeds as well. It will have what it calls a public transport box, where only buses and trams will be able to travel. I want to make it clear that it is not my business to tell Sheffield how to pedestrianise its centre if it wishes to do so, but it must consider a co-ordinated transport plan if it wants supertram to be a success.

The passenger transport executive of course invested its funds in obtaining Acts of Parliament giving powers to build and operate supertram. It then submitted a bid to my Department for funding. To make it absolutely clear, the funding was sought under the general heading of the public transport facilities grant available under section 56 of the Transport Act 1968.

I should emphasise that, under the published rules for that funding, the South Yorkshire supertram had to be the most economic way in which to meet the identified transport need; it had to need no operating subsidy; the future income from it had to be sufficient to make a real contribution to its capital cost; and it had to attract enough drivers off the road to deliver wider economic and environmental benefits, thus justifying the taxpayers' investment.

It is important to this debate on the precise meaning of the various elements of correspondence that have been exchanged to understand that the South Yorkshire PTE made the case that all those requirements were met. My Department certainly probed, argued and queried the case, but in the end it was not for my Department to produce research analysis and forecasts of South Yorkshire's transport needs. The PTE was responsible for that, and made the case for it, and we in central Government in due course accepted it.

I have already said that future incomes from supertram have to be made available to contribute to the capital cost. Again, the House will be aware that, in Manchester, for example, the operating concession for the metro link was sold up front, so a capital contribution was attracted immediately, and the revenue risk was with the private sector. That is also the case in the west midlands. Frankly, the same approach is planned in every other light rail scheme in the country.

As is occasionally the case, South Yorkshire did it differently. Ironically, so confident was the PTE of its forecast profit that it decided to build the scheme first, operate it itself and sell it later at what it no doubt believed would be a good profit, which meant that the only way that future supertram incomes could be made to contribute to the capital cost of the system was for the PTE to borrow against those future profits.

Now, the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central tells me that the profits are not sufficient to repay the borrowing. He asserts that the people of Barnsley have to repay it. I quite understand his concern on behalf of his constituents, but I hope that he will recognise that, while that may be an issue for the people of Barnsley, it is arguable as to whether it should be an issue for the wider taxpaying public. The PTE made this proposition, advanced it, and argued the case that was ultimately accepted.

I must make it clear that I do not run day-to-day transport in metropolitan areas, and there would be a great deal of criticism if I tried to do so. On that basis, it is not for me to interfere in how the project is managed. Ultimately, it is for those constituent authorities—here is the point that I must underline and which the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central made—to sort the matter out. There is the germ of a solution to the problem. A considerable rethink about the management and operation of the system is required, and that cannot start too soon.

On the impact of having to underwrite the costs on the financial arrangements of the local authority, and on the capping arrangements, the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central knows that the Department has consistently made the case to our colleagues in the Department of the Environment that it is an issue that ought to be considered sympathetically. Obviously, I regret the fact that there has been an impact, and equally, that the constituent authorities spend so close to the cap that they are under that risk. None the less, without making a cheap party political point on a serious occasion such as this, we have been sympathetic on the matter.

On the promises made by my predecessors that supertram would be fully funded, I know the letter to which the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central referred—indeed, I have a copy here in my hand—and I understand the quotation. The hon. Gentleman was kind enough to show me the wider context of the original quotation from my right hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman).

I must make it clear that, as far as the Government are concerned, we have delivered every commitment made by my predecessors about supertram. We have said that the capital cost, net of the future revenues forecast by the passenger transport authority, would be provided for by 50 per cent. section 56 grant and 50 per cent. credit approval. It ought not to have been necessary to underline that fact, because it is the standard advice on the issuing of section 56 grant. But it has been spelt out, and the way in which the funding system works is that future revenues from major transport schemes such as this are put towards the capital cost, in this case by the PTE undertaking borrowing, to which the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central referred, with the remaining capital cost paid for partly by grant—paid by the Department—and partly by credit approval, supported by the Department of the Environment through the revenue grant system.

Judging from the analysis, it is clear that the system was and is fully funded. Now that there is no revenue to support that element of the scheme that should have been self-generating, the problem—one that I understand perfectly well—is that the authorities are saying that it is a burden that they did not contemplate. In all honesty, I hope that they will appreciate that it was not us, but the PTE, that made the case. The authorities are jointly responsible for the PTE, and it is to them that we must all turn in the first instance.

I hope that the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central will understand that we have felt it necessary to be fairly firm on the timetable, not least because I do not believe that allowing any laxity in it would necessarily have the desired result. I believe in keeping to the firm timetable—it has been on the table for some time. Frankly, I am concerned that, even at this stage, there may not be sufficient urgency behind the process. In the present climate, I do not envisage the position getting any better if we start to indicate any laxity in the system.

Secondly, I understand that there is interest in the joint working group being reconstituted. My officials are certainly happy to be part of it. As to the suggestion that it should include elected members, I can tell the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central that I am determined to work with elected members as well as all the other interested bodies in South Yorkshire to try to do the best we can to rescue the project and let it fulfil the potential we believe it has.

The motion having been made at Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 6 February 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Eurofighter

1. **Mr. Atkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his discussions with the German Defence Minister on the workshare and purchase of Eurofighter. [12026]

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. James Arbuthnot): I met my counterpart, State Secretary Schönbohm, on 18 January of this year. I welcomed the announcement by the German Defence Minister of his country's intention to increase its commitment from 140 aircraft to 180, which has largely resolved the question of workshare in the production phase of the Eurofighter project and is excellent news for British industry.

Mr. Atkins: I and my Lancashire Conservative colleagues thank my hon. Friend for responding to our lobbying on behalf of our constituents and for holding firm in the negotiations over workshare with his German counterpart. Can he confirm that the decision will mean many extra billions of pounds'-worth of work for my constituents and those of other hon. Members and that the production investment phase will move forward as rapidly as possible?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his comments. I pay tribute to him and our right hon. and hon. Friends from the area for the vigour with which they support an industry that is important not only to their constituencies but to the country. I can confirm what my right hon. Friend says. The agreement that we have reached means that the production phase of Eurofighter will bring to the United Kingdom between 37 and 38 per cent. of the workshare—an increase of 4 per cent. over the development phase. That means that some £9 billion-worth of work will go to United Kingdom industry.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The Minister will know that what he just said will be welcome on both sides of the House. Does he agree that Eurofighter is a significant example of the European co-operation on defence procurement that was recently endorsed by the Trade and Industry Committee and the Defence Committee joint report? Does he further agree that if the European industrial defence base is to be maintained and the United Kingdom and others are not to become the compliant customers of the United States, common procurement in Europe will be essential?

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is an extremely valuable example of the way in which collaboration can work. I am delighted that the project is going ahead and that Eurofighter is now back on track to become the cornerstone of the Royal Air Force's capability into the next century. It is necessary for us to have collaborative links both with European partners and with the United States where we have many industrial ties and where we can gain many benefits from collaboration.

Mr. Colvin: Eurofighter is a most important defence industrial project but, last Thursday, in the debate on the Royal Navy, my hon. Friend referred to the review being carried out by his Department into our defence industrial base and announced his response to the Select Committees' joint report referred to by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell). Was that response his definitive statement following the completion of his review, or can we expect another document?

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend is right to refer to that response. We found the Select Committees' joint report extremely constructive. We have given a continuing response that shows the closeness of our ties with British industry. We continue to discuss these important matters with British industry and with the National Defence Industries Council. A sub-group is working on precisely the industrial base questions that my hon. Friend raised.

Market Testing

2. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to change his policies concerning market testing; and if he will make a statement. [12027]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Government remain committed to market testing. The "Competing for Quality" initiative seeks efficiencies and best value for money through competition and private sector involvement. Our aim is to deliver defence support at the high level that our armed forces deserve, and at a cost that the taxpayer can afford.

Mr. Jones: Surely the Government will abandon market testing as an instrument of policy, because it involves such a high risk. Will the Minister please receive a deputation from RAF Sealand in my constituency, whose 1,500 staff are now very uneasy about the implications of market testing? Does he agree that RAF Sealand played a magnificent part in the Gulf and Falklands wars? Surely the in-house team bid should be accepted. RAF Sealand is the finest maintenance unit of its kind in the world, and it is a British strategic asset. Surely the Minister agrees with me.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I agree that RAF Sealand has performed a magnificent job over the years, and I will of course accept a deputation from the hon. Gentleman; but I must discourage him from asking us to abandon our approach on market testing, which has proved extremely

successful. Over the past three or four years, it has saved us some £250 million annually—money that can be spent on other equipment for the armed forces. It has also brought us private sector expertise and improved quality, response times and delivery times. I am afraid that we will not abandon it.

Mr. Wilkinson: In implementing the "Competing for Quality" exercise, will my hon. Friend ensure that the armed forces retain a surge capability, so that maintenance facilities can be expanded at times of emergency or war? To that end, will he ensure that a fair number of the contractor personnel are members of the new sponsored reserves?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I can certainly reassure my hon. Friend on the first point: we are very conscious of its importance. As for the second point, it is a very interesting idea which I would like to pursue further.

Mr. Murphy: Will the Minister take his mind back to RAF St. Athan? Can he guarantee that market testing will never again result in the fiasco that occurred there when the former Airwork company botched repairs to Tornado aircraft? When will he give the House the full details of that sorry affair—and will he tell us whether the market testing exercise cost British taxpayers £30 million, £120 million or, as some claim, as much as £300 million?

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is bizarre. I should like to know whether the hon. Gentleman would abandon market testing in the unlikely event of his ever gaining power. If so, he would abandon the huge savings that we have achieved through market testing.

As for Airwork, the figures that the hon. Gentleman plucked out of the air—with an irresponsibility of which I had not previously thought him capable—are completely out of the question. We are pursuing a claim against Bricom of which we have made the company aware; I shall not disclose the amount of that claim, because it is commercially confidential. The aircraft are steadily coming back into service as British Aerospace returns them, and they are all well on the way to being properly repaired. The hon. Gentleman's irresponsibility astounds me.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Where did wealth creation, the United Kingdom's manufacturing base and jobs in the United Kingdom feature in the Minister's response to the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy)?

Mr. Arbuthnot: That is a difficult question to answer, because the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) is clearly not interested in wealth creation. We know that, if a Labour Government came to power, they would want to cut defence spending. They cloak that intention with the suggestion that they want some sort of review, but we know that they are scared to reveal that they want to cut defence spending. That is why they have called for a fundamental spending review.

Beaufort's Dyke

3. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has to monitor the ammunition dump at Beaufort's dyke. [12028]

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): My Department will contribute to a follow-up survey of the Beaufort's dyke area by the Scottish Office Marine Laboratory.

Mr. Jones: I hope that the Minister had the opportunity to read yesterday's *Western Mail* because it contained a revelation that a distinguished bomber in the second world war, Mr. Robert Wannop, and many of his colleagues had disposed of large quantities of chemical and incendiary bombs in Cardigan bay. The British public want to know how many other dumps exist in seas around Britain, where they are and what their state is. Is it not time that the Minister's Department conducted a comprehensive survey and provided the public with the much-needed answers to those questions?

Mr. Soames: I did not have the great joy of reading the *Western Mail* yesterday—it passed me by—but I shall ensure that I receive a copy so that I may establish more carefully the basis of the hon. Gentleman's claim. As we have said throughout this matter, there is no marine, navigational, safety or other defence requirement to conduct further monitoring. We have already released a substantial amount of information—the most detailed information that has ever been released in a parliamentary answer—on all the dumping sites. Scientific opinion is that, if left undisturbed, such sites present no significant risk to human health or to the marine environment. I shall certainly read the article that the hon. Gentleman mentioned and report back to him.

Sir Hector Monro: Is my hon. Friend aware that the local authority in Dumfries and Galloway has been concerned at the washing ashore of incendiaries following the installation of the pipeline? Will he assure me that all Ministries concerned will come to a conclusion on the way forward before a decision must be made on the interconnector between Scotland and Northern Ireland?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. Of course we liaise closely with the Scottish Office on the matter. I am sure that he will wish to pay tribute to the remarkable work of members of the Royal Navy's Clyde submarine base clearance diving unit and the Scotland, northern England and Northern Ireland diving units, who have cleared approximately 4,500 devices from affected beaches. I take note of what he said.

Mrs. Ewing: As the House will be interested today in the change of personnel at British Gas, what direct contacts have been made with British Gas on the laying of the pipeline? What issues were discussed? On what dates were meetings held and what recommendations, if any, were made by the Ministry of Defence?

Mr. Soames: A contractor working for British Gas surveyed the proposed route north of Beaufort's dyke dump before the pipeline was laid and filmed metallic objects and other debris on the sea bed. The contractor notified the MOD on 29 September that it intended to clear the proposed route. The MOD advised against that, but following confirmation that the Health and Safety Executive had accepted the company's risk assessment, work was allowed to continue. Throughout this matter,

the MOD has treated the problem extremely responsibly. Explosive ordnance disposal teams will, whenever necessary, continue to undertake any clearance work.

Homosexuality

4. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will publish his departmental report regarding homosexuality in the armed forces. [12030]

Mr. Soames: I expect to receive the homosexuality assessment team's report later this month and, when I have considered it, a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Brown: Will my hon. Friend confirm or deny the reports in today's *Evening Standard*?

Mr. Soames: Again, that is a pleasure that has passed me by. I assure my hon. Friend, however, that neither I nor my right hon. and hon. Friends have yet received the report. When we do, we will give it the most careful consideration. I am grateful for the sensible and realistic way in which my hon. Friend has approached these matters and for the helpful guidance that he has frequently given.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is it not true that many homosexual service men were decorated for bravery, for gallantry in the field and for their courage during the second world war? Will the Minister confirm that from the Dispatch Box?

Mr. Soames: I am sure that, in the course of a number of global conflicts, a number of homosexuals have acted with the highest gallantry. The view of service chiefs and Ministers is based not in any way on moral judgment, but on the impracticality of homosexual behaviour, which is clearly not compatible with service life.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Will my hon. Friend give the House a clear undertaking that no changes will be effected in the armed forces against the wishes of those currently serving?

Mr. Soames: I know that my hon. Friend will accept from me the clear statement that I have just made, but he will also understand why we commissioned the report, the basis of which will form part of a paper that is to be submitted to the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill. A copy will placed in the Library. The House will have a full chance to discuss such important matters, but the view of service chiefs, of Ministers and, I have to say, of the great majority of the people in the armed forces, is exactly as I have outlined.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is there not some inconsistency in Government policy towards homosexuals in the armed forces? Is it not technically possible for a Defence Minister to be homosexual, even though it is unlawful for someone in the armed forces to be homosexual? Is not that unfair and inconsistent?

Mr. Soames: I have rarely found inconsistencies in Government policy of any sort.

Defence Expenditure

6. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of expenditure is currently devoted to defence; and what is the current European average. [12032]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Michael Portillo): My Department expects to spend about 3 per cent. of gross domestic product in 1995-96 compared with the current NATO European average of 2.3 per cent. of GDP.

Mr. Whittingdale: Have not successive Labour party conferences voted to reduce the proportion of our GDP devoted to defence expenditure to the European average? The question was avoided at the most recent Labour party conference only because it was not put to the conference. Will my right hon. Friend say what effect such a policy would have on our ability to meet our NATO commitments and to defend ourselves?

Mr. Portillo: On the figures that I have given my hon. Friend, it would mean a reduction of more than £4.5 billion in Britain's defence budget. I can confirm that successive Labour party conferences have voted to reduce this country's spending to the European average. Indeed, I calculated the figure so as to give the most benefit to the Labour party, because I used the average of the NATO European countries. If a broader definition were drawn, the figures might have been even more divergent. The time has come for the Labour defence spokesmen to tell us whether the Opposition would increase or decrease defence spending, and whether they would follow the dictation of their party and satisfy their hon. Friends by reducing spending by £4.5 billion or more.

Dr. Reid: He is a beauty, is he not, Madam Speaker? That is all a scare story to cover up the Secretary of State's own incompetence and cuts. Does he remember that the same scare stories appeared in the 1992 manifesto, in which it was claimed that Labour

"would devastate our conventional forces by cuts of . . . 27 per cent."?

Why is the right hon. Gentleman not boasting, because he has managed to beat that? He has made spending cuts of 27.3 per cent. on the defence budget, and of more than 30 per cent. on the conventional forces budget over the past decade. Why does he feel compelled to spread those scare stories again? Are they a cover-up for further cuts, or are the Conservatives genetically disposed to say one thing and do another?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman has such contempt for his own party and its conference that he sums it up as a "scare story". I am not inventing things; I am talking about Labour party conferences year after year. What I want to know is whether the hon. Gentleman sticks with his party and his party conference. Would he increase defence spending or reduce it? The whole House will have noticed that he had nothing to say about what a Labour Government would actually do.

Mr. Brazier: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be inconsistent for the Government to implement further defence cuts while their Back Benchers were

calling for orders for factories in their constituencies and for the deployment of troops to all sorts of destinations in the third world, but that that is what we hear again and again from Opposition Members?

Mr. Portillo: It is indeed. There are no more vociferous voices than those of Labour Members calling for orders for their constituencies—yet their party's policy is to reduce spending. In the debate on the Navy the other day, three Labour Members told us once again that they are active members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and that they want our nuclear deterrent to be abolished. What have the Front-Bench team to say about such things? Why do they not tell us the proper policy of the Labour party and, in the process, how they propose to deal with a Labour conference and Labour Back Benchers whose determination to cut this country's defences will not be silenced?

Mr. Skinner: Is not it true, once we have cut all the cackle, that the Labour party conference regularly passes resolutions proposing a cut in defence expenditure, and the Tory Government carry them out?

Mr. Portillo: If the hon. Gentleman is so uninfluential in his own party, I do not know why he does not give up and find something else to do.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my right hon. Friend recall that the Labour Government's major decision was to cancel the TSR2—the most magnificent aircraft at the time—which decimated jobs in Preston and lost a 10-year lead in electronics?

Mr. Portillo: Hon. Members on both sides of the House who represent constituencies that depend on defence orders should remember that the contrast between a Conservative Government and a Labour Government is that a Conservative Government announce orders and a Labour Government announce cancellations.

Official Service Residences

7. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money has been spent by his Department on the official service residences in the past five years. [12033]

Mr. Soames: Over the past two years, £2.61 million and £1.51 million respectively has been spent on maintenance, building work, furniture and fittings of official service residences. I have today placed in the Library of the House my Department's detailed response to Sir Peter Cazalet's recommendations, which includes a reduced list of posts that carry an entitlement to an official service residence. The list shows that we have reduced such posts from 75 to 48, with further reductions to 44 as other posts lapse. I understand that Sir Peter is very satisfied by the way in which my Department has implemented his recommendations.

Mrs. Prentice: Given last year's scandal about expenditure on official service residences, including £33,000 for a set of curtains, does the Minister agree that such a gross waste of taxpayers' money must stop or does he agree with the *Daily Express* that it makes the Secretary of State appear like

"a squalid little estate agent"?

Mr. Soames: No, I do not agree with the *Daily Express*. The hon. Lady has plainly not done her homework on the subject. In May 1995, the Government commissioned Sir Peter Cazalet, to whom we owe a great debt of gratitude for a very thorough piece of work, to report on representational entertainment in the armed forces. A copy of that report has been placed in the Library. Since then, and in the light of the Cazalet report, a great deal of work has been done and I am pleased to say that we have been able to implement Sir Peter's recommendations in full. I hope that the Labour party accepts that, in future, such matters will be managed more effectively and efficiently, and that, above all, there is no doubt that there is an important requirement for the services, which are a golden asset to this country, to entertain where they have a significant representational role.

Mr. Key: Will my hon. Friend confirm that our senior officers—when they are not living cheek-by-jowl with service men while winning wars or keeping the peace—are often occupying their first permanent home after a career of moving their wives and families around the world? Do they not occupy houses that represent the dignity of the rank that they hold for a short period? Is not that very necessary in the armed forces? It would be entirely inappropriate for the Prime Minister to live in Lewisham, for example, just as it would be inappropriate for senior officers not to live in official service residences.

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend, through his constituency interest, is well aware of the importance of the representational role of very senior officers in all three services. We can now account for these matters more effectively, and I hope that we will be able to go forward from here.

Mr. Spellar: Is not the sale of Haymes Garth another example of the breathtaking incompetence of the MOD? When added to the sale of the married quarters estate, does not that comprise the giveaway of the century? Will the Minister confirm that the proceeds of the sales will go to the Treasury, but that future rents will come from the Defence budget? Is not that a defence cut by the back door?

Mr. Soames: That was as fine a display of soundbites as I have heard this year, and it displayed the politics of mediocrity and envy for which the Labour party is famous. Let us establish the facts—Haymes Garth is being sold and, very sadly, the officer who was previously concerned has left the service. The Cazalet report, which was commissioned by the Government, has been thoroughly examined and all of its recommendations carried out. The hon. Gentleman's question seems extraordinary in those circumstances.

Lost Medals

8. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy in reissuing lost medals for ex-service men. [12034]

Mr. Soames: Where evidence of genuine loss is produced, replacement medals can be supplied. Replacements are charged at cost.

Mrs. Gorman: Will my hon. Friend accept the grateful thanks of my constituent, Mr. Edwin Rymer, who lost his war medals but was able to regain them, although at a cost of £70—almost a week's pension? Will he also accept that Mr. Rymer and his generation of war heroes would be absolutely devastated if the freedom to run our country for which they fought were ever to be lost? Would not a Labour Government hand over that freedom lock, stock and barrel to Europe?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend does well to highlight again Labour's imperfect understanding of defence matters. I am grateful for her tribute to the work done by the medals office of the Ministry of Defence. We realise how distressing it is when treasured medals are lost or stolen. Claims for replacement take some time to process, as it is important that they are properly verified. As the years go past, such requests will increase, and we must make sure that they are properly satisfied by having an effective and efficient operation in place. As for her question about the Labour party, defence and Europe, the least said the better.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the Minister consider issuing medals to the service men who advised against the route of the gas pipeline across Beaufort's dyke? Will the Government examine the route of the proposed electricity interconnector with the same degree of care—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is abusing Question Time. He stood to ask a supplementary question on the subject of Beaufort's dyke, but was not called. He now seeks to ask his question, but he will not do so.

F16 Aircraft

9. **Mr. Pope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his American counterpart concerning leasing American F16 aircraft. [12035]

Mr. Portillo: The question was discussed briefly during a meeting with him in October last year.

Mr. Pope: Will the Secretary of State confirm that the plan to lease American F16 aircraft was the brainchild of David Hart? Will he further confirm that the plan is bitterly opposed by the chief of the RAF, Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon? Does he agree that to proceed with the F16 will be a kick in the teeth for Lancashire aerospace workers who are working on the Eurofighter?

Mr. Portillo: I do not agree with any of that. It is a perfectly simple matter of ensuring that the United Kingdom has the best equipment for its defence. In deciding whether to upgrade the Tornado F3, it is necessary for us to make a comparison with the other courses that we might follow, which include leasing the F16.

If the hon. Gentleman is trying to tell me that, if the Labour party were in power it would not compare one option with another to get the best solution for the country, he would serve the country even less well than I had imagined.

Mr. John Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend go a little further and confirm the Government's absolute commitment to the Eurofighter project? In the long run, will that not give the RAF the multi-role aircraft that it needs for the future?

Mr. Portillo: Yes, my hon. Friend is right. The Government have on many occasions made clear their commitment to Eurofighter, and I am pleased to do so again today. Thanks to the good work of my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, that project now has the green light. This discussion about the F3 and F16 is about how we fill the gap for that capability between now and the day that we have the Eurofighter. I am pleased to say that the latter will be an excellent aircraft for the RAF.

Dr. David Clark: Does the Secretary of State recall grumbling to his American counterpart just two weeks ago that Britain had placed defence orders worth more than £5 billion with the United States and arguing that it ought to reciprocate with some orders for British defence equipment? In the light of that grumbling, will he drop his obsession with this one-way deal to lease F16s, which will cost thousands of British jobs and be very expensive, as we shall have to adapt the refuelling arrangements and the aircraft will require new support systems?

Mr. Portillo: I went to Washington not to grumble, but to represent my country and to say that we demand a two-way street in defence procurement. It is true that, last year, we placed orders worth £5 billion with the United States and, therefore, we look to that country to buy defence equipment from us. I am pleased to say that it is buying at the rate of about £800 million a year, and I want to see more of that. The hon. Gentleman is the Opposition defence spokesman and he wants to hold my job. He cannot be so irresponsible as to say that, if he were in my position, he would not compare one project with another. If he is saying that, there will be no value for money and no way of ensuring that Britain has the defences that she requires.

Defence Industries

10. **Sir Roger Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the export potential of United Kingdom defence industries; and if he will make a statement. [12036]

Mr. Arbuthnot: British defence equipment manufacturers continue to enjoy success in the export market. In 1995, they won contracts worth about £5 billion. That achievement makes us the second largest exporter in the world.

Sir Roger Moate: Can my hon. Friend give any estimate of how many hundreds of thousands of jobs are dependent on our defence industries? Is it not the case that, if ever the Labour party were in a position to carry

out its conference policies of reducing spending to the European average level, a large number of those jobs would be in jeopardy in Labour as well as Conservative constituencies?

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend is right. Around 400,000 jobs throughout the United Kingdom depend on the defence industry. If we were to reduce spending on defence by £4.5 billion every year, it would be devastating to the British defence industry. That is why it is plain to the British people that we cannot trust Labour on defence, or even on industry for that matter.

Mr. MacShane: Is the Minister aware of the large export potential for British arms in Europe, both in the European Union and the wider continent? Does he find helpful the continuing public hostility of the Secretary of State to European integration and co-operation? Does he find helpful the speech that the Minister of State made in Munich last week, in which he invited Germany, in effect, to re-arm? The last person to say in Munich, "Deutschland Erwache!" which means "Germany Arise, Germany Awake!", caused some little trouble in Europe. Is it not the case that, while we have a Defence Department that is so hostile to European integration and co-operation, the future for Britain's defence industry is poor indeed?

Mr. Arbuthnot: That question was total, unmitigated drivel. When British defence exports have risen from 15 per cent. of world market share in 1994 to 19 per cent. in 1995, we should feel proud of what the country has done and realise that that shows the strength of British industry and the support of the British Government and the armed forces. We should talk about, for example, the Red Arrows' recent tour, which was a fantastic aerial display. They are excellent ambassadors for British industry. For the hon. Gentleman to come up with a question such as that is pathetic.

Mr. Mans: Given the importance of the arms industry to the north-west, when my hon. Friend next speaks to his American counterpart, will he ensure that there is fairness in the export of arms to eastern Europe and that certain statements made by the Americans to the effect that eastern European countries will be more likely to be able to join NATO if they buy American combat planes are stopped?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I have some sympathy with what he says because whether countries join NATO does not depend on their buying high-tech US equipment. That is something that they need to be well aware of before they make their decisions

Korean War

11. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will evaluate the "Time Watch" programme on prisoners from the Korean war, a transcript of which has been sent to his Department; and if he will update the evidence produced by his Department during the meeting between a Minister of his Department and the hon. Member for Linlithgow on this subject. [12037]

Mr. Soames: I have great sympathy for the families of service men who remain unaccounted for following the Korean war. Nothing has been discovered since the hon. Gentleman's meeting which has altered our view that there is no evidence that British service men were improperly detained after the post-hostilities repatriations. We will, of course, follow up any evidence if it should emerge.

Mr. Dalyell: As it now seems not entirely inconceivable—I put it no higher—that national service contemporaries of mine in the Royal Armoured Corps could still be in remote Russian camps after 45 years, and as Russia is becoming more free, will the Government follow up any possibility that there are British people, all these years after the Korean and Vietnam wars, still in those camps?

Mr. Soames: I wholly understand and applaud the hon. Gentleman's honourable concern and sympathy for those who still remain unaccounted for. His words will, I am sure, have been recognised by those families that are affected. As he knows, most careful and detailed investigations were carried out by successive Governments and Administrations to resolve the cases of service men unaccounted for. No evidence has been found of any British service men being detained, but I assure him that we will, and are, taking advantage of greater openness in Russia. My Department has in recent years carried out detailed research and exchanged information with US and Russian experts to see whether any evidence could be found. No new evidence has emerged. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall continue to work hard where any leads emerge.

Royal Navy

12. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent additions to the effectiveness of the Royal Navy have been introduced. [12038]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Government continue to maintain and enhance the operational effectiveness of the Royal Navy. Over the past year, the second Trident submarine, HMS Victorious, has entered service, the type 23 frigate HMS Richmond has been accepted and the helicopter carrier HMS Ocean has been launched. In addition, a further seven upgraded Sea Harrier aircraft have been delivered.

Mr. Devlin: How many ships are currently on order or out to tender for the Royal Navy? Will my hon. Friend assure me that none of those orders will be cancelled, which is what used to happen under the last Labour Government, when Labour used to say one thing and do another?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I agree with my hon. Friend. At least our decisions are positive. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, Labour's decisions on, for example, the TSR2 were all cancellations. Labour would have cancelled Trident. Even the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) once said that he would like to ban all nuclear weapons from our soil. We know that Labour cannot be trusted on defence.

Mr. Hutton: Will the Minister accept that the effectiveness of the Royal Navy would be improved by

modernising its amphibious capability? Will he therefore tell the House and my constituents when he expects the delayed contract for the replacement of HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid to be signed?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I accept that the amphibious capability is very important indeed, which is one of the reasons why on Tuesday last week I went to see HMS Fearless as it was being maintained and re-equipped. We believe that it will come out of dock on schedule, in time for its exercise in April. It is very important to maintain that important capability.

Defence Spending

13. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the effect on Britain's contribution to peacekeeping operations around the world of reducing United Kingdom defence spending to the European average. [12039]

Mr. Portillo: If any Government were to reduce spending to the European average of 2.3 per cent. of gross domestic product, they would be forced to cut spending on defence by more than £4.5 billion. That would severely undermine our capacity to undertake operations of any kind.

Mr. Waterson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is incredible hypocrisy for Opposition Members on one hand to support, by and large, peacekeeping operations and on the other to call for cuts that would be the equivalent of all 40 infantry battalions?

Mr. Portillo: Every Labour Government increase taxes. Every Labour Government dream up new ways of spending public money and therefore every Labour Government are subject to intense pressure from their Back Benchers to cut defence spending. That is ultimately why we know we cannot trust the Labour party on defence.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 6 February. [12055]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Waterson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the considerable strength of the economy throughout the country, including Scotland, is based in large measure on reduced burdens on business? During his busy day yesterday, did he have the opportunity to—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Waterson: Did my right hon. Friend have the opportunity to read reports in Scottish newspapers that two different spokesmen had said diametrically different things about whether extra public spending would be required to carry out Labour's plans for Scotland?

The Prime Minister: I am not remotely surprised to hear that Opposition Members say different things about their devolution policy. They have not yet thought through that policy; it is full of holes and full of damage. We said from the outset that a Scottish Assembly would require increased taxation and increased public expenditure. The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has, I think, referred to that as utter rubbish. The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) has confirmed that that is indeed the case and that taxes will go up—a tartan tax of £6 per week initially, but undoubtedly more later. Another instance of Labour saying one thing and doing another.

Mr. Blair: When customer complaints to British Gas have doubled and the company has been forced to split into two today because of huge losses on gas contracts, does the Prime Minister think that the leaving package of the chief executive—a £4 million pension fund, an annual income of £250,000 a year and £120,000 in consultancy fees—is justified?

The Prime Minister: As a matter of fact, the company has split into two to increase competition, which I should have thought the right hon. Gentleman would have liked. As for the package that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned, that, in the private sector, is a matter for the shareholders. As those shareholders include the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, I suggest that the right hon. Gentleman takes it up with the union. If the shareholders are unhappy with the arrangements, no doubt they will pursue the matter. If he does not know how to get the RMT on his side, he can ask the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), the deputy leader of the Labour party, who is sponsored by it.

Mr. Blair: Do we take it from that answer that the Prime Minister recognises no responsibility at all on the part of Government? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Blair: Two years ago the Prime Minister told us that he found those excesses distasteful, and they have grown since then. He then told us to wait for the Greenbury committee, and the excesses continued to grow. We have had Greenbury and nothing has happened. When will the Prime Minister act in the public interest to make those privatised utilities serve the public and not a small group at the top?

The Prime Minister: A moment ago, I explained to the right hon. Gentleman that he and one of his hon. Friends were saying different things. We have it again here. I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman agrees that the Government should not attempt to sit in the boardroom in a metaphysical sense. One of his hon. Friends said:

"We believe that people should be rewarded for a performance, whether in the form of salary or the granting of share options".

That person, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling)—a shadow Treasury spokesman—continued:

"It is not for me to spell out the benchmarks of success".

The right hon. Gentleman is once again playing the politics of envy. *[Interruption.]* Let me be a moment. He loathes privatisation, he loathes private ownership and all that he has had to say about private ownership and a new Labour party is exposed every time that he takes that line.

Mr. Blair: With all due respect to the Prime Minister, can he not see the difference between people operating within a highly competitive market and the privatised utilities operating monopoly services? Can there be any more telling expression of Conservative values than the Deputy Prime Minister yesterday condoning late payment to small companies while today condoning the excesses in the privatised utilities? One group of hard-working people is told to wait for its money and the other group is given by the Government a licence to print it.

The Prime Minister: Let me explain to the right hon. Gentleman the benefits of privatisation for millions of people who happen to be consumers. Gas prices have fallen by more than 20 per cent. since privatisation. Potential new suppliers are offering price reductions of 15 to 20 per cent. in the south-west. Personally, I believe that we need

"the enterprise of the market and the rigours of competition".

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman agrees with that, because that is the Labour party's new clause IV, which he pushed through last year. As ever, Labour's constitution says one thing and Labour Members do another.

Mr. Hendry: Will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to the exceptional courage of 21-year-old Fleur Lombard who came from the High Peak and who lost her life at the weekend in the course of her work as a firefighter? Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is great scope for a scheme of rewards to recognise the contributions made by young people in all walks of life, whether they have shown great courage—as in Fleur's case—or they have made a contribution to others and to society? Will he consider whether such a scheme could be backed by the Government?

The Prime Minister: I will of course consider the matter. I am sure that the whole House will join me in expressing our sympathy to the family of Fleur and those of the other firefighters who have lost their lives in service. There is no doubt that such incidents underline the selfless bravery of the fire service. On this occasion, a young lady lost her life while seeking to save the lives of other people. I shall certainly consider what my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. Ashdown: Does the Prime Minister think that it is right to delay payment on other people's bills and to use their money to gain interest for oneself? Having done that, does he think it wise to then boast about it?

The Prime Minister: Let me say to the right hon. Gentleman—

Mr. Skinner: Can't pay, won't pay.

The Prime Minister: That reminds me of what the trade unions say about their control over the Labour party. They say that unless they maintain that control, they will not pay for the Labour party, and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) for reminding me of that.

On the substantive question, the Government—not least my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, when he was President of the Board of Trade—have done a great deal to encourage prompt payment. My right hon. Friend encouraged the establishment of the CBI's prompt payment code. We required Government payments to comply with the code and we improved procedures in the small claims courts. We are making companies disclose their payments rapidly. Those are the practical measures that we are taking.

Mr. William Powell: Has my right hon. Friend noticed the remarks of the Prime Minister of Belgium, delivered at Davos at the weekend, to the effect that, if the single currency does not proceed in 1999, the single market will collapse? Is it not the case that Belgium has not the slightest chance of meeting the Maastricht criteria as its general Government gross debt is more than twice the threshold level set down in the Maastricht treaty? Does my right hon. Friend believe that there is a secret agenda to proceed with the single currency despite the treaty of Maastricht? Do not Mr. Dehaene's remarks vindicate my right hon. Friend's decision to veto Mr. Dehaene as President of the European Commission?

The Prime Minister: I certainly do not believe that the single market would be at risk if the single currency did not proceed in 1999 or at any other time in the future. I do not think that anyone can seriously dispute that, at the moment, there are uncertainties about the timetable. No one can say with absolute certainty which countries might qualify for stage 3 if it goes ahead in 1999. What is relevant is that we must address the key issues about how stage 3 would work, and I have raised that point at successive European Councils. Were it to proceed without the right economic background, there is no doubt that it would be a disaster, not just for the countries taking part, but for all the countries of the European Union.

Q2. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 6 February. [12056]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Dowd: Does the Prime Minister agree with the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his condemnation of late payment as a serious threat to the very survival of many small firms, or does he side with the Deputy Prime Minister, who advocates becoming skilful at keeping creditors away? Is not that latter approach a kick in the teeth for millions of honest small businesses? Which one does the Prime Minister support? May we have a straight answer?

The Prime Minister: I think that the hon. Gentleman must have been dozing, because a few moments ago I set out a range of measures that the Government have introduced to encourage prompt payment, some of them initiated by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister.

Mr. Booth: As last week we all heard the German Chancellor say that integration would be a matter of war and peace in the 21st century, will the Prime Minister tell Herr Kohl that integration and federation forced on countries and peoples that are free, against their will, often result in civil war? Where is Yugoslavia now? Will my right hon. Friend tell Chancellor Kohl that this country takes it ill when we hear loose talk of war from Germany?

The Prime Minister: The whole House recognises the importance of examining very carefully what criteria there might be for any countries that decide to move ahead to stage 3. We need to look at what has been achieved in the European Union over the past 30 years or so and to ensure that that is not imperilled by moves to other advanced changes for which the European Union is not yet ready. That needs to be a pragmatic debate on whether the economic circumstances are right for movement and on what the implications would be, both in the short term and in the long term, for the countries that might be in a single currency and for those that might not be.

Q3. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 6 February. [12057]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Mackinlay: Is the Prime Minister aware of the growing feeling that the country is being run for and by a narrow magic circle of privileged people? In that regard, will he tell the House how it is that former Eton toff Darius Guppy can negotiate his sentence and negotiate his way out of prison—a prison that he likened to his school, Eton? How is it that top rail managers can fail to pay rail ticket fares yet not suffer any penalty? How is it that Cedric Brown can have a massive windfall pay-off? Is it not a case of, "It's the rich what gets the pleasure and the poor what gets the blame"?

The Prime Minister: That was an exceedingly well worked pay-off line by the hon. Gentleman, but I am not sure that the build-up merited it. This is the first time in my life that I have been told that I am part of a magic circle, and I do not think that I like it.

British Gas

3.30 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South) (*by private notice*): To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the proposals for the restructuring of British Gas, and his Department's response to them.

The Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Tim Eggar): The separation of British Gas's supply and transportation businesses is a requirement of schedule 5 to the Gas Act 1995. This provision was debated at length during the passage of the Bill. The Act received broad support. It has been widely agreed that separation is a necessary step in opening up competition in the domestic gas market and in ensuring that British Gas operates on the same basis as its competitors.

The British Gas schedule 5 transfer scheme, which effects that separation, has now been approved by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. Today's announcement by British Gas of a demerger is a commercial decision by the company, and is not imposed by the provisions of the Act. However, it has been welcomed by, among others, the Gas Consumers Council and the GMB union.

Mrs. Beckett: Many people will wonder why Ministers did not volunteer to make a statement on the matter today, since it is of great concern to the 19 million customers of British Gas, and especially since, despite what the Minister has said, what he is telling the House today is the right structure for British Gas seems so closely to resemble the structure that the Government and the Minister himself specifically rejected as "unnecessary" less than nine months ago, when the Gas Act 1995 was being debated in the House. Why have the Government changed their mind? Is it because they have failed to find any other solution to the problems of the potential £1.5 billion losses British Gas faces as a result of take-or-pay contracts?

Is it not the case that what the Minister has just announced means that, while one company retains a natural monopoly over gas transmission, the second, which is the company responsible for gas supply to those 19 million customers, is the one saddled with all the liabilities and all the attendant risks? What assurances can the Minister give that that company will be viable in the long term? Will he give an absolute assurance that the interests of consumers will be protected, especially as consumers are already suffering from a deteriorating service, as evidenced by the loss of British Gas's charter mark and the doubling of complaints since privatisation?

Finally, who loses? British Gas has large liabilities which seem to have led directly to the decision. Those liabilities are still there, so who is going to carry the can? Is it the customer? Is it Sid, who is not getting the deal he was promised by this Government? Plainly, it seems to be neither the board nor Mr. Cedric Brown.

Mr. Eggar: The right hon. Lady asked me who loses. The answer is the Labour party and the right hon. Lady. The right hon. Lady voted against the Bill and in favour of a reasoned amendment that made it quite clear that the Bill would result in harm to the south-west. As she knows very well, the south-west will be the first to benefit from the effect of competition, with most south-west consumers being offered reductions in their bills of between 15 and 20 per cent., and some as much as 25.2 per cent. The right hon. Lady was scaremongering when she voted for the reasoned amendment. She should withdraw it and apologise to consumers in the south-west and elsewhere who will benefit from the results of competition.

The decision on the demerger was a commercial decision for British Gas. The right hon. Lady should know that, under schedule 5 to the Gas Act 1995, it was always envisaged that there would be a transfer scheme that effectively separated the supply side of British Gas from the transportation side.

Finally, the right hon. Lady should be aware that the Gas Consumers Council has welcomed today's announcement, as has the GMB union, and that the chairman of British Gas has recognised that the introduction of competition will lead to a reduction in prices to consumers. Rather than deploring what has been announced today, she should welcome it, because it is good news for consumers.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): Does not my right hon. Friend agree that the fact that the right hon. Lady felt it necessary to table a private notice question shows that the Labour party still wishes to intervene in industry, and dictate to private sector companies? Will he confirm that it remains Government policy to leave such decisions to those best qualified to make them?

Mr. Eggar: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am amazed that the Labour party should regard the matter as worthy of a private notice question. It is a commercial decision by a commercial company.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): Having pressed almost single-handedly during the passage of the Bill for such a division, I welcome the fact that, albeit belatedly, it has been made. What discussions have the Government had with British Gas or the regulator about the possibility of business failure because of the debts that British Gas has accumulated? Is the Minister absolutely confident that the division that has been announced today will protect the consumer against having to pick up the tab for those debts?

Mr. Eggar: The British Gas board, in recommending the demerger, has addressed the issue under its Companies Act obligations. The Government are satisfied that the transfer scheme meets the necessary requirements under schedule 5 to the Gas Act 1995.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the demerger makes total sense? It makes sense for the companies that will be competing in supplies against British Gas and obviously want the transmission company to be separated, and for consumers, who will benefit.

Mr. Eggar: The decision to demerge is a matter for British Gas; none the less, I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend that the effect of increased competition, which is a direct result of Government policy, will be sharply to reduce prices to consumers and improve the quality of service.

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): Are not such corporate gymnastics, which were foreshadowed in the Bill, simply a ruse to ensure that the take-or-pay contracts are paid for by consumers and taxpayers rather than by British Gas shareholders, who have already benefited disproportionately?

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman completely misunderstands the position. He particularly fails to understand that everyone who observes the sector or who is involved in it, including the chairman of British Gas and the Gas Consumers Council, recognises that the introduction of competition will result in lower prices to consumers. The old and new Labour parties do not believe in competition. They do not believe in the private sector; they still believe in state control.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I agree with my right hon. Friend that the demerger clearly vindicates the Government's policy of competition in the private sector, as opposed to nationalised industries. I also agree with him that it is clearly a commercial matter. Therefore, can he clarify exactly which of his responsibilities we are holding him to account for in the House today?

Mr. Eggar: I have some difficulty in answering my hon. Friend's question. The Government's responsibility relates to the transfer scheme under schedule 5 to the 1995 Act. The responsibility regarding the demerger of British Gas has nothing to do with the Government, because that is a matter for the board of British Gas.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does not the Minister recognise that he cannot guarantee that British Gas Energy—with the contracts that it will inherit on the demerger, and in a competitive market with its reduced market share—will not fail?

Mr. Eggar: That is certainly not the view of the British Gas board. The Government have been satisfied about that, and have had regard to the requirements of schedule 5 to the 1995 Act. Of course, the hon. Gentleman may not be aware that the new entity, which is, at least temporarily, being called British Gas Energy, contains the significant assets of the Morecambe Bay north and the Morecambe Bay south fields.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Is it not the case that the privatisation of the gas industry, which was fiercely opposed by the Labour party, has led to prices falling substantially—by about 25 per cent. since privatisation—to far fewer disconnections, and, of course, to greater competition in the industry? Is it not clear that this private notice question, tabled by the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), is simply her attempt to cause mischief? However, does not the question prove that the Labour party still believes in interfering in British industry as much as ever?

Mr. Eggar: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There has not only been a 23 per cent. reduction, in real terms, in prices to domestic consumers, but there are significant further price reductions in the pipeline in the south-west of the United Kingdom. Most people anticipate that, as competition is extended beyond the south-west, there will be further price reductions in the rest of the United Kingdom. As for the position taken by the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), her instincts now—as they were when she was in government during the previous Labour Government—are to intervene on every possible occasion. She believes that she can run British industry better than British managers can.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The Minister must be aware that the new company could increase gas prices unless the take-or-pay contracts are sorted out. What action will he take, therefore, to ensure that British Gas's 19 million customers are protected against those likely price increases?

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman simply does not understand the nature of competition. There is no way in which British Gas will be able to raise its prices when its competitors are lowering prices. The future for consumers is bright because competition will produce significant price reductions and because of improvements in the quality of service. The hon. Gentleman should recognise that.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): Given that the demerger is supported by the Gas Consumers Council, in particular, and by the GMB union, will my right hon. Friend remind the House that British Gas is a private company—whatever the Labour party might say—that it is operating in a very competitive sector, and that it is giving an increasingly good service to the public as a result of privatisation? Is it significant that the Labour party is raising this issue on the Floor of the House and showing how much it wants to over-regulate industry and establish a stranglehold on the private utility companies, and so much other British industry, which would take us right back to the 1970s, when this country was the sick man of Europe?

Mr. Eggar: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. The fact is that, when faced with a choice between regulation or state ownership on the one hand and competition on the other, the Labour party always chooses regulation and nationalisation.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I wonder if the Minister understands that the demerger will give an opportunity to some of the Tory Ministers who are leaving Parliament to get jobs on those companies' boards. Can he give us an assurance that he is not among them? Will he condemn the action of any Tory Ministers who leave Parliament and take jobs on those boards? Will he give us a guarantee that no Tory Back Benchers will get moonlighting jobs on those boards?

Mr. Eggar: I have not yet received a job application form from British Gas, and, if I did, I would not fill it in.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, in future, following the demerger, gas prices will fall? Will he also confirm that those reductions will be in addition to the price reductions that have occurred since privatisation—the Prime Minister today said that the fall was more than 20 per cent.? Can he give an estimate of the total reduction in prices in, say, three years' time?

Mr. Eggar: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We can look forward to significant further reductions. In the

[Mr. Eggar]

south-west trial area, some consumers are being offered reductions of as much as 25.2 per cent., and average reductions of between 15 and 20 per cent. In future, I would expect to see similar reductions available in other parts of the United Kingdom.

Action taken by the regulator in the price review on transportation may lead to additional nationwide reductions. Of course. I cannot anticipate the outcome of whatever proposal she may make or any right that British Gas may have to appeal to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. I am confident that increased competition in the gas market will lead to lower prices and better-quality service for consumers.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I am sure that the Minister will recall that I did my Industry and Parliament Trust fellowship with British Gas. Is he not concerned that BG Energy—which has only £2.6 billion assets and the possible loss of £1.5 billion owing to its contracts for gas—is a vulnerable British company? There is a possibility of retail closures, with more job losses. Is the Minister not concerned that the other company, which now has most of the overseas assets and transco monopoly, is ripe for overseas takeover? We shall lose a British company because of the predatory actions of foreign investors.

Mr. Eggar: Before the hon. Gentleman stood up, I should have thought that he was one of the last Opposition Members whom I would have to accuse of scaremongering. Why does he have to talk down a successful British company in that way? Only today I was told that the proposals being put forward would

"ensure British Gas was able to compete in the 21st century."

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): What about the share price?

Mr. Eggar: My opposite number intervenes from a sedentary position, but he does not know that I was quoting from Mr. MacGregor of the GMB union. The view I gave was not mine, but that of Mr. MacGregor, the union leader on the side of the gas workers in the GMB.

Mr. Ian Pearson (Dudley, West): In the light of today's revelations about Cedric Brown's pension settlement, how can the Government claim to have implemented the Greenbury report in full, when the Department of Trade and Industry's Companies Acts consultation paper exempts companies such as regional electricity companies from the requirements of full disclosure?

Mr. Eggar: Mr. Brown is

"widely respected by the work force"

of British Gas

"for his years of experience and commitment to the company."

That is not my view, but the view of the GMB union spokesman.

With the greatest respect to the hon. Gentleman, it is a pity that he should ask such a question on the day when Mr. Cedric Brown has announced his retirement—a man who has made a major contribution to the gas industry over 40 years. Of course, the hon. Gentleman is entitled to his views on Mr. Brown's pension entitlements and salary. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, those are matters best dealt with by the company and its shareholders. If the hon. Gentleman or other customers object to the level of pension paid to someone like Mr. Brown or other executives, under the changes that we have introduced, they will shortly have the right to take their custom elsewhere and to buy their gas from other competitors.

Mrs. Beckett: Does the Minister realise that people will have noticed that we have heard nothing from him this afternoon except bluster and abuse, and not a single answer to a single question? I ask him again: as he is not claiming that the liabilities of British Gas have disappeared, who will pick up the tab—the customer or the shareholder? Who is it? It must be somebody.

Mr. Eggar: British Gas itself is confident that it will be able to improve service to customers and lower prices to customers. That is not my view; it is the view of Dick Giordano, the chairman of British Gas.

The issue of take-or-pay contracts is, of course, a matter for commercial negotiation between the producers and British Gas. I have no doubt that those negotiations will start shortly, and I am as hopeful as the right hon. Lady that they will be resolved satisfactorily. I am absolutely clear that, at the end of the process, as a result of the Government's policies—first of privatising British Gas and secondly, of introducing competition—we will see lower prices and better quality of service for consumers. The right hon. Lady should support that.

Points of Order

3.50 pm

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I rise to defend innocent people. Can you please advise me whether the jealously guarded privileges of the House are being improperly used? Column 20 of the *Official Report* for yesterday shows that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) stated that the London-Tilbury-Southend line management team is "corrupt". I thank the hon. Lady for being present this afternoon; I gave her notice.

As the hon. Lady knew yesterday when she made her statement, investigations are proceeding, so the matter is surely best left until they are completed, without being prejudiced or prejudged by the House under the protection of privilege. In any event, I believe that those investigations will entirely exonerate all the members of the LTS senior management team.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman's point of order is rightly to me. I personally would not have used the expression that the hon. Lady used, but there are hon. Members on both sides of the House who, under questioning and in the often excitable conditions of the House, use language that I personally do not find appropriate. It is used under privilege, and all of us must be responsible for the language that we use in the House. I remind hon. Members that good temper and moderation are the characteristics of parliamentary language, and when our exchanges occasionally become heated and fractious, I wish that hon. Members on both sides of the House would use the English language with care and concern.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): No split infinitives.

Dr. Spink *rose—*

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has expressed himself. I should now hear from the hon. Member for Ladywood Birmingham (Ms Short).

Ms Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. What I said yesterday, and what is very important, is that, "if" the allegations that are made are true, it would show that the management team was corrupt, and therefore there is a question whether the franchise should be awarded—if the allegations prove to be true. That is what I said, and that is my view.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member for Ladywood has read the whole of the exchange yesterday. That is now the end of it.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I wonder whether I could ask you briefly, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Is it a point of order?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Yes, it is.

I ask whether the matter of a Minister of the Crown sponsoring the pass of a commercial lobbyist has been referred to you, and whether you will refer it to the Serjeant at Arms for an inquiry, because clearly there has been an abuse of our arrangements.

Madam Speaker: The matter has already been referred to the Serjeant at Arms, and I understand that the pass in question has been made available to the staff member in question since—if I remember correctly—the mid or late 1980s. It has been in the possession of the staff member since that time.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Perhaps I can narrow it down a little further. You will know that the Minister involved signed a document last May, three months after his appointment as a Minister, sponsoring that commercial lobbyist's access to the House of Commons with a pass endorsed by the Serjeant at Arms. Clearly that must be wrong. I have checked, as well.

Madam Speaker: I have checked the matter thoroughly, but as the hon. Gentleman has raised the matter, I shall do so again. It is my understanding that the person concerned has been a staff member of the Minister since the mid or late 1980s.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. We are not having a debate about the matter. I shall check the matter again.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): The word "if" did not come in the statement on the record yesterday. There was a straight assertion

"because it has shown itself to be"—

Ms Short *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Let us hear the hon. Lady.

Ms Short: I should be grateful if you would allow me to read from *Hansard* for the benefit of the House. The words that I used were

"because it has shown itself to be a corrupt management team . . . if the allegations are true."—[*Official Report*, 5 February 1996; Vol. 271, c. 20.]

Madam Speaker: I, too, am accustomed to read *Hansard* every morning. Not only did I listen to the exchange; I read it this morning. We shall take the matter no further.

NEW MEMBER

The following Member made the Affirmation required by law:

Jon Trickett Esq., for Hemsworth.

Questions to the Prime Minister

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. No doubt you noticed that Question 2 to the Prime Minister was reached at 3.28 pm—I was looking at the clock. You are, I am sure, aware of the intense competition for the Prime Minister's questions slot, and you have often asked for short replies.

You may also have noticed that the Prime Minister took a long time to answer the questions from my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. It seems unfortunate that, when an hon. Member has been lucky enough to table Question 5 or 6, only Questions 1, 2 and 3 should be reached. Would you like to comment, Madam Speaker? What happened today was extremely unfair to Back Benchers, who, if they are lucky, may find themselves somewhere near the top slot twice or, at most, three times a year.

Madam Speaker: A total of 10 questions were asked today, although the hon. Gentleman is right: only three of them were listed on the Order Paper.

Recently, questions to the Prime Minister have not moved as speedily as they used to. When questions and answers were short, those 15 minutes were one of our best periods in the House. I have noticed recently that both questions and responses are rather long, and the hon. Gentleman—and, obviously, the House—have noted that we are not moving as speedily as we could.

The hon. Gentleman's point of order gives me an opportunity to appeal both to the House as a whole and to those on the Front Benches to move more speedily in the future. It is absolutely right that hon. Members who take the trouble and time to place questions on the Order Paper should at least have a reasonable opportunity of being called. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance. Can you explain why the Leader of the Opposition needs to ask three or four questions to make his point? That may well answer the point made by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick).

Madam Speaker: I have probably been in the House for at least as long as the hon. Gentleman. Leaders of the Opposition, whatever their party, have often been able to ask three questions. If hon. Members wish to change that procedure, perhaps they should ask the Procedure Committee to have a look at it. I shall certainly make no decision at this stage.

BILL PRESENTED

Regulation of Diet Industry

Mrs. Alice Mahon, supported by Mrs. Ann Clwyd, Ms Dawn Primarolo, Ms Jean Corston, Mr. Tony Banks, Ms Diane Abbott, Ms Liz Lynne, Ms Mildred Gordon, Mrs. Helen Jackson, Ms Harriet Harman, Ms Clare Short and Ms Tessa Jowell, presented a Bill to regulate the diet industry; to bring all medicines relating to diets under control; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 22 March and to be printed. [Bill 53.]

Periodicals (Protection of Children)

3.58 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require publishers of periodicals to display prominently on the front cover of their publications their own assessment of the youngest age for which they consider that publication to be suitable; and for related purposes.

The House has many duties, but none is more important than the duty that we owe to our children. The influences on children in British society are many and varied. The House must be satisfied that it is doing its best to create the healthiest climate possible for our children to grow up in. I am not convinced that we are rising to that challenge.

I greatly appreciate the support for the Bill that I have received from hon. Members on both sides of House. It suggests that my view is widely shared. The country has been shocked by the case of the 13-year-old bride of a Turkish waiter. It has led many people to question our nation's moral condition.

We should not be surprised that children respond in worrying ways, when we consider the pressures that are placed on them. As a parent, I worry about all those pressures, whether they be from television soap operas, pop music lyrics, our increasingly materialistic society or the growing drug culture.

I start from the premise that, although children may be physically mature younger, it is not necessarily true that they are emotionally mature any sooner. I may be a bit old-fashioned, but I believe that childhood innocence still has its value. We may have to warn children of dangers rather younger, but, in doing so, we should not go further than is absolutely necessary to protect them, and we must not lead them to admire aspects of adult behaviour that are less than admirable.

Therefore, the Bill deals only with one aspect of a much larger problem. In this general climate, some influences stand out as especially worrying and yet capable of some control. My Bill deals with one of those: teenage girls' magazines.

Hon. Members whose memory of teenage magazines is of the *Beano*, *The Dandy*, *Jackie*, *Bunty*, *Eagle* and *Look and Learn*, may be somewhat puzzled by my concern. I invite them to consider just the covers, never mind the contents, of some of the magazines that are on sale and aimed at young girls. They state:

"Sex and you—read our sealed section now!"

"Men unzipped—an intimate guide to men's minds (and bodies!)"

"Red hot! Sizzling male model posters inside".

"I had sex with my ex, but was forgiven".

"Boys in the buff—shots so hot we sealed the pages".

"First time sex—how to get it right".

"Seven steps to sexual heaven—bedtime bliss starts here".

"Your sex secrets—I've slept with over 100 boys".

Inside, the contents are even more explicit. The worst case was probably that of *TV Hits*. In the November edition of a magazine probably read widely by 10 and 11-year-olds, there was a reply to a letter giving precise details of how to perform oral sex—and I mean precise.

The problem pages are often the worst offenders. Letters pages that could often be about the real emotional and physical problems of adolescence too often

degenerate into squalid titillation. One page in a magazine aimed at a young audience is called: "Let's talk about SEX".

The magazines defend themselves by saying that they are offering important advice not offered elsewhere by schools or by parents. That defence is not entirely untrue. Some of the advice that they offer is sensible and useful, but much is not. All the advice is not wrong or inappropriate—girls do grow up younger and need franker advice than the sort once offered by *Jackie*, but the letters are often written using language more usually seen on the walls of public conveniences. The answers, even in magazines aimed at 12-year-olds and therefore read by much younger children, give explicit advice on sexual technique.

It is not just the letters—it is their context. Role models are offered. In the present edition of *It's Bliss*, celebrities such as Jon Bon Jovi, Sean Maguire and Prince boast of losing their virginity at 12, 14 and 11. Such boasts undermine the magazines' claims they are offering only advice that is urgently needed.

Take the editor's letter in the current edition of one magazine:

"Us MORE! girls are not known for being shy and retiring when we go on the pull, so I was gagging to see how we'd compare to a bunch of lechy lads out looking for a bit of skirt action."

The only impression any girl reading such magazines could be left with is that her personal fulfilment will come only from looking good, wearing the right clothes and getting a good sex life. That is deeply sexist. Girls should be encouraged to believe that there are other ways of leading a meaningful life. Sexual stereotyping of that sort is wrong.

Does it matter? Does such open discussion about sex encourage girls into promiscuity? I believe that it does.

The House need not take my word for it. Only last Friday, Daniel Wright, of the Medical Research Council's medical sociology unit, told a British Medical Association conference of his concerns about the coverage of sex in magazines for young girls:

"The way sexuality is presented suggests that most young people are engaged in sexual relations".

According to reports of his speech, he said that girls were given the impression that they were being left out if they did not engage in sex. But research shows that only 23 per cent. of girls under 16 have had sexual relationships.

For my money, even 23 per cent. is too high a proportion, but we must not allow the pressures to grow, and thus increase the numbers. I say that not because I am a prude, but because I believe that sex is not a mechanical activity performed for immediate gratification, but a God-given gift that, in a loving relationship, is one of the best things about being a human being. Those magazines undermine the value and the importance of sex.

I do not say for one minute that we can return to some age of lost innocence; the pass has been sold. Encouraging magazines such as *Sugar*, *Mizz*, *It's Bliss*, *19*, and *More!* to behave more responsibly will not change the world. But it could help to prevent further deterioration. I believe that some of the magazines, too, want to avoid any further drift into salaciousness and smut. Others, such as *More!*, which is aimed at an older audience, could not but gain from having that fact better understood by readers and parents. Above all, the editors need to pull back. The current edition of *19* gets as close to full frontal male nudity as it is possible to get without actually showing it, and the centre-page spread in *Mizz* is the same.

Since I launched my campaign, I have been overwhelmed with letters and telephone calls from parents saying, "We didn't realise what was in them," or, "We thought it was only us who were worried. Now we feel we can do something about it." I want to help editors, parents and schools by making it easier to learn what is inside the magazines. I want editors and publishers to decide the lowest target age for each magazine, and to show it on the front cover.

Because there would be an outcry if a magazine made a major error of judgment by publishing material unsuitable for its own declared age range, I do not believe that any complex regulatory machinery is necessary—simply a sanction for failing to display on the front cover a clearly defined target age for the periodical.

I do no more than ask the magazines to follow the lead already set, entirely voluntarily, by the computer software manufacturers. I had the privilege of launching their now well-established age classification system. The European Leisure Software Publishers Association—ELSPA—the trade association for well-known names such as Sega and Nintendo, which I am pleased to say is based in Worcestershire, was concerned that a statutory system might be imposed after concern was expressed about the violent and sexual content of certain games. ELSPA moved voluntarily, and so far it has succeeded. The Bill gives the magazine publishers the chance to do the same. They would be well advised to seize the opportunity to clean up their act, before pressure grows for a more draconian system.

The Bill is a serious attempt to legislate; unlike so many ten-minute Bills, it is not simply a way of debating or drawing attention to an issue. It is simple, it is not bureaucratic, it has no public expenditure implications, and it enjoys overwhelming support both inside and outside the House. It would impose no burden on newsagents, who have for many months called for just such a scheme, and who strongly support the Bill.

The Bill does not mean censorship. Magazines would be free to publish as they saw fit. They would simply have to be straightforward about who they wanted to read them. The Bill would not encourage girls to buy magazines intended for older girls; they already know what is in them. It is their parents who have been in the dark. Neither is it an attempt to deny young people essential advice. I accept that the advice in magazines has to be more explicit than that given 20 years ago, if only because girls reach puberty at an earlier age.

I leave it to the magazines themselves to decide how to go about the task that the Bill would impose on them. If I were them, I would set up some kind of organisation under the Periodical Publishers Association to monitor and implement the scheme, and adopt an age-range classification system.

The Bill enjoys all-party support. My fellow sponsors know that parents, teachers, Church groups, newsagents, journalists and even many of the children at whom these magazines are aimed, want change. They are right, and I am determined to ensure that they get it.

4.8 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I welcome the debate, and I shall not try to divide the House. Although it is right that we should debate the Bill, we should proceed carefully. My fear, and the fear expressed by many outside the House, is that, by legislating in such a way, we may not achieve the objective of the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff), or that of others who support his proposals. The hon. Gentleman and I must accept that men of our age, even parents of daughters of his daughter's age, may not be the best people to form judgments on such issues.

The law is clear; it says that the age of consent for a girl is 16, and that should be reinforced in the House. Advice is clear—indeed, I concur with the hon. Gentleman in citing the advice of the British Medical Association, the General Medical Council and others—that it is better not to have sex before the age of 16; people are not normally ready for it. The Church, other faith groups and many others are even clearer, and say that sex, especially intercourse, should be left until marriage.

Even the most well-regulated households, however, do not necessarily manage to avoid under-age sex. According to all the evidence, one in five young people have had intercourse before they are 16 years old. That, of course, means that four in five have not. It is therefore not right for youngsters to try to influence their peers to have sex by saying that everyone else is doing so.

It is, of course, also true—I hope that the hon. Gentleman concedes this—that, although young people develop in different ways and have different interests at different times, the fact that some people may not have any form of sex until well after the age of 16 does not mean that most youngsters are not interested in sex well before then.

What should we do? It is a case of separating fantasy from fact. We regulate magazines, yet we do not regulate radio, television, plays, records, tapes, compact discs, newspapers, books or advertisments. Cinema is in part regulated. Records banned from being played on Radio 1 because they were regarded as—potentially—too sexy immediately shot to the top of the charts.

Young people say that they would rather receive information from parents or at school, but that parents and schools are often not very good at giving that information, and that their peer group and magazines are the best places to turn to.

In an article printed in the *Evening Standard* on Monday, a girl of 13, who reads two magazines—*Shout* and *Sugar*—said:

"I think they are the best. They give you really good advice but I don't think I would ever actually write in. Reading about other people's problems is really helpful. I'd be embarrassed to ask my mum some of the questions they ask the agony aunts."

I am not aware that there has been any criticism that the information given in the magazines has been wrong, which is often not the case with information culled from other sources. It is also clear that young people ask questions and want answers about some matters about which people find it difficult to be explicit.

To be fair, the magazines generally contain substantially more non-sex parts than sex parts. Indeed, we must be careful not to overstate the amount of sex-related content on the pages that carry it. On the problem page of a magazine published this month, sensitive responses are given to questions about family rejection, being scared in a home alone, being sexually abused and coping with arguments at home.

Only two letters out of eight dealt with sex. One concerned a reader's knowledge of her brother's under-age sexual activity. Advice was given that it is illegal, and that, if she could not persuade him to stop, she should inform her parents. The other letter was from a girl who had had sex and wished that she had not. The reply was good; it said:

"relationships don't need to centre around sex, so this is a lesson for the rest of you".

Some of the difficult issues, such as pregnancy, petting, contraception and orgasm, need to be dealt with in a factual way, since people in their early teens ask questions about such matters and deserve factual answers. All the magazines that I am aware of seek professional, independent advice before writing their advice columns.

Mr. Luff *indicated assent.*

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is nodding. The Brook advisory centres are certainly regularly consulted on writing the agony aunt or agony uncle columns, as are the Family Planning Association and the Health Education Authority.

Very important to the defence of the present situation is the fact that there has been no great recent upsurge in the number of teenage pregnancies. Indeed, as advice has increased, teenage pregnancy rates in this country have gone down.

Secondly, there is no evidence that sexual education leads to more sexual activity. Indeed, some say that such education may delay the onset of activity, and that activity may decrease overall. Lastly, the countries with the most clear and uncomplicated attitude—such as the Netherlands—have lower conception rates than this country. Surprisingly, the rate of conception in the Netherlands is one seventh of the rate in England and Wales.

How should we proceed? First, we must not end up with an age marking that makes those magazines more rather than less appealing. Secondly, it is difficult to define an exact age when young people develop, and that applies to boys as well as girls. Thirdly, we must not make it seem that sex is talked about more than everything else, and, in doing so, make sex the centre of attention.

There is an equal danger of cultivating a view that other things that the magazines promote—a beautiful body, expensive clothes, designer life styles and a certain range of luxuries—are as desirable as anything else. We should be clear about giving the facts, but also about raising young people's horizons. We should make sure that there is proper consultation on the issue before we proceed to legislate.

We should be discouraging young people from having under-age sex, but not pretending that it is not entirely natural to be interested in it. We should be informing young people that most of their peer group are not having under-age sex, but tell them what happens when they do. We should not pretend that information that is not obtained in teenage magazines will not be obtained somewhere else.

We must proceed carefully, because hon. Members may not be the best people to teach parents in the rest of country how to manage these matters. If we proceed carefully, we may be able to have a healthy attitude to this matter, as we have with all matters of concern to young people.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Peter Luff, Mr. Michael Alison, Mr. David Alton, Mr. Nicholas Baker, Mr. James Cran, Mr. Harry Greenway, Mr. Frank Field, Mr. Andrew Rowe, Sir Timothy Sainsbury, the Rev. Martin Smyth, Ms Tessa Jowell and Ms Estelle Morris.

Periodicals (Protection of Children)

Mr. Peter Luff accordingly presented a Bill to require publishers of periodicals to display prominently on the front cover of their publications their own assessment of the youngest age for which they consider that publication to be suitable; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 1 March and to be printed. [Bill 54.]

GP Fundholding

4.17 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I beg to move,

That this House pays tribute to the role that GP fundholders have played in kick-starting and developing innovative practice in both primary care and the acute sector; welcomes the advances that fundholding has brought to many patients; accepts that fundholding has acted as a lever to improve services; and consequently remains committed to the further development of GP fundholding.

The Government have selected the subject for debate this afternoon for a simple reason: we believe that it is important to expose the double-speak that passes for Labour's health policy. That is true across the whole field of health policy, but it is particularly true of fundholding. I intend to remind the House of the claims that Labour makes for its health policy, and then to examine the reality of those claims in the context of its approach to fundholding.

Labour says that it favours empowerment of GPs, yet it remains opposed to the system that brought about the greater empowerment of GPs. Labour says that it favours innovation, yet when it sees it in the context of fundholding practices, it immediately retreats into verbiage about a "two-tier service". Most of all, Labour says that it is in favour of a system based on choice and diversity and encouraging professionals to develop their own approach to the profession that they practise. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) shows in her decisions about her own family that she holds that principle dear, but Labour as a whole remains resolutely opposed to putting that principle into effect within the NHS.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Is my right hon. Friend aware that virtually every general practitioner in the Mid-Staffordshire constituency is a GP fundholder? Is he equally aware that they are fundholders because they believe that it helps them to be better doctors and to make the sorts of choices that GPs ought to be making? They live in fear at the thought of a Labour Government, who would oppose GP fundholding, getting in and abandoning it.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is precisely right. I shall quote some of the speculations of the hon. Member for Peckham on why my hon. Friend's constituents have opted for fundholding. He gave us the answer first: they opted for it because they believe that it is the best way to improve the care that is available to their patients and, furthermore, to give full expression to their commitment to the principles of the national health service.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Is it not true that the patients of fundholders are getting preferential treatment for operations in hospitals? We have some evidence of that. Is it not a two-tier system?

Mr. Dorrell: It is also true that 70 per cent. of the patients in the hon. Gentleman's constituency are covered by fundholding practices. That reflects the choice made by GPs operating in that health area on how best to serve the interests of their patients and to ensure that an improved national health service is delivered, not just to their patients but to those of all GPs operating in the NHS.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I want to pursue the question asked by the hon. Member

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell). A psychologist working in the NHS with whom I spoke on Sunday confirmed that GP fundholders get preferential treatment for their patients from him and his colleagues at the hospital, not because they want it but because they have the resources to buy it. Will he confirm that that is the position and that the perception in every health authority is that those who have the funds call the tune?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman's intervention is based on a total misapprehension of the position. He can substantiate his proposition that the patients of a particular doctor have an unfair advantage only if the resources available to that doctor to deal with the patients on his list are more generously provided than the resources available to NHS patients as a whole. Within a fundholding practice, a doctor or group of doctors make choices about the use of resources, which certainly allow them to improve the NHS care available to their patients—that is why they do it. That is done on the basis not of an unjust allocation of resources but of better use of the resources available to them.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: I will not give way now, but I will do so again later.

Last October, the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) accepted an invitation to speak to the National Association of Fund Holding Practices. For once, that brought a Labour health spokesman, the predecessor to the hon. Member for Peckham, not up against Ministers, whom the Opposition no doubt think are easy conventional targets, and not in a television studio, but face to face with fundholding GPs—individual doctors committed to the principles and future of the national health service, who had decided that it was in the interests not merely of their patients but of their commitment to the health service as a whole to opt for fundholding. It is interesting to examine what the right hon. Lady said when she was face to face with an audience of fundholders:

"We want genuinely to pay tribute to the role that you as fundholders . . . have played in kick-starting and developing innovative practice in both primary care and the acute sector."

[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah.] My hon. Friends should wait, because there is more to follow. She continued:

"We understand and welcome the advances that fundholding has brought to many patients."

I cannot detain the House with the entire speech, although there was some good stuff in it, but she also said:

"I do accept that fundholding has acted as a lever to improve services."

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dorrell: No, I am going to make my point.

Those three sentiments, every one of which I agree with, have been brought together by the Government in the motion. The motion that the House is invited to agree is no more than the bringing together of those three sentiments out of the mouth of the right hon. Member for Derby, South, coupled with the obvious policy conclusion that, if it is that good, we had better have more of it.

When Labour Members later this afternoon choose to substitute, if that is what they vote to do, the words of the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Peckham, they will be voting against the words spoken by their health spokesman of only three and a half months ago. It must be relatively rare for the Government to table a motion for debate in the House the sentiments of which were drafted exclusively by the person who held the shadow health portfolio until only months ago.

It is properly described as hypocrisy for the Labour party to endorse a spokesman who went to Harrogate to talk to fundholding GPs in October last year and then invite hon. Members, as no doubt the hon. Member for Peckham will in a few minutes' time, to reject those words when safely away from the audience of fundholders.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): The right hon. Gentleman referred earlier to verbiage about two-tier services. Does he recall that I wrote to him in November and sent him a copy of a letter from a GP in my constituency? At that time, there were no GP fundholders in Halifax. The GP complained that when he desperately needed clinical psychology services for a patient, he was told by the trust to which he tried to refer her that there were no services for anyone who was not from a GP fundholding practice. The only service available was a Relate counsellor. He pointed out that that was not what he wanted and had to wait a considerable time before the health authority eventually referred the woman to a BUPA hospital. Is that not a classic example of two-tier fundholding? Why should that patient not have access to a service to which GP fundholders' patients have access? Why should she have to wait?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady said that there were virtually no fundholders in her constituency. In fact, the health authority that covers her constituency will, from next April, have 44 per cent. of its patients covered by fundholders. She is not precisely right.

Mrs. Mahon: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The right hon. Gentleman must get it correct. That is not true in Halifax. It is no good using somebody else's constituency.

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order. I am sure that if the right hon. Gentleman is incorrect about fundholding in the constituency of Halifax, he will make a correction.

Mr. Dorrell: As you know, Madam Speaker, health authority and constituency boundaries are not precisely the same. The health authority that covers the hon. Lady's constituency—and this is what I said—will, from next April, have 44 per cent. of patients covered by fundholding practices.

Mrs. Mahon: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dorrell: I shall give way once more and then I shall answer the hon. Lady's point.

Mrs. Mahon: Will the right hon. Gentleman guarantee that patients in my constituency who need a clinical psychologist will be able to get one as quickly as would GP fundholders' patients?

Mr. Dorrell: I will guarantee that in the hon. Lady's constituency, just as in the rest of the health service,

where fundholders use resources to develop or open new services—that is what innovation means—it creates precisely the pressure that she wants to ensure that both the patients of other fundholders and the patients of all other GPs participate in an improving general level of service in the NHS.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: I wish to make progress, if I may.

I return to the words of the motion—the words first spoken by the right hon. Member for Derby, South to the National Association of Fund Holding Practices. On 24 January 1996, two weeks ago, I quoted those words in the House and the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) said, "This is old hat." Three and a half months is a long time in Labour party politics. He was wrong; it was not old hat. It was a flash of inspiration. St. Paul travelled the road to Damascus; the right hon. Member for Derby, South travelled the road to Harrogate. Converts are always welcome.

The right hon. Member for Derby, South is not old hat; Labour's policy on fundholding is old hat. Yet again, the Labour party is on the wrong side of an argument. It is the repeated experience of Labour and Labour Members in the past 20 years. They fought against privatisation of nationalised industries, and history passed them by; they fought for unilateral nuclear disarmament, and history passed them by; they fought against a framework of law for trade unions, and history passed them by; and they fought—how they fought—against GP fundholding, and history is in the process of passing them by on that subject as well.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the principles of GP fundholding are the same as the principles of grant-maintained schools—that the budget is delegated downwards? Does he find it strange that a person who approves of, and is willing to use, a grant-maintained school opposes the principle of GP fundholding?

Mr. Dorrell: I have already said so, and I agree that identical principles underlie fundholding and grant-maintained schools.

The way to improve a state-provided service is to encourage a diversity of approach in the professions and encourage the professions responsible for delivering the service to try new ways to deliver the service. The hon. Member for Peckham endorses that principle by her private action yet refuses to apply it in the portfolio for which she has policy responsibility.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: I want to make progress. I will give way to the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) in a few moments.

I want to begin at the beginning of fundholding. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer was the Minister responsible for introducing fundholding. He did it for a simple reason: he wanted, and wants, to make the national health service more accountable to its patients. He wanted to accept the challenge implicit in the rhetoric about patient-centred care and a flexible health service responsive to its patients, and make those phrases real.

The hon. Member for Peckham made her approach to the subject clear from the start. She said that

"there is no support among GPs for the concept of fund-holding practices."—[*Official Report*, 15 March 1990; Vol. 169, c. 687.]

Six years later, the evidence on that subject is decisive. She was wrong.

From 1 April 1996, more than half the patients of NHS general practitioners will be served by fundholding GPs. The hon. Member for Peckham was wrong then in her predictions, just as she is wrong now in her policy prescriptions.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: I have undertaken to give way to the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate in a moment.

The hon. Member for Peckham is now wrong in a different sense, because she now makes a different charge. On 9 November 1995, in *Doctor* magazine, she said:

"Fundholding was not a GP idea. It was imposed on doctors".

That is insulting to the half of NHS GPs who have opted for a voluntary fundholding scheme. It implies that a few letters from me and my predecessors have led them to adopt a scheme that they believe is damaging to their patients and the NHS. Further, I believe that it is a wilful misrepresentation of the facts.

In saying that, the hon. Member for Peckham knows perfectly well that the fundholding scheme is voluntary, that more than half of NHS GPs have opted to join that voluntary scheme and that the words of her 1990 prediction are on the record, and she feels the urge to explain them away. She will have to think of a better explanation if her remarks are to carry any conviction.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Is there not another similarity between grant-maintained schools and doctors' fundholding? The imposition of both was fiercely opposed by the professionals—schoolteachers, governors and parents, and certainly the majority of doctors—yet both groups were aware that the only way to provide the necessary educational and medical services was to take the money that the Government were offering them in only one way.

I refer the Secretary of State back to innovative practices. There is little that is innovative about elective surgery, but last year the Whittington hospital in my constituency issued a directive that all elective surgery must stop, save for patients of GP fundholders. If that is not a two-tier system, perhaps the Secretary of State could explain what it is.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady is simply wrong, as I said in replying to the hon. Member for Fife, Central. *[Interruption.]* She is wrong about that fact, just as the hon. Gentleman was wrong to describe the comments of the right hon. Member for Derby, South as "old hat".

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate is wrong because she has said that GP fundholders have more resources available to them to care for their patients than other GPs in the health service. That is not true.

[Mr. Dorrell]

The resources available to GP fundholders are provided on exactly the same basis as the resources that are available for other forms of patient care.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I share the Secretary of State's views about the improvement that GP fundholding has made. The fault with the two-tier system lies not so much with the GP fundholders as with the providing authorities, which are leaving much elective surgery until the end of the year because they can then obtain the roll-over from the health authorities. Is that not the real issue, as the Körner statistics show?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. He is correct in pointing out what is happening in different parts of the country where GP fundholders are finding better ways of using the resources at their disposal. As a result, the standard of service that GPs are delivering to their patients—which is measured in waiting times and in a variety of other ways—is being ratcheted up. I do not apologise for that fact: fundholding and the other reforms were introduced partly to improve patient service.

The hon. Gentleman is quite right to point out the second-stage effect. Once a fundholder has found a way of improving the care available to his patients, the system is deliberately established to apply pressure to other fundholders—and to purchasing health authorities acting on behalf of non-fundholders—to raise the quality of service, leading to a relentless improvement in the quality of care that is available across the health service.

I shall return to the question that troubles the hon. Member for Peckham. Why was her prediction wrong and why do more than half of the doctors now plan to be fundholders from the beginning of April? If she will not accept my explanation of why people are opting for fundholding, perhaps she will listen to the words of some independent and friendly advisers. Howard Glennerster said that GP fundholding

"has produced a shift in the balance of power back to general practice for the first time this century."

That is the reason why GPs are opting for fundholding.

Mr. Alan Milburn (Darlington): And Julian Le Grand?

Mr. Dorrell: It is not just Howard Glennerster. I do not intend to quote Julian Le Grand today, but perhaps I shall return to him on another occasion. Brian Abel-Smith, the former special adviser to Lady Castle, who was one of the last Labour Health Secretaries of State, said:

"Fundholding represents a major transfer of power from specialists to GPs".

The same theme was picked up by Kathy Jones writing for the Fabian Society. The hon. Member for Fife, Central might do well to read some of the Fabian Society material as it is rather more inspired than some of his speeches. Kathy Jones said:

"Fundholding gives GPs leverage over hospital doctors, changing the balance of power between them."

Those three quotations are from three different sources, each of them putting the finger on the real reason—not the cosmetic reason that the hon. Member for Peckham prefers, but the real reason—why GPs are opting for fundholding. Not just those commentators but the 13,500 GPs who will be fundholders from April understand the shift in emphasis that has occurred in the national health service as a result of the introduction of fundholding.

Does the hon. Member for Peckham believe that all those people—all 13,500 GPs and all those advisers—are knowingly undermining the health service? Are they all engaged in a conspiracy to break up a service to which they have given their lives? That is absurd. I have quoted the evidence I have about the support for my policy from people responsible for actually delivering the service. The question I am putting to the hon. Lady and her hon. Friends is whether they believe that all those people who are opting for those changes are doing so because they share the suspicion that that is a desirable way of breaking up the health service. That is the charge the hon. Member for Fife, Central levels at me, but—much more damagingly for him—he is levelling it at 13,500 GPs operating in the national health service.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. It is no good Back Benchers standing up for the whole afternoon when it is clear that the Secretary of State is not giving way.

Mr. Dorrell: The quotations that I have offered, and I could have chosen a thousand others, demonstrate why doctors are opting for fundholding. They are doing so because fundholding is a means of delivering the objective that so often in the past has been espoused by Opposition Members as a desirable health policy objective—the empowerment of GPs and the strengthening of the role of GPs in the health service.

Mr. MacShane: May I tear the Secretary of State away from his Oxford Union practice, which will be useful when he is in opposition, and bring him to the point about GP fundholders? In my part of the world, and I hope that the Secretary of State will listen, it is GP fundholders themselves who are concerned about the fact that if they nominate someone for a hip replacement at the Royal Hallamshire hospital in Sheffield it will be done in 12 weeks, but if a non-fundholding GP down the road does the same—and they are all in the same business—the person has to wait 52 weeks. GP fundholders are also concerned that if they put money into private hospitals, it is denied to NHS hospitals that have to provide accident and emergency cover, which the private hospitals do not.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) went to Harrogate, and I invite the Secretary of State to come to Rotherham to meet fundholders and to hear the problems and questions that they would like to put to him. They are worried, whether he likes it or not, that he is creating a two-tier service.

Mr. Dorrell: What I am doing is supporting a system that has led to a bigger shift of power in the health service, away from the institutions and towards the GPs, than we have seen at any time since 1948. That has been a matter of common exchange between hon. Members on both sides of the House. That aspiration has been accepted—empowering GPs because they are the people who are

closest to the patients, and allowing them to act as guides and advocates for patients finding their way around the health service.

Spokesmen on both sides of the House have argued that GPs are well placed to design a patient-centred service. The hon. Member for Peckham goes beyond that and has talked about the importance of the development of a broader range of services in primary care. She is right about that too. We have a broader range of provision of post-operative care, shared care arrangements, emergency care arrangements and better provision for GP support for cottage hospitals. All those are important examples of the developments of primary care. What the hon. Lady does not deal with is the fact that the introduction of the fundholding scheme is the biggest single step forward to the delivery of those objectives since 1948.

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): Will my right hon. Friend come to north Derbyshire to talk to fundholding doctors, including the brother of the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), about the way in which fundholding benefits the patients of all doctors? Is he aware that in Glossop, because of the way in which fundholders have introduced new surgery cases and new activities at the cottage hospital, waiting lists for ear, nose and throat treatment have fallen from 20 weeks to four and for general surgery from up to 30 weeks to a maximum of eight, not just for patients of fundholders but for all patients? That shows how everybody has benefited.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right, and a three-part tutorial might be beneficial. I might go to Rotherham and take the brother of the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) with me to examine the role of fundholding in strengthening the voice of primary care within the national health service.

The hon. Member for Peckham used her defence to my argument in a television programme which I saw before I came into the House today. She said that fundholding is not necessary to the delivery of those improvements in primary care, or to the strengthening of the voice of GPs. I ask the House to pause for a moment and consider that argument. For a quarter of century, speeches have been made in the House, from both sides, about the importance of GPs and about how the NHS must deliver a more patient-centred basis of care. Nothing happened. Then we introduced fundholding and it started to happen.

Is it reasonable to assume that there is a link between those two events, or was that just a massive coincidence? Were the two events entirely unconnected? Would all the changes have happened anyway? Is that the hon. Lady's argument? The changes did not happen for a quarter of a century, but they happened on precisely the day that fundholding was introduced. Is that purely a coincidence? That is what the hon. Lady asks us to believe. The GPs know the answer and on 1 April this year over half of them will be fundholders. They are voting with their feet, and they are not voting for the hon. Lady's arguments.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Can the Secretary of State explain how it is in the interest of patient care to have millions of pounds locked away, unused, in underspends for GP fundholders? In Birmingham, there is a £10 million underspend and the regional executive has suggested that the health authority borrow money from fundholders to get the waiting lists down. That may sound fine, but is it a good idea for the NHS to be in hock to its own fundholders rather than putting the money to use at the time it is needed, through properly allocated resources?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman must decide whether he believes the speeches that his hon. Friends have made over a quarter of a century about the best way of using health service resources.

Mr. Milburn: All GPs?

Mr. Dorrell: I shall come to that argument in a moment.

Does the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) believe that the patients' interests are best served by empowering GPs to make decisions in their patients' interests, or does he prefer leaving those decisions to the regional health authorities which we have introduced legislation to abolish? That is the choice. The hon. Gentleman prefers to make great speeches about a primary care-led NHS. He likes to talk about devolving power to enable GPs to act as patients' advocates, but he backs away from the hard facts.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, given that 50 per cent. of the country will shortly be covered by GP fundholders, the Opposition are boxing themselves into a potential crisis? The chairman of the National Association of Fund Holding Practices, Dr. Morris, has said that if Labour ever comes to power and takes the steps it has threatened, those GPs will leave the NHS.

Mr. Dorrell: If the hon. Member for Peckham pursued the policy that she is committed to pursuing, GP fundholders would have a difficult decision, as my hon. Friend rightly says.

The hon. Member for Peckham likes to use another argument; she points to the success—Labour's amendment points to this—of commissioners. On that point at least, I can agree with the hon. Lady. There are, of course, many GPs who are not fundholders but who are improving care as commissioning GPs. The hon. Lady should listen to the commissioning GPs to find out what caused the changes that have allowed their commissioning approach to be effective. Numerous commissioning GPs will tell her, if she listens, that it is the introduction of fundholding that has changed the terms of trade—the terms of the relationship between the primary and secondary sectors. That has made possible the success of the commissioning schemes which the hon. Lady likes to endorse.

The reality of the commitment by the hon. Member for Peckham to replace fundholding with commissioning is that it is bad news not only for fundholders and their patients, as my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) said, but for the commissioners. The commissioners are taking advantage of the change in the relationship that the fundholders have brought about. That is a key argument which the hon. Lady prefers to fudge. Indeed, Labour is trying to fudge its way out of an embarrassment. Labour Members know that they are caught in a policy position that does not work. They must decide quickly whether they are prepared to opt for and

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to back the fundholding scheme, which would be the best way to convert their fine words about empowering GPs into reality, or whether they confine their ambitions to fine prose and press releases, in which case they can continue their policy of abandoning fundholding.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: No, I will not give way, because I want to make progress. I may give way later.

Another objective to which the Labour party declares its firm attachment is innovation. Labour is right. Health care is a developing activity and it is important to maintain innovation. There are hundreds of examples of innovations that have been introduced as a result of the initiatives taken by fundholders. However, every one of those is under threat if we accept the two-tier argument that has been the chant from Labour during the debate.

The guts of the two-tier argument are that nobody can have the benefit of an innovation until everyone can have it. That is an absurd argument. What Labour seems completely incapable of understanding is that it is in the nature of an innovation that it is new and has to be done somewhere first. Furthermore, the problem is compounded by Labour's naive belief that standards can be identical in every part of the country, for every patient, all at once. Everybody knows that that cannot be true even in a static service; it is doubly untrue in an evolving service. The key issue that the House must address is not how to make the service identical for every patient everywhere—that is an undeliverable objective—but how to maintain the pressure right across the service for continuing improvement. That is the key question, and general practitioner fundholding is a key part of our commitment to seeing relentless and continuing pressure for improvement within the national health service.

That point is the key distinction between Labour's approach and the Government's approach. Labour values uniformity above all. Labour Members talk of diversity and choice, and they use the language of individual responsibility and initiative, but in their actions they opt unerringly for the uniform formula. That absolutist vision represents the hypocritical face of the Labour party. Labour Members say that they favour innovation and diversity, but they set their face firmly against the most effective way in which to bring those factors about.

The most hypocritical aspect of the whole story is the position of the hon. Member for Peckham. We know that she does not believe this absolutist claptrap; we know that she favours a policy of diversity and choice. We know that she understands that the best way to deliver high-quality social services is to encourage professional people to develop their own approach and to allow responsible citizens to choose which professionals best meet their needs.

We know that the hon. Member for Peckham is opposed to the imposition of a single unchanging formula, regardless of local preferences and choices. We know all that because she has opted her own family out of the politically correct formula for education and has exercised her right to choose the best education for her son. *[Interruption.]* This is not a cheap point. We applaud that action and we think that the hon. Lady is right to have taken it. What she has to explain to the House and to the country this afternoon is why she continues to oppose the application within the national health service of those principles which, by her actions, she endorses in the education of her own children.

4.55 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"pays tribute to the role all GPs have played in developing innovative practice in both primary care and the acute sector; regrets that the system of GP fundholding leads to two-tier health care and a massive increase in bureaucracy; believes that the unfairness of the internal market should be ended and GP fundholding replaced by GP commissioning in which all patients get excellent primary care, access to hospitals on the basis of clinical need, and in which all GPs have a say in the planning and development of primary and hospital care.".

I welcome the debate and the chance that it gives us to talk about what is really happening in primary care. The Secretary of State has clearly forgotten the advice of the Maples memorandum. He has proved again today that no news about the NHS is good news for the Tories. Any time that he wants to use Government time to debate the NHS and our policies, we shall be happy to oblige.

The Government motion is a disgrace. It congratulates only fundholding GPs; it has nothing to say about all the other GPs who are working hard for their patients. Our amendment, which I commend to the House, pays tribute to the efforts of all GPs who are struggling, despite this Government, to improve patient care.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Was the hon. Lady aware, before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made his speech, that the Government motion, almost in its entirety, was drawn from three quotations from a speech by the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), her predecessor? Was she aware of that, yes or no? If she was not, that is incompetent; if she was, how can she and her colleagues oppose the motion? If they oppose it, it is clear that Labour spokesmen say one thing, but vote in exactly the opposite direction.

Ms Harman: It is clear, from the speech that the Secretary of State quoted, that my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) was proposing all the points that we make in our amendment. I quote from the press release that went with the speech. My right hon. Friend said:

"Labour's proposals are to end a two-tier system of primary health-care provision . . . Fundholding"—

hon. Members should listen to this point—

"has improved GP services for some, but at the expense of others."

That is our case.

I am glad that the Secretary of State mentioned the points that I made in 1990 because we warned then that the Tory internal market in the NHS would lead to unfairness for patients. We said that it would lead to costly bureaucracy for doctors and fragmentation of NHS provision. The experience of patients and doctors has borne out our warnings. Labour rejects the internal market now as we did in 1990, and we will end it.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): The hon. Lady keeps making the point about the so-called two-tier service that

she believes fundholding to be. Will she confirm, in that case, that she believes that before fundholding was introduced, there was a single-tier service throughout the health service, despite the fact that across the country, people were waiting different times for the same operation?

Ms Harman: Later in my speech I shall give examples illustrating that there are different waiting times at one hospital because of the two-tier system that has been driven into the NHS.

Mr. Mans: There always were.

Ms Harman: No, there were not. Clinical need determined priority before the internal market, but now it is cash before care. The hon. Gentleman is wrong.

We shall replace GP fundholding by GP commissioning—a system that will benefit all patients, not just a few, and will give all GPs the opportunity to commission care.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): Is my hon. Friend aware that last week I met a member of the Avon fundholders group? I asked him what innovations he could provide under fundholding that he could not have made available before. He told me that his practice now offered psychological counselling two nights a week and that that would have been impossible before he was a fundholder. However, locality commissioning in south London has enabled non-fundholding surgeries to provide psychological counselling five days a week between 10 am and 3 pm. So fundholding allowed that GP to provide a service that must surely be available to non-fundholding GPs.

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In his speech today, the Secretary of State sought to perpetuate the idea that innovation takes place only in fundholding practices and that all other GPs are letting their patients down. We reject that and GPs are right to be angry.

The Tories want GPs to compete. They want to be divisive, but Labour wants GPs to work together in the interests of their patients. I shall set out four principles, and the primary care system should measure up to them. We heard nothing about the principles and objectives for primary care from the Secretary of State, so we shall hear whether he agrees with these. The system should provide equal access for all patients; it should make the best use of NHS resources; it should help to provide stability within the NHS so that it can grow; and it should play a part in local health strategies to improve the health of local people.

The Government's policy of fundholding fails on all those counts. It has created a two-tier service; it has added to the mountain of management bureaucracy and red tape; it prevents hospitals from planning for their services; and it cuts across any chance of strategic planning for health gain.

The Secretary of State claimed that fundholding is the fount of innovation in primary care. That is a sectarian and partial view. The Government see no merit whatsoever in the work of non-fundholders. There are hundreds of examples, but I shall mention just a few. Dr. Helen Groom, a GP in Gateshead, has set up a nurse assessment unit for men with prostate problems. That is innovative and the Secretary of State should welcome it. Dr. Robin Singer, a GP in Enfield, has set up a new service to treat cataracts and a twilight nursing service. The Secretary of State should welcome that. Why has he not done so?

Mr. Dorrell: I did. I said in my speech that there was no difference between the hon. Lady and myself on the benefits that commissioning GPs have brought to their patients. However, the hon. Lady has to explain how that would have been possible had the relationship within the health service not been changed by fundholding.

Ms Harman: We are talking about GPs innovating within their own practices. That has nothing to do with GPs buying hospital care and managing their budgets. Non-fundholding GPs do not control their budgets; they are simply improving primary care in their surgeries. However, we have had some success today because we have forced the Secretary of State, against his motion, to recognise that all GPs are doing a good job, whereas previously he wanted to concentrate on fundholders—to divide and rule.

The Government's claims for fundholders do not stand up. They claim that fundholders improve efficiency, responsiveness and quality of care. Angela Coulter, director of the independent King's Fund centre, says that those claims

"are in general not supported by the evidence."

The Tories claim that fundholding has been the mechanism for reducing prescribing costs, but the British Medical Journal says:

"Early reports of the effectiveness of fundholding in curbing prescribing costs has not been confirmed in its longer term study.".

There is one thing about GP fundholding on which the Government like to stay silent and everyone else agrees. A two-tier system is an inevitable part of GP fundholding. Some patients are fast-tracked for hospital appointments, while others have to wait longer.

The Secretary of State for Health has always denied that unfairness. This afternoon, it was not clear whether he was denying it or admitting it as his line of argument was somewhat confused, but in the past he has denied the unfairness. He said:

"The role of fundholding is not to allow a two-tier service",

but the evidence tells another story.

I have here a bulletin sent out by the hospitals in Sheffield. It shows the two-tier service in action. The first column reveals that cardiology patients of non-fundholders wait 26 weeks for an out-patient appointment, and the second column sets out the waiting time for patients of fundholders. Instead of waiting 26 weeks, patients of fundholders wait only 12 weeks. Dermatology patients of non-fundholders wait 26 weeks, while patients of fundholding GPs wait only nine weeks. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Dorrell: Perhaps the hon. Lady would prefer to make her own speech in her own way, but she is illustrating the force of my argument. Is it wrong to improve the service available to the patients of fundholders? If it is not wrong to improve the service to the patients of fundholders, is it then wrong to apply

[Mr. Dorrell]

pressure, as the hon. Lady and many others will do, to improve the service available to all patients of the health service? The hon. Lady is highlighting how fundholders are improving standards and that leads to pressure for improvement across the board. While she is talking about waiting times, she might also recount to the House how waiting times for out-patient and in-patient care have tumbled over the past five years, not least under the pressure created by fundholders.

Ms Harman: Hospitals, not GP fundholders, carry out operations. The document also deals with hip replacements in Sheffield. It no longer matters who is in greatest pain and needs a hip replacement and who finds it most difficult to get upstairs and has to sleep on the sofa on the ground floor because they cannot get to the bedroom. What matters is whether or not the patient's GP is a fundholder. In Sheffield hospitals, patients of non-fundholders have to wait up to 52 weeks for hip replacements, but patients of fundholding GPs, even if their condition is less serious, have to wait only three months.

The Secretary of State said that he wanted to know what was wrong. I shall tell him: it is the unfairness of a two-tier system. We are not talking about advantages won by GP fundholders; they are not carrying out the hip operations. The system simply provides unfair access to our hospitals.

Did the Secretary of State know about the position in Sheffield? Did he know about the two-tier bulletin for waiting times in Sheffield? Does he defend it?

Mr. Dorrell: Yes, I just did.

Ms Harman: He defends it.

Unfairness is built into the heart of the system of GP fundholding because the advantages of the patients of fundholding GPs—

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you ensure that *Hansard* shows that the Secretary of State said, from a sedentary position, "Yes, I do defend it"?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is not for the occupant of the Chair to determine what *Hansard* reporters record.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My concentration during the debate has been badly upset by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks), who at no stage has tried to intervene, but continually barracks from a sedentary position. Will you call him to order?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In an ideal world, there would be less barracking from both sides of the Chamber, from both the Back and Front Benches. It has been a lively debate so far.

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) is absolutely right. In the debate that the Secretary of State has called today, he has just endorsed the two-tier waiting-list system. That is a disgrace.

It is the same story across the country. In Scotland, the Glasgow royal infirmary issued a letter proposing to give priority to the patients of GP fundholders. In King's College hospital in my constituency in London, there are extra surgery sessions for fundholding patients only. As my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) said, it is the same in Halifax. I have a letter that was sent to a GP in her constituency from St. Luke's hospital. It states that

"we are not able to respond to your recent request to provide a psychology assessment/treatment service for your patient, and I am, therefore returning your letter of referral . . . We are only able to provide services . . . where we have contracts with fundholding practices".

When the Secretary of State responded to one of my hon. Friends, he tried to say that a new system was being developed. What is being developed is not a new system, but unequal access to an existing system. It is not just that the internal market is unfair; it is too expensive to run and it piles bureaucracy on to bureaucracy. Every GP fundholder has to have his own set of contracts and has to have a business manager in the practice. Each fundholding practice now employs a business manager who is paid twice as much—if not three times as much—as the practice nurse. The hospitals have to employ more managers to negotiate with the fundholder managers and the bill is huge—at least £80,000 extra in administration costs for each fundholding practice. With the current number of fundholders, that amounts to an extra £212 million a year on bureaucracy. There is no contribution to patient care, just more bureaucracy.

With the multiplicity of GP fundholders, there is no chance of developing what we want to see: an overall strategy for health services in each area. It is impossible for hospitals to plan from one year to the next. Like unfairness, instability is driven into the system by GP fundholding. We do not criticise the patients of GP fundholding; we do not criticise the fundholders. GP fundholding was not the idea of doctors; it was forced on them by the Government and there is still widespread opposition to it among GPs.

The Secretary of State misrepresented GPs' views. A survey in 1995 by *Pulse* magazine found that more than three quarters of GPs wanted fundholding abolished; half of all the fundholders wanted the scheme abolished. The GPs joining the fundholding scheme are not giving a vote of confidence to the fundholding scheme; many are simply trying to do the best for their patients in an unfair system. Unless GPs become fundholders, they have no right to choose where patients go for treatment; unless GPs become fundholders, they have no say in the planning of local services. Two thirds of GPs object to fundholding in principle, but half of them said that if other practices in their area started to become fundholders, they would have to apply too.

Because the fundholding scheme is fundamentally flawed, many doctors across the country are working together to remedy its defects. They are trying to make fairness in an unfair system; they are trying to make sense out of a senseless system. They are struggling to overcome bureaucracy.

In Hertfordshire, GP fundholders have tried to instil some strategy into the fragmentation of the NHS market. A joint strategy working group there incorporates

fundholders and non-fundholding GPs, public health, Hertfordshire health agency and the local medical committee. The group has created a Hertfordshire-wide policy where the fundholders agree to purchase within the policy.

In Winchester, an attempt has been made to mitigate the two-tier system by using fundholders' budgets to pay for operations for the patients of non-fundholders, who would otherwise have to wait until after April for their operations. In Newham, GPs have tried, single-handed, to influence the purchasing decisions of the health authority by combining to create the Newham Innercity Multifund.

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): I am grateful that the hon. Lady has at last decided to give way on a constituency point. Does she not understand that if the fundholders had not been in a position to manage their budgets to make savings, the money would not have been available for health care in my constituency? That is the point.

Ms Harman: No, that is not the point. The situation was unfair: neither the GP fundholders nor the non-fundholders found it acceptable, so they all got together to pool their resources so that the fundholders could help out the non-fundholders in an unfair system. That is an example not of the system working, but of good people on the ground trying to mitigate the unfairness of the Tory system, and I applaud them for that.

All the examples that I have given show GPs struggling to improve their care for patients despite the problems of fundholding. The Labour party will build on their work and will replace fundholding with GP commissioning—a framework for primary care that will allow all GPs to have a role in shaping local health services.

All GPs will have substantial new powers and opportunities under Labour's scheme for GP commissioning. First, all GPs will be able to refer their patients to the hospital or specialist they want so that GPs can ensure that their patients are in the right hands without the tangle of red tape. Secondly, Labour offers all GPs an enhanced role in the planning and public health functions of the health authorities. GPs and the health authority will team up to commission health care. There are a number of models, so the relationship between the two can be flexible. But, under our system, health authority commissioning decisions will have genuinely to reflect the views and experiences of local GPs. GPs will have the chance to innovate, while bureaucracy can be cut and strategic planning maintained.

GP commissioning is, as the Secretary of State acknowledged, already evolving throughout the country: more than 60 commissioning groups are in operation, representing more than 5,000 GPs and covering 11 million patients. The range of commissioning models is still developing. In Nottinghamshire, a commissioning group has been established by 200 GPs, caring for nearly 400,000 patients. They have achieved many improvements in patient care. In Tamworth, first-wave fundholders frustrated with the limitations of fundholding have taken up commissioning instead. Working with non-fundholders and the South Staffordshire health commission, they have created a health commissioning group. They say that commissioning is the way in which the NHS should work in the future.

The Tory internal market in the NHS creates division. It sets patient against patient, doctor against doctor and hospital against hospital. Today, the Secretary of State has sought to manufacture further division with his motion. He has tried to play fundholding GPs against non-fundholding GPs. He realised that it did not work and so he backed off. His strategy, however, is widely understood. One fundholding GP, Dr. Marcoolyn, observed that the Government

"are never happier than with divide and rule situations."

When they cannot find those situations, they create them.

The debate should not be about dividing GP from GP or fundholders from non-fundholders. It should be about what the Government could be doing to improve primary care, but the Tories are fixated on one divisive ideological model for primary care—GP fundholding. Their only new ideas for primary care are that GPs should take on casualty work to help out the hospitals because of the hospital crisis, and backing private GPs to set the standard for all other GPs. We have, "Dorrell backs private GPs"—an interesting suggestion that he did not introduce in the debate today. Perhaps we shall hear that he has thought better of it.

The Tories are prisoners of their own policies, and they are afraid to listen to the experience of GPs and patients. Labour is moving forward, listening to GPs and patients and building on the best practice of all GPs to create a primary care service fit for the millennium. The Tory party is not interested in patients, the state of the NHS or the condition of Britain. It is interested only in clinging on to power. The Tory party has, as evidenced today, shut down the business of government and is simply trying to act like a propaganda machine, and is using the House to do so. *[Interruption.]* In effect, this has been an Opposition—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I understand that an hon. Member used the word "hypocrite" in relation to another hon. Member. If that is correct, will the hon. Member please withdraw the word immediately?

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): It was another word, but if the context is offending you, of course I withdraw.

Hon. Members: What?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I would be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would speak slowly and clearly so that I can hear.

Mr. Dicks: I withdraw the word "hypocrite" and use the words "double standard".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am most grateful.

Ms Harman: In effect, this has been an Opposition day debate. The tables in British politics have now turned. We are an Opposition preparing for government, and the Conservatives are a Government preparing for opposition.

5.23 pm

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): It is extremely helpful that we have the opportunity today to expose the differences between the Government and the Labour party

[Mrs. Marion Roe]

on GP fundholding. It is about time that we began to hear what the Labour party proposes for health care. I make my contribution to the debate not only as Chairman of the Select Committee on Health but as the Member of Parliament for Broxbourne, and I shall outline the health services that are available to my constituents in Hertfordshire.

It will not be a surprise to anybody to hear that, during the Select Committee's inquiries into priorities in the national health service—both in the drugs budget and in purchasing—the role of GP fundholders was brought to our attention. In the NHS drugs budget inquiry in 1994, we received evidence that focused on GP fundholders' management of their budgets. We were informed that fundholders had consistently spent considerably less on drugs than had non-fundholders, despite their budget allocation being set on an identical formula. We were given examples. In Mersey, although real costs had increased, 70 per cent. of fundholders had reduced their prescribing costs in relation to their set budgets. In the five months from April to August 1993, Oxford regional health authority published figures that showed a 9 per cent. difference above permitted target growth for fundholders as against non-fundholders.

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Roe: Not at the moment. When I have finished this point, I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Lincolnshire showed a 2 per cent. lower rise in drugs costs between fundholders and non-fundholders. In Derbyshire, fundholders underspent their budgets by 1 per cent. Non-fundholders overspent theirs by 8 per cent.

We were given three reasons for those results: first, the incentive of being able to reinvest the resulting savings for the benefit of patients; secondly, the ability to contract directly for the minimal use of expensive drugs emanating from hospital prescribing; and, thirdly, the self-imposed commitment required in fundholding health plans to show improvement in the quality and value for money of the delivery of health care. I should also add that we were assured that, in attempting to reduce prescribing costs, fundholders accept that rational prescribing does not necessarily mean cheap prescribing, but the financial incentive and necessary commitment make fundholders much more aware of the general headings under which drug expenditure can be reduced. Effective and appropriate prescribing with a value for money principle must be a worthwhile goal that we would all support.

Mr. Galbraith: The hon. Lady raises a matter about which there is some evidence rather than just opinions. She will be aware that much of the evidence that she quotes is for the first year of fundholding. A significant reduction in prescribing costs was confirmed in a paper published in the *British Medical Journal* in 1993. Perhaps she has not read the paper that was published in the BMJ on 9 December last year. I quote from the abstract of the conclusions, which says:

"Early reports of the effectiveness of fundholding in curbing prescribing costs have not been confirmed in this longer term study."

The claims that she makes were for the first year only, and were due to GP fundholders being given more money at the start. They were not borne out in the longer term.

Mrs. Roe: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing that to my attention, but I should explain to him that, during the course of our inquiry, evidence was given to us that showed that on many occasions doctors were handing over a prescription to a patient to get them out of the surgery, which I understand had frequently been the case in the past, and the emphasis was on more appropriate prescribing—not just the budget itself—to benefit the patient.

In its purchasing inquiry, the report of which was published in January 1995, the Health Select Committee questioned five fundholders. When asked:

"What changes have you made to secondary care services since becoming involved in commissioning and what changes are you expecting in the next 3 to 5 years?",

the East Shropshire GP commissioning group replied—the reply is headed "Impact on Secondary Care"—

"We have virtually eliminated any waiting time for GP direct access physiotherapy. We have influenced the nature of the outpatient experience for patients, driving towards innovative 'one stop' clinics whereby the patient gets everything necessary for operation work-up done in one afternoon rather than up to four visits to hospital. In the next three years, if we still exist, we would expect to achieve much closer integration of the secondary and primary services, possibly with clinicians moving out from the hospital base into the primary care setting.

We would hope to achieve better communication between consultants and GPs, better measurement of outcome and better quality standards in the purchasing contracts, based upon following an individual patient through the system (not currently possible on the information available to the district health authority)".

Surely all of us, especially patients, would approve of that statement.

I was pleased that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) drew attention to the innovative ideas that we are implementing in Hertfordshire. We feel that we lead the field in the provision of high-quality health care. My Broxbourne constituency contains 15 GP practices with a combined list size of 97,185; 11 practices are fundholding, and have a combined list size of 92,935. GP fundholders comprise 73 per cent. of practices in Broxbourne, and serve 96 per cent. of all patients. Their combined budgets in 1995-96 amount to nearly £15 million.

I have no doubt that GP fundholders can claim to be at the leading edge of implementation of the Government's policy of a primary care-led national health service. From the start of the scheme, they have developed services in their own surgeries that are convenient for patients, avoid inappropriate use of hospital facilities and provide better value for money. For example, there are outposted out-patient clinics where hospital consultants hold regular clinics in different specialties. That helps to develop GPs' specialist skills, and has frequently led to jointly agreed protocols for hospital referral. Fundholders have also contracted for, or directly employed, physiotherapists, counsellors, dieticians, chiropodists, nurse practitioners and other professionals, and carry out an extended range of minor surgery procedures in their own surgeries.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I ask the hon. Lady a question that my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham

(Ms Harman) asked the Secretary of State? The hon. Lady, who chairs the Health Select Committee, has seen the Sheffield document that showed two different waiting lists for the same discipline in a certain hospital. Does she accept that a two-tier system operates there?

Mrs. Roe: I have not seen that document. It has been displayed across the Chamber, but I have not had an opportunity to read it. I was going to make the point that in Hertfordshire there is no two-tier system. If the hon. Gentleman visits my constituency, I will demonstrate to him that the system there is operating very effectively for the benefit of patients. I shall, of course, look at the document, and I am sure that my colleagues on the Select Committee will do the same. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) has been in the House long enough to know what the procedures are.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I know the procedures.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman knows the procedures, he should not have crossed the Floor as he just did.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If I may say so, I am entitled to sit on the Conservative Benches.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows the procedures of the House full well. He knows that he should not have crossed the Floor of the House with that document.

Mrs. Roe: The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) has tried to make his point in a rather forceful way. I listened to what he had to say, and I have told him that, as Chairman of the Select Committee, I shall look at the document when I have an opportunity to do so.

Mr. David Ashby (North-West Leicestershire): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Roe: I am told that a number of other hon. Members wish to speak. I have already given way twice; my hon. Friend will be able to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Through an innovative and flexible approach to health care, GP fundholders in my constituency have now made available an extensive range of diagnostic investigations and screening including blood tests, electrocardiograms, audiology screening before referral to an ear, nose and throat surgeon and ultrasound screening. They are working increasingly closely with hospital colleagues in developing protocols for referrals, treatment and discharge. They have increased the number of community and practice nursing staff to cope with the increased work load as hospital lengths of stay shorten, more day-case surgery is undertaken and the move from secondary to primary care settings accelerates.

Most GP fundholders place contracts with trusts on a "cost per case" basis, which has led to improved procedure-based costing by trusts and to more timely communications. That is very important. Fundholders are also working closely with the Hertfordshire health agency in developing joint approaches to contracting, and in reviewing the appropriateness and effectiveness of different treatments.

Those of us who represent Hertfordshire constituencies are proud of the way in which the whole local medical profession is delivering health services to our constituents. I assure the hon. Member for Workington that no two-tier system operates in my area: equity of service for all patients is an acknowledged priority. Moreover, there are four total-purchasing pilot projects in the county, which will begin purchasing all health services in April.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Roe: No. I want to finish my speech.

Given my experience as the Health Select Committee Chairman and my work in the constituency, I believe that GP fundholders are doing an excellent job in putting the interests of their patients first and ensuring that they receive a high-quality service within the NHS. There is no doubt that fundholders are a success, and also very popular with patients. They have set a standard for others to follow, and I believe that they should be encouraged and assisted to flourish and develop in the future.

5.38 pm

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I feel very privileged to speak in the debate, mainly because I have done what the Secretary of State suggested and listened to some of the comments of GPs who are members of the non-fundholding consortium that operates in Nottingham. On the basis of those comments, I shall address the seven deadly simplicities offered by the Government in defence of their policy on fundholding, and the four more sensible options that might result from adopting the same course as the non-fundholding group in Nottingham. It may help hon. Members to know about the non-fundholding consortium's structure. It has an elected committee of 13 general practitioners, who represent more than 200 GPs in the city. Between them, they cover more than 400,000 patients. The consortium has proved so successful that it is contracted to advise Nottingham health authority on its purchasing policies.

The consortium's objectives were set out about a year ago by Dr. Doug Black, Dr. Alan Birchall and Dr. Ian Trimble in the *British Medical Journal*. They said that they could

"collectively offer more time and knowledge to the contracting process while minimising the impact on clinical workload. As a large purchaser with low management costs the group has secured access to quality secondary care which is equitably available to all patients, preventing the development of a local two tier service."

It is in that context that I shall deal with the first of the simplicities and inaccuracies that the Government offer us.

The Minister for Health recently said that GP fundholders' savings far outweighed their administrative costs. It was on that basis, he said, that fundholding saves money. Let me refer him and hon. Members to last year's Audit Commission report. Paragraph 37 pointed out that, of the £19 million-worth of savings that had been made by fundholders,

[Mr. Alan Simpson]

35 per cent. had been spent on premises and 25 per cent. on office furnishings. One Nottingham GP pointed out in *Pulse* that the report showed that

"of the £19 million of fundholders' savings actually spent by 1993/4, less than 20 per cent. was spent directly on patient care. If this pattern continues, fundholders will re-invest less than £13 million of the 1993/4 savings on patient care."

He added that, if that trend continues

"fundholding will have resulted in nearly £90 million . . . being withdrawn from patient care in a single year."

That is a pattern not of value for money spending, but of a profligate waste of money. In Nottingham, 75 per cent. of general practitioners are non-fundholders. The administrative costs in Nottingham are the lowest in the Trent region. That achievement is a direct result of the non-fundholding consortium's role and contribution.

The second magical myth that the Government have peddled is that fundholding reduces drug spending. A recently completed study in Nottingham shows, however, that, over a four-year period, fundholding GPs' prescribing bills have been rising faster than those of non-fundholding GPs. It is an objective fact that, in Nottingham, non-fundholding GPs' cost for drugs per prescribing unit is almost £3 less than that of fundholders. Although non-fundholders lay claim to that and view it as a virtue, they also point out that, if the House genuinely wanted to understand the key issues in prescribing costs, it should not simply compare fundholders with non-fundholders but should consider the extent to which any savings are dwarfed by the power and pressure exerted by the pharmaceutical companies in relation to the total drugs bill. A different way of pursuing substantial savings on the drugs bill would be to link hospital and prescribing budgets at district level. That would offer direct incentives for consultants to work alongside their GP colleagues to promote more effective use of budgets.

The third fantasy that we were offered is that fundholding is popular with GPs. Last year in Nottingham, however, not a single GP moved from non-fundholding to fundholding. A meeting that was scheduled to be held on the invitation of the Health and Safety Executive, to promote fundholding, had to be cancelled because it could not attract GPs to attend—such is the measure of fundholding's popularity. All that must be viewed against the backcloth of nearly five years of direct financial incentives to GPs to opt out of non-fundholding status.

I did not understand the Secretary of State for Health when he said that the funding arrangements for fundholder GPs did not differ from those for non-fundholder GPs. The consortium in Nottingham tells me clearly that fundholders are paid on an activity basis, that non-fundholders are paid on a capitation basis and that Government rules restrict the way in which non-fundholders can use any savings that they make collectively. The aim of the unequal approach to funding is to drive GPs out of the non-fundholding sector.

The fourth Government myth is the notion that fundholding is popular with patients. A *Which?* report last year pointed out that about 59 per cent. of patients did not know whether or not their GP was a fundholder. We can all understand and excuse that: it will not necessarily be the biggest issue in a person's life. What was more significant was that the survey accepted that lack of knowledge and asked patients whether they were getting better or worse access to their GP. It found that more fundholding GP patients were having difficulty in gaining such access than non-fundholding GP patients. So the claim that fundholding is popular is itself somewhat dubious and does not stand up.

The Government then tell us that fundholders influence service provision. In some cases, they do—evidence of a two-tier system can be seen in the Sheffield list—but they do so at the cost of other patients. Ironically, some of this is beginning to boomerang on Government policy. The National Association of Fund Holding Practices recently surveyed its members and found that a high proportion of them were experiencing increasing prices because of demands by trusts, after purchasing budgets had been set. Their members were having to pay increased moneys to purchase the extra services that they wanted. That is hardly a sensible way of dealing with serious, overall reductions in patient waiting lists.

Again, in Nottingham, the non-fundholding consortium's role has been precisely what the Secretary of State wished: to exercise a collective role in reducing patient waiting lists. It has been astonishingly successful. I identify just three of the sectors where there have been amazing results. At the Queen's medical centre, a teaching hospital in my constituency, the waiting lists for non-urgent, out-patient operations went down considerably. For example, the waiting list for ear, nose and throat operations went down by 30 per cent., in the ophthalmology department it went down by 48 per cent. and in the orthopaedics department it went down by 15 per cent. Overall, waiting lists have gone down by 14 per cent. That is what can be achieved by GPs acting collectively in non-fundholding consortiums.

The sixth claim that the Government make is that fundholding promotes change through market forces. Again, the evidence from fundholders is that it takes a huge amount of time to negotiate contracts. Many of them are simply signing copycat contracts that have been written by the hospital trust. Fundholding has not shifted the basis of leverage in terms of innovation. GPs tell me that, although they have a sense of what they can do in terms of patient care and meeting patient needs, if they are drawn into individual contract negotiations, they do not have the time or expertise to view the broader picture and to assimilate epidemiological evidence. That task must be done at a collective level.

The seventh, and the last, of the fabulous myths and simplicities that we have been offered is that fundholding ensures that the NHS is primary care led. The simple fact is that, in negotiations between a GP and a hospital, an individual practice is dwarfed by the power of the large providers, and their ability to set the agenda.

In Nottingham, the non-fundholding consortium proposes that an elected group of GPs should share the responsibility for Nottingham's budget with the executive of Nottingham health commission. That would give an innovative, primary-care edge to the whole purchasing process.

The real excitement about the debate that we should be having lies in the possibilities beyond the fundholding absurdity. Again, Nottingham has come up with an exciting idea—that of a total commissioning project based

on four assumptions. The first is the shared fiscal responsibility that I have already mentioned. That would be not an abrogation of responsibility, not a "grab it for yourself and run as far as you can" notion of responsibility, but the establishment of a common and collective responsibility for commissioning, in the interests of all patients.

The second requirement is that the absurdities and inconsistencies between the funding offered to different GPs should be removed. The consortium wants us to understand the need to accelerate the move towards capitation-based budgets at regional, district and practice level.

Thirdly, the House should acknowledge the value of allowing for virement between budgets at a district level. If drug budgets are overspent, money now automatically comes out of next year's health service allocation. There is already a direct linkage, but virement at a local level would offer incentives for consultants to work with GPs to get the maximum out of the budget, in the interests of all their patients.

Finally, the group asks for funding for information technology advances. It is a recognition of the fact that if the different elements can act collectively, they can get far more out of the system, in the interests of patients, than if they all set off down separate paths.

The group has carried out costings for the project, showing that there would be an overall saving of £3 million, compared with any equivalent move to push an extension of fundholding. That is the local Nottingham advantage that would arise simply from any such approach. If we extended the idea across the country, to the 60 or more commissioning units set up by non-fundholding practices, the benefits would be spread even more widely.

We must recognise that the choice is between being stuck in a system that will increasingly confer benefits only on the few, and the opportunity of delivering substantial benefits to the many. The new approach that I have described would not be a question of "no change"; it would bring substantive change for the vast majority of people and prospective patients, and we must consider that.

Of course Labour must scrap GP fundholding, but the real debate—the debate that we should be having now—is about how to replace it with a national programme that incorporates the visionary lessons, and a far more efficient system, that are already being learnt both in Nottingham and by other GP non-fundholding commissioning groups across the country. The challenge is to weld those into a national strategy to restore the structure of a single-tier national health service.

5.53 pm

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I am glad to have the opportunity to make a brief speech in support of the motion. Fundholding has a proven record of success, and it is one more milestone on the road of the Government's achievements in modernising, improving and enhancing our British health service. It cannot be said often enough that our health service today is better than it has ever been in the whole of its history.

Fundholding has indeed done all that the motion says it has. Fundholding doctors know from experience how advantageous it has been for patients, in enhancing primary care and in giving doctors the tools with which to improve their practices.

Doctors who have learnt the advantages at first hand have been talking to their friends, and fundholding is soaring. At the beginning of 1991-92 only 7 per cent. of practices were fundholding. In two months' time the proportion will be 51 per cent. That alone, quite apart from anything that my right hon. and hon. Friends or I may say, is a clear sign of how much the GPs like fundholding systems.

Fundholding has brought so many advantages to patients that I have time to list only a few of them. The range of treatment now available has now improved so much since fundholding started. The quality of care has improved and, as the Opposition agree, waiting lists are much shorter. There has been a reduction in bureaucracy, and services such as chiropody, which is most important for elderly people and makes all the difference to their lives and to whether they can get about without pain and discomfort, have improved.

The minor operations done by doctors in their practices since fundholding began have also helped a great deal. I could also say much about dermatology, because I was closely involved for a long time as the president of one of the groups of people in my area who suffer from skin diseases. Treatment for all such conditions and many others are now available within practices.

That has made a tremendous difference to the burdens that hospitals have to bear. Hospitals today are carrying out more and more complicated operations and treatments, and they need all the alleviation of their work load that can be provided. Fundholding has made an important contribution there. As my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) said, doctors can now negotiate directly with hospital consultants in a way that was not possible before. That, too, has been a help.

Practice nurses are important, because their presence has improved primary care. I was amazed when I learned that since fundholding was introduced the number of practice nurses has increased by 261 per cent. That is marvellous news. I spoke to a practice nurse recently, and she was eulogistic in her support of what had happened in fundholding practices.

Doctors have been able to use the savings to improve their waiting rooms, and in other small ways whereby patients' comfort can be increased. That is most important. Fundholding has given doctors a power over their own domain that they did not have before.

I have always felt that those nearest the point where money is spent, those who know the score and know the specific problems, should decide how money should be allocated. That is equally true of school budgets. Those, too, are better decided by heads and governors than by education committees. Doctors running practices know better than health authorities where money is most needed and how it should be spent.

The Labour party disagrees with all that—at least, I think that it does. It is sometimes difficult to figure out what Labour Members are really saying—especially now we know that, although the motion uses the words of the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), the Labour party apparently proposes to vote against what she said.

[Dame Jill Knight]

Labour's response to the fact that the treatment of patients is very much better than it was is absolutely typical. Labour cannot deny that patients are receiving much better treatment. Indeed, Opposition Members are not advancing that argument—

Mr. Hinchliffe *rose—*

Dame Jill Knight: I said that I would make a brief speech. The Opposition are whingeing and whining that patients of doctors who are not fundholders are disadvantaged. The argument is not that patients of fundholding practices are getting a bad deal. Those patients are getting such a good deal that it infuriates the Labour party because the service for everybody else is not improving as well.

Mr. Hinchliffe: They are getting no service. That is the problem.

Dame Jill Knight: I understand that constant attention is paid to ensuring that money is as fairly allocated as possible between fundholding practices and non-fundholding practices. The difference is that fundholding practices are managing their money much better.

Conservative Members want the benefits that patients of fundholders receive to be spread all over the place. There is no absolute ban on the number of doctors who can become fundholders. There is a stipulation about the size of the practice, but many doctors have overcome that problem by amalgamating with other practices. The Government have not said, as one would think from listening to Labour Members, that nobody else is allowed to become a fundholder because the number is limited. Conservative Members are trying to spread far wider the undoubted benefits of fundholding, which is absolutely right and proper.

The Opposition will have problems if they rubbish fundholding. Although their argument today has not been that fundholding is wrong, they still want to get rid of it. That is extraordinary. The Labour party should recognise that the British Medical Association has given fundholding the seal of approval for good housekeeping, and patients most certainly approve of it.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) could not wait to hear the rest of the debate and has already left the Chamber as I wanted to raise a particular point with him. He said that patients were not very keen on fundholding. If patients are receiving so much better treatment from fundholding doctors, why should they not be keen on the system? They are very keen indeed.

The support for fundholding among doctors who have experienced it is undeniable. The National Audit Office has approved of it; the Public Accounts Committee has said what a good system it is. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) seemed to imply that the King's Fund did not approve of the system. I wonder whether she has read the 1994 report which evaluated NHS reforms and described fundholding as one of the major successes of the reforms. So how can the hon. Lady suggest that the King's Fund is not in favour of fundholding?

It is clear that the Labour party will meet strong opposition to its policy to abolish fundholding. I wonder whether it will include that policy in its manifesto at the next election.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Yes.

Dame Jill Knight: Good—that will mean many thousands more votes for us. What a good idea that is. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members are stuck with it now. They will have to put it in the party's manifesto. Will they argue with the BMA, doctors, patients and the King's Fund? They should ask themselves whether all those people can be wrong. Labour is in a tizzy—it is in a mess.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Peckham has left the Chamber as I should have liked to draw her attention to the many instances in her speech when she seemed to be facing both ways. For instance, she complained that money which ought to be used for patients was wasted in fundholding practices on management, but at the same time she had to admit that those patients got better care than any patients of non-fundholding practices. She cannot have it both ways, although she loves to try.

I do not know what the Labour party intends to do, although it has proposed some alternatives—joint commissioning came up again today. So far as I can gather, there is little support for that among doctors who happen to be in the Labour party. I read that the Labour party is suggesting shadow budgets. Labour Members are so used to being shadows that they advocate them even for doctors. Long may they continue being shadows.

If the Labour party removes real money—I understand that that is what having shadow budgets means—real control will go as well. Running a medical practice is not a game of Monopoly, and Labour Members had better understand that. Other Members wish to speak, so I will conclude my speech. I strongly support the motion.

6.5 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Anybody without prior knowledge of the subject who heard this debate would have thought that it was a dialogue of the deaf and would probably have left without being further enlightened. Although the benefits and disbenefits of fundholding have been cited, nobody so far has explained what fundholding is intended to achieve. I shall describe why I think that the debate has so far been a dialogue of the deaf.

The position of my right hon. and hon. Friends is clear from the amendment that we tabled. Although Madam Speaker did not select it for debate, it is on the Order Paper and sets out what we believe. There are problems with the other two expressions of party opinion. The Government motion, which is fine so far as it goes, does not admit that there is anything wrong with the system at all.

The Labour party's amendment, which rightly points to the failures of the system, does not specifically address the question asked by, for example, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight). Does it imply the abolition of fundholding? I have read the Labour party policy document and I know that it proposes the replacement of fundholding with commissioning, but the question of abolition is not answered. Fundholding GPs would want to know the answer to that question.

Despite this rather unsophisticated debate, it is none the less obvious why there is such a difference of view. It is clear that the system that the Government set up to devolve power to GPs by giving them budgets enabling them to buy their own health care for a specific list of activities—obviously not forms of acute care and the like—has been welcomed by some GPs, who see it as an advantage. It is also abundantly clear that the system has produced innovation and a knock-on effect on the way in which other practices are organised.

Disparity of treatment in some areas—described in the document to which the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) referred, and which, courtesy of the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), has found its way to the other side of the Chamber—has arisen because when hospitals are deciding who is first on the list for treatment, they have to make a choice between keeping fundholding practices happy and keeping the local health authority happy. Non-fundholding GP practices do not have the individual clout of fundholding practices as customers in the marketplace. For example, if GP fundholders do not get put first in the list, they may take their business to another provider or trust. Therefore, the trust will lose out and its budget and prospects will be reduced. That is why there is a difference.

It may be true that the formula for allocating money in terms of patients is more or less similar, but the providers are dealing with two different sets of people—GPs, who are buying services directly, and the local health authority, which is the indirect purchaser. The health authority is likely to continue to be a purchaser, as the local health authority for the place where the trust is will probably be providing either community care services or acute services from a hospital. It is quite explicable as to why there are benefits for many patients and for fundholders. Fundholders get to the top of the list in some places, even though that is not written into the system and is not part of the defined difference between fundholding and non-fundholding GPs.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) made a good speech and asked some pertinent questions. He alluded to the fact that proper criticisms can be made of the fundholding system. My right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) visited the Mid Devon Family Doctors commissioning group in Cullompton last autumn. One of the doctors at that practice, Michael Dixon, wrote to me enclosing the group's document. The introduction illustrates why at present there is a two-tier system. If the Government would accept only that, we could make some progress.

Mr. Milburn: The Minister of State does accept that.

Mr. Hughes: He has certainly defended the system, but he has not formally accepted—so far as I am aware—that there is a two-tier system. The introduction to the Mid Devon group's document states:

"We are quite happy with the pluralist system of purchasing, which allows for GP commissioning groups and fundholders, but the unnecessary and unreasonable bias in favour of fundholding must end. No-one doubts that historically fundholders have been over-funded. Furthermore, they, but not GP commissioning groups, are provided gratis with money for management and computers from outside funds (approximately £35,000 per practice). It is also unfair that fundholders are able to substantially increase their expenditure on practice staff over non-fundholders by committed overspends on their staff budgets. It is neither fair nor ethical that underspends (which averaged £59,000 per practice in Devon last year), can be spent on furniture, equipment and buildings to the financial benefit of the practice and the partners themselves."

According to that document, 99 per cent. of fundholders in Devon use underspend money in that way. The national figure is 75 per cent. The document continues:

"Doubly absurd are the present rules whereby the local Health Authority (and thus indirectly the patients of non-fundholding practices) have to pay out for any fundholding practice that overspends."

That is true. If a fundholding practice overspends, the tab gets picked up by the health authority, which has to divide the rest of its budget between other practices. That is clearly unfair, and the Government ought to recognise that.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) received a letter from Dr. Mark Beer of Chumleigh in my hon. Friend's constituency. Dr. Beer quoted from a letter from Dr. Rosemary MacRae of Rainford, St. Helens, that was published in the December issue of *Financial Pulse*, entitled:

"Why should GP fundholding savings become 'assets'?"

Dr. MacRae's letter states:

"I regret I was not appalled to read that a retiring partner is entitled to a share of assets bought from fundholding savings . . . I merely read it with cynicism and resignation.

It seems unjust that money allocated as such can be 'saved' and invested in assets that become the property of the GP. It suggests too much money was allocated in the first place, the services bought were not comprehensive, or there has been inordinate waste in the way patient care has been financed in the past."

Dr. Beer wrote to my hon. Friend, saying:

"Would your Health Spokesperson be interested in this . . . ? I am appalled by the implications as I am sure most of the population would be. There should be questions in the House!"

I have now posed that question in the House, and I hope the Minister will respond to it. Can he explain how certain people can stack up assets by buying that advantage while others lose out because the total amount of health service money allocated in any area is, by definition, limited?

There is no secret about the Liberal Democrats' position and policy. I believe that the Minister has been sent a copy of the policy document approved at our conference last autumn and entitled, "Building on the Best of the NHS". The document sets out our proposals for unifying the service in the way we have set down in our amendment. Very simply, the document states that there should be

"a unified system of funding for all GPs . . . All GPs would be allocated funds by their joint commissioning agencies on the same basis as the joint commissioning agency are allocated funds by the Department of Health."

That could happen in one of three ways for the individual doctor and practice. First, the doctor would be able to manage his budget independently, although subject to strict accreditation and the expenditure of annual savings in accordance with plans agreed with the health authority. The important thing about that is that GPs and the health authority must agree on a way forward. Secondly, the doctor could manage his funds as part of a consortium. Thirdly, if those options were not acceptable, the local health board could be asked to manage the budget directly as the GP's agent.

There are two fundamental planks on which we will go forward. First, we need negotiation between the health authority and GPs as to what the plan for the area should

[Mr. Hughes]

be within which GPs work. GPs must also retain the right to buy out of the local authority area if they wish to do so. Secondly, fundholding would therefore be able to continue. In answer to the hon. Member for Edgbaston, we would not propose to abolish fundholding, and she is right to ask Labour the same question.

The Government must come clean about the fact that the present system is unfair, even if—although I am rather sceptical about this—they may not have intended that to be so. Labour must come clean as to whether it would abolish fundholding. We believe that there is a way forward which recognises the increased power of GPs, but requires them to be partners with all the other GPs and the health authority in their area in planning the provision for all of the services that they provide as part of the primary care service in this country.

6.16 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): When I first stood to become a Member of Parliament in 1987, I fought the election on the proud boast that the Government had not only replaced health funding lost through inflation, but had gone on to spend an extra 50 per cent. per annum on the health service. Today, that figure is 72 per cent. over and above inflation.

I could not help thinking, however, that that increased money did not seem to have the right effect for my constituents, who, as patients, felt helpless in the face of the vast monolith of bureaucracy. It seemed to me that the most obvious thing was to try to get the clout in obtaining health care as close to the patients as possible. That is precisely what fundholding practices are all about, and the concept is central to the NHS reforms.

We have heard time and time again today the allegations about a two-tier NHS. I wish to bring the House's attention to the independent evaluation of fundholding conducted by Professor Glennerster of the London School of Economics, who said categorically that arguing for the abolition of fundholding on the ground that it causes a two-tier service is perverse. He said:

> "It is akin to the philosophical paradox that equality in human needs can best be achieved by starving everyone. Equality is best pursued by seeking to maximise opportunities, not to minimise them—levelling up not down".

That is precisely the point.

The particular opportunity to which I wish to draw attention—very rapidly—is obtaining service locally. When I became a Member of Parliament, the Gravesend and North Kent hospital was being reorganised—along with two hospitals in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn)—under the old-style NHS, the idea being to centralise departments.

When I asked how that helped my constituents who had to travel a long way, the answer was, "Consultants must be all together, nice and cosy. Your patients must travel long distances at great inconvenience, and queue up for their appointments. As consultants, our time is more important than that of the general public who are to be served." Basically, it was the "We know best" syndrome.

Consultants said that the best health care could come only from centralised hospital provision via consultants, but that idea was completely blown when I went to see the Marshlands practice, the first fundholding practice in my constituency. I was fascinated to find that it had contracted for a consultant physician to come in once a week, a surgical consultant to come in fortnightly, and a neurological consultant to come in monthly. I asked how that could be possible in the light of what the consultants had said. I was told, "It is simple. If we wave a cheque, the consultants come running. They are just like anyone else. They respond to funding."

What happened in that case? The patients were seen by experts in the local surgery in their own village. It took less time, cost less, and the practice found it had a 50 per cent. saving in the budget. What happened to the saving? It went towards clearing the hip replacement queue in the practice. All the patients in the queue were dealt with immediately. It also went on investment in equipment and skills, so yet further patients were seen in-house without the need to travel long distances to hospitals.

For example, the practice bought cystoscopy equipment, the consultant handles it locally, and the treatments are done locally. Minor operations are done locally. Investigations such as computerised tomography scanning and those using exercise electrocardiographs are done locally. As a result, that surgery alone—there are many more now—is seeing 25 per cent. more patients, and seeing them faster. Fundholding is for the greater convenience of the patients. In the process, the practice has unclogged hospital waiting lists in our area.

In the constituency of Gravesham, more than half of my constituents are served by fundholding practices. If fundholding were abolished, patients and GPs would be dismayed. I intend to circulate the speech of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), because she demolished Opposition education policy last week, and she is demolishing their health policy this week. That is a gift sent from St. Paul's girls school—the well-known public school—to the Tories.

6.21 pm

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): GP fundholding is an untested political experiment, so for this debate I thought I might peruse the literature for its effects—old habits die hard. Interestingly, while there is much in the literature, most of it is no more than assertion and opinion. It lacks any scientific rigour or fact. I will deal with some of those assertions, but then I hope to come to the few facts we have.

I gather from the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) that general practice fundholding brings medicine closer to the patients. I find it ludicrous to suggest that the fact that one holds a budget makes one closer to the patient. However, there is just as good an explanation of something that makes one more distant from the patient. The doctor-patient relationship is based on trust. Once one imposes a financial constraint on it, that trust is lost, and, if anything, the relationship is further apart.

The Secretary of State and others said that there were new initiatives in GP fundholding, thereby decrying non-fundholding practices, as though they do not have new initiatives. However, the so-called new initiatives in fundholding are all completely untested and untried. That was one of the great problems. Are they of value? Are they appropriate? That is something we have not even begun to consider.

A third claim about GP fundholding is that it will help us to achieve the priorities for the health service. That was claimed by Geoffrey Scaife, the chief executive of the national health service in Scotland. I find such claims ludicrous. The priorities include cancer, accidents and coronary artery disease. A GP might see three cancer patients in his or her practice each year, so how on earth can he or she make choices about priorities and how those should be delivered by fundholding? That is ludicrous.

The fourth claim made by the Secretary of State was that somehow or other GP fundholding is more efficient. On that we have some evidence—no more assertions. The hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Health, touched on that. She sought to describe how GP fundholders have reduced their drugs budget more significantly than non-fundholders. There might be reasons why that happens throughout general practices that become fundholding. Time does not allow me to go into detail about why the costs and amounts they were given might have been overestimated. Much activity was also underestimated in the practices.

Let us apply the argument to the drugs budget, and the evidence that fundholders are more effective. We must not talk about assertions, beliefs and political dogma—let us look at the evidence.

There was some initial evidence from the *British Medical Journal*, which I quoted earlier. I saw the Minister laughing when the BMJ was mentioned, as though that made the evidence invalid. He ought to know that it is a scientific, not a house, journal. The conclusion of the original paper from Bradlow and Coulter in the BMJ edition 1993;307:1186-9 was:

"Fundholding has helped to curb increases in prescribing costs".

That was the conclusion mentioned by the hon. Member for Broxbourne.

There were many reasons why that might have been so, however, and the curb in increases might have fallen off, so a follow-up study was carried out, which was reported in volume 311 of the BMJ on 9 December 1995—again by Brown, Surender, Bradlow, Coulter and Doll. Their conclusion was:

"Early reports of the effectiveness of fundholding in curbing prescribing costs have not been confirmed in this longer term study".

That is the evidence, never mind any more assertions. That shows us that the needs and pressures of patients are the main determinants of clinical practice—not the organisation and the budgets, but the necessity for managing and treating patients in the best way. That is what we can conclude from that report.

Fundholding is bureaucratic, two-tier and grossly unfair, and the quicker we abolish it the better.

6.26 pm

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Every Conservative Member should issue a press release headed, "Labour will destroy success". The commitment today from the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) that GP fundholding will be abolished by a future Labour Government, in the unlikely event of that ever occurring, has to be headline news in every constituency where fundholding has been successful.

Last July and August, I undertook a survey in the communities of Longfield and New Barn in my constituency, where one of the first local practices to receive fundholding status is situated. Three hundred and eighteen households replied by post saying that they supported fundholding and were happy with it. Only one household returned a form saying that it was not. That speaks volumes.

Of course, it is incumbent on Opposition Members to say where they are coming from. Every speech from an Opposition Member has been from a two-tier opponent. They are elected here to represent their constituents, but 200 of them are sponsored by trade unions, including the hon. Member for Peckham and her number two, the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish), who is on the Front Bench now. They are sponsored by the health union, Unison.

The Labour Front Bench receives between £200,000 and £300,000 a year to fund the party's health team from Unison, which is opposed to our reforms, as it has been since 1979. So, when Opposition Members speak, I have to speculate whether they are speaking for their constituents or for the health union that sponsors them.

I am still waiting for the hon. Member for Peckham to honour her pledge that

"the information will all be placed in the Register of Members' Interests"—

meaning how much Labour receives from Unison. It was not placed on the Register in November or December or January, or, so far, in February. I know that the hon. Lady has been busy lately with one or two internal problems, but she ought to honour her commitment. There is no point in Labour Members looking at the ceiling for inspiration, because they will get none. Her commitment is in black and white.

The Labour party is committed to abolishing NHS trusts, removing control of our hospitals and health service from a local level and taking powers from GPs, because, as ever, it wants to centralise NHS decision making. By removing powers from local doctors, it would create a wasteful and unnecessary tier of bureaucracy. It attacks NHS managers, while supporting the increase in bureaucracy that its own proposals would create.

It is not only Conservative Members who are in favour of fundholding; doctors and patients also favour it. But let us return to what the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), said in *The Observer* of 19 March 1995. She said that the Labour party

"remained firmly opposed to fundholding".

For her, the abolition of fundholding was "not up for consultation". That was the case then, as it is now.

Fundholding doctors are able to pioneer improvements in patient care locally. They demand improved performance from hospitals in their communities, and use their budgets more efficiently, ploughing savings back into improved patient care. The facts speak for themselves. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), I shall make sure that every GP in my community receives a copy of my speech and that of the hon. Member for Peckham, so that they will know once and for all that Labour will close down GP fundholding for ever. However, it will not get the chance.

6.31 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): When the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) has calmed down and gathered his senses, perhaps he will read my speech and understand why I am opposed to the consequences of fundholding in my constituency.

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

I am pleased that the Minister for Health and the Secretary of State for Health are here, because they know full well that we have concrete evidence of a two-tier system at Pinderfields hospital, the main NHS provider in my area, that has arisen directly from fundholding. They know the simple reasons for that.

Wakefield health authority has overspent its budget for patient services by £483,000, that being the last figure available. At the same time, up to the end of November, the last available public figure, GP fundholding shows an underspend of £749,000 on the hospital and community services budget. The Pinderfields trust contract from Wakefield health authority projected 5,100 more finished consultant episodes than the current contract—5,100 people who, rightly, have been treated at Pinderfields hospital against the existing overspend. Fundholders have 1,500 more than the contract—against an underspend.

The policy of Pinderfields and Wakefield health authority is, rightly, treatment on the basis of patients' needs, but consultants at the hospital are, understandably, choosing to treat the patients they know that they will get paid for.

I spoke yesterday, with my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien), to a highly respected consultant, whom I have known for many years, and who has worked at Pinderfields for nearly 30 years. I hope that the Minister and the Secretary of State are listening. He said that the consultants have the management figures, know the reality of the existing overspend and know where the money is coming from. He continued: "Most of them do private work. They wouldn't do that for nothing, and they won't do NHS work for nothing."

If there are two budgets, and the patients have similar needs, consultants will pick the patient from the budget from which they know that they will get paid. They are picking the patients from fundholders because their budget is underspent. They can get paid for treating those patients. That is why in Wakefield—and elsewhere, including Winchester, Salisbury and other places represented by Tory Members—a two-tier system is arising directly from the existence of GP fundholding.

We have been told that GPs are choosing fundholding. I have talked to GPs. I will give the Secretary of State the name of a non-fundholding GP who told me that he is being forced into fundholding because his patients are getting a second-rate deal because of the situation at Pinderfields hospital.

I do not blame the hospital, the health authority or fundholding GPs. I blame the Government, because they have undermined fundamental principles that have underpinned the national health service since the 1940s—equity, fairness in treatment and the idea of treatment according to patients' needs. Fundholding completely undermines those principles. That is why I oppose the whole process.

6.34 pm

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): I have torn up the speech that I had intended to give because there has not been a debate in the House recently in which the Government have conceded so much to the Opposition in so short a time. *[Interruption.]* I understand the instinctive reaction of Conservative Members, but it has been truly extraordinary.

We are puzzled about why this debate was called. This is a Government debate on health, an unusual event in the House. They could pick the subject and the timing to try to defend, laughably, their record. We are still puzzled about what the true intention was. They can shake their heads and laugh in an agitated manner, but the Government have screwed up on a health debate for the second time in two weeks. The proper epitaph for the debate, as Oscar Wilde might have said, is, "To lose one debate, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness." That sums up the Government's predicament.

I must be specific and make sure that when GPs and the public read about the debate, they know what the Government have conceded. It has not been a happy afternoon for the Secretary of State. He may have been cajoled into the debate by the right hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney). It is a political issue and it has blown up in their faces.

First, the Secretary of State has conceded that there is a two-tier service under GP fundholding. He tried to wriggle out of every question that was posed to him about that, but the only logical conclusion was that he not only condoned GP fundholding and a two-tier service but was actively encouraging it.

Secondly—this will be the issue for the 60 per cent. of GPs and the 60 per cent. of patients not covered by fundholding—the motion, despite the attempts to play around with its words, was deeply offensive, insulting, aggravating and provocative to nearly half the nation's GPs. It is offensive to me, but that is less important than the fact that it is offensive to GPs.

The so-called one-nation Secretary of State for Health has conceded on the Floor of the House that fundholding is about not one nation but two nations—two types of GPs. GP fundholders are destined for the first division and the rest for the second division. The only distinction between the Government and us is that we want all GPs to be in the premier league. It seems inconceivable that we should have a Government who want to have two classes of patients and two classes of GPs. That is essentially what they have agreed this afternoon.

The third issue for the Secretary of State, which was thrown up by my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) earlier in the debate, was the headline "Dorrell backs private GPs" in *Pulse* on Saturday 18 November 1995. Where does the Secretary of State stand on some of those issues? He pretends that he is part of the right-wing rabble that has concocted some of the Government's health policies, but privately, in debates at the universities, he is a one-nation health spokesman. He cannot have it both ways. He must tell us why he wants to support private GPs. His statement that the

"private sector will set a standard that the population of patients will very properly expect the NHS to match"

was offensive to most GPs.

Will the Secretary of State return to the Dispatch Box and tell GPs, as the Government are trying to tell teachers and schools, that they are all incompetent—that none of them fulfils the standards that the national health service has set? I suspect that he will not, because it is wrong to attack almost 50 per cent. of GPs along with 50 per cent. of GP fundholders, who do an excellent job on behalf of patients. The hallmarks of Tory health policy as it affects primary health care are that it is particular, exclusive, divisive and partisan.

The debate has defined the Government's position on primary health care; they have not moved on. All the contributions by Conservative Members, including the speech by the Secretary of State, were about right hon. and hon. Members who want to be stuck in time. The debate has moved on in the health service, in primary health care and in fundholding, and it has moved on politically.

Mr. Dorrell: We are back in 1990.

Mr. McLeish: The Secretary of State cannot have it like that, because the debate is moving on.

Let me do some more defining. We are concerned about the challenges of today and tomorrow, but Conservative Members are still concerned with the problems of yesterday. They are prisoners of their political propaganda, and it is a tragedy.

Ms Harman: No; it is not.

Mr. McLeish: My hon. Friend says that it is not, but I shall be more generous than she has been from a sedentary position.

General practitioners seek leadership from the Government, but they get a Government who table a motion that merely congratulates 50 per cent. of GPs and excludes all other GPs in the primary health care service.

Mr. Galbraith: It is a disgrace and a scandal.

Mr. McLeish: It is. The Government cannot wriggle off the hook that they are now on because of their incompetent performance tonight.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham said earlier, we do not want to pick out GP fundholders or people involved in locality commissioning and set one against another. That would be destructive and wasteful, but it is the hallmark of the Government.

When the Minister of State replies, why does he not congratulate Dr. Aneez Esmail, a commissioning GP in Manchester who has 70 per cent. generic prescribing, way above the average for fundholders, saving the NHS thousands of pounds? Dr. Esmail has set up

"a practice based counselling, acupuncture and homeopathy service, a joint clinic with a consultant psychiatrist, a Tele-medicine link clinic with a dermatologist and a drug rehabilitation clinic."

That shows that there is no monopoly of wisdom in fundholding in progress, innovation or ideas.

Why are the Government so partisan and blinkered that they cannot lift their eyes above a policy that they adopted two or three years ago, which they are now trying to use to divide GPs and as a political stick to beat everyone else who might not whole heartedly endorse it?

We know that the Minister of State will not praise in his speech anyone who is not a GP fundholder. The tragedy about 16 years of Conservative Government is that, once wedded to an argument, it is impossible to get them ungripped from it. It is a tragedy that we cannot make progress.

It has not always been like that. Take one of the Secretary of State's early speeches. As long ago as 30 July 1995, an article appeared entitled "Dorrell freezes Bottomley's NHS reforms"—God, some of them needed freezing. It stated:

"In his speech to the Conservative Political Centre Summer School in Cambridge, Mr. Dorrell promised development of the family doctor service—the 'jewel in the crown' of the NHS—and stressed that the Government's favoured GP fundholding scheme 'was not the only model'."

Well, well—saying one thing and doing another.

Tonight the Secretary of State supported a partisan, particular, divisive motion. A few months ago, he said that fundholding was not the only model. The Secretary of State needs to convince us that there are other models and that he is thinking about them.

Mr. Dorrell *indicated dissent.*

Mr. McLeish: I was in the Chamber for the whole debate, and I did not hear much praise being lavished on non-fundholding GPs.

I return to the speech of 29 July 1995, reported in the article of 30 July 1995. The Secretary of State said that there would be

"no preconceptions, no closed minds, no rejections of ideas because they weren't invented here".

He said those words far from the House, but some day he must be brought to account for suggesting one thing at a Conservative party summer school and then using completely opposite words in the House this afternoon. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before the hon. Gentleman continues, may I say that I have noticed an increasing tendency for a sub-debate to take place between the two Front Benches? I would prefer that to stop.

Mr. McLeish: The Government debated GP fundholding and lavished praise on GP fundholders but, while definitive policies are being poured down everyone's throats, we find the following quotation from a speech by the Secretary of State in a press release entitled "Department of Health/Looking After Health in the New Millennium", issued on 8 January 1996, four weeks ago:

"The time is now ripe to take this process further. I have therefore asked Gerry Malone to lead an examination of the options for the future of primary care within the NHS."

We have not heard much about that in the House. Perhaps the Minister of State will elaborate. He has been charged with the responsibility of considering primary health care. It creates the impression that he may want to consider other options.

Mr. Malone: Is it a crime?

Mr. McLeish: I think it is a crime if those words are used in press releases issued by the Department and the Government pretend in the House that there is only one favoured option and that those who do not subscribe to it are second-class GPs and second-class patients. That is why we are angry about the sheer hypocrisy of the Government.

[Mr. McLeish]

The Government want GPs to believe that the Conservative party stands for a one-nation health service. Every action, every comment in the House, undermines that idea. It is ridiculous that, in 1996, four years away from a new millennium, the Government are bogged down—becalmed. They do not know what to do because they are fixated with a one-party policy for the future of primary health care.

In his reply, the Minister should convey to us that he is not fixated by one idea to the exclusion of others and he should try to convince us that he has moved on. If the Government do not move on, when Labour is in government in a few months' time we shall certainly have a one-nation primary health care system that treats all patients and all GPs with equal respect and fairness.

6.47 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): That was pretty thin gruel from the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish), trying to make a case out of very little.

This has been an astonishing debate, in which the Opposition blamed Ministers for coming to the Dispatch Box to speak about Government policy. We have now reached the extraordinary position where an Opposition Front Bencher, from a sedentary position, was worried about what was happening to the national health service when Ministers were at the Dispatch Box, not running the health service from Richmond house. I am glad that Opposition Members believe that we are so effective from day to day, but the purpose of coming to the House was to concentrate on fundholding, a part of the Government's policy that has been criticised by the Opposition.

Before the debate we did not know what the Labour party was saying about fundholding; now we do. The soft soap that we have heard Labour spokesmen deliver to GP fundholders when trying to cosy up to them to suggest that there will be no abolition—the soft words of change, and promises to restructure budgets—has now been replaced with the harsh words of abolition. If the debate did one favour to the public debate about fundholding and the health service, it was to clarify Labour's position.

When the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) was out of the Chamber, the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) made wild commitments on her behalf. He shouted, "Hear, hear," and was on record as saying that abolition of fundholding would appear in the Labour party's manifesto before the next election. I wonder whether the hon. Lady will endorse those comments. She will not, so I do not know where that leaves the hon. Gentleman. If the Labour party's claims that it will abolish fundholding are not reflected in the manifesto that it will put before the public, what words will it use to describe this debate?

The Labour party advanced three arguments to support its opposition to fundholding. The first was the absurd old chestnut that it is a two-tier system. It is not a two-tier system, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State did not say that it was.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Malone: I have debated that subject with the hon. Gentleman before. Last time I challenged him to produce evidence of two-tierism in his constituency and he said that he would name names and present cases. However, we have heard nothing about it. We examined one case that he presented and we found no basis to it.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I ask the Minister to look at the Wakefield situation. He knows as well as I do—as I said in my brief contribution to the debate—that it is a two-tier system. If he comes to Wakefield, I will introduce him to GPs and to consultants who will show him at first hand why there is a two-tier system, for the reasons that I gave a few moments ago.

Mr. Malone: I should not have bothered giving way to the hon. Gentleman. I did so during the last debate and I asked him to write to me about specific cases. However, he did not bother to do that, so I shall treat his recent invitation in that light.

The position is clearly set out in the 1991 guidance on fundholding, which I shall repeat for the benefit of the House. In 1991, guidance was agreed with the medical profession which, according to the Labour party, is unanimously opposed to the process. That guidance stated:

"Common waiting lists should apply for all urgent cases and no hospital should offer contracts to one purchaser which would disadvantage patients of another".

Labour Members persistently and obdurately refuse to understand the next point. The guidance continued:

"However, hospitals can offer spare capacity to anyone who wishes to purchase it. If GP fundholders or health authorities choose to purchase some of the spare capacity so that patients may be seen more quickly, this does not disadvantage other non-urgent patients whose waiting times are unaffected".

If GP fundholding and conventional purchasing are exercised in different ways, there will be different results. However, that does not undermine the equity of the national health service for one second.

Ms Harman: Will the Minister admit that the 1991 executive letter expressly allows two-tier waiting lists for non-urgent cases? Will he repeal that circular and issue a fair waiting list circular so that, whether they are emergency, urgent or non-urgent cases, clinical need is the only determinant of priority in the national health service?

Mr. Malone: The hon. Lady makes an absurd point. If there is any distinction in the way in which GPs purchase health care for their patients, there will be differences. People get their priority placing on waiting lists as a result of clinical need. I point out to the hon. Lady that if patients' conditions change while they are waiting for an operation, they are entitled to return to their general practitioner and be accorded priority. We have absolutely no truck with the Labour party's principal argument that a two-tier system is in place.

We heard another old chestnut about massive bureaucracy. I shall give the House the facts. The management of GP fundholding costs 2 per cent. of the funds of which GPs ultimately have charge. They have been able to deliver consistent efficiencies of 3.5 to 4 per cent., which can be returned in patient care. Better resource management will lead to an increase in both patient care and the facilities in GPs' surgeries for the delivery of patient care. That is another nail in the coffin of the Labour party's argument.

Labour Members [illegible] a lot about commissioning. I believe that commissioning has become the Labour party's comfort blanket. It sounds like a very comfortable compromise—and the way the Labour party put it forward, it certainly is. It is fudge and mudge. The Labour party confirmed that it is a step towards a national system.

I pay tribute to the achievements of individual practitioners, be they fundholders, commissioning practitioners or non-commissioning practitioners—that happens occasionally across the system. The Labour party cannot ignore the fact that those achievements are driven by the power of fundholding and the power of budgets. On Friday, a fundholder told me—I think that this says it all—that one GP with a budget is worth 10 GPs sitting on a committee somewhere. The Labour party's model would return us to the old days of discussions around tables and no possibility of defining what would be done to benefit patients. It is an old argument which has failed in the past. The Labour party is now putting forward an out-of-date concept: it wants to return to the old national systems.

Let us accept for a moment that perhaps the Labour party is right. Let us assume, for example, that there is some two-tierism in the national health service. A member of the public might say that, if there is a two-tier system and if we argue that fundholding is providing a better service than non-fundholding, it seems extraordinary to opt for a policy that abolishes the system that is delivering better care. The Opposition cannot get away from that fact. The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden said that there was no evidence to support that argument, but the matter is being researched and the evidence is growing.

The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden referred to an article from the *British Medical Journal*. I have read that article, and I looked rather quizzical when he made his observations because I know the narrow base on which that research was founded. Further evidence will be published soon showing that the fundholding practitioners can make real savings from the prescribing budgets and that those savings will continue over time. Of course they will plateau; it would be unreasonable to assume that they could continue year after year.

I wonder what the position of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) is with regard to this debate. He argued precisely for what we are doing with the accountability framework. He said that he opposes fundholding in the way that we have introduced it. He is in favour of a little of what we do—his party opposed it before—and he also opposes what the Labour party proposes. It is the typical Liberal party "push me, pull you" approach. He is the custodian of a policy that his policy officers recently described as "barmy". He failed to take account of the fact that, in the accountability framework, when general practitioners are fundholders—either in the conventional sense or in the total sense—they must share their information with health authorities and they must discuss and agree their public plans, which are placed on the public agenda, before they are put in motion.

At a time when the whole health profession is looking very positive about developing the arguments on future primary care, the Labour party has decided to take a step backwards. The Government are conducting a debate with the health service to define the boundaries of primary care and what new challenges it will face. We are interested in that debate, but the Labour party is not. We are taking the debate forward not just with fundholders but with doctors and other health care professionals who are responsible for the delivery of primary care. That is the way forward.

Tonight, the Labour party has chosen to demonstrate that it simply wants to abolish all that has been achieved. New Labour may have new policies in other areas, but the lesson we can take from the debate today is that new Labour does not want them in the health area; it wants to return to national systems in a determined effort to abandon all the progress that has been hard won by general practitioners who have been improving services up and down the country.

When the Labour party started the debate against primary care reforms in the NHS and when it first decided that it was against fundholding, the situation was very different and only a small minority was engaged in fundholding. Now the Labour party is setting itself against the 50 per cent. of the population who receive primary care, and setting itself against a large proportion of GPs. The people and the GPs will have heard the message that the Labour party has delivered today.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 246, Noes 320.

Division No. 43] **[6.59 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna *(Perth & Kinross)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John

Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and Ms Ann Coffey.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David

Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, The Reverend William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Robert
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maddock, Diana
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon ohn
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Derek Conway and
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House pays tribute to the role that GP fundholders have played in kick-starting and developing innovative practice in both primary care and the acute sector; welcomes the advances that fundholding has brought to many patients; accepts that fundholding has acted as a lever to improve services; and consequently remains committed to the further development of GP fundholding.

Terms and Conditions of Employment

[Relevant document: The Minutes of Evidence and Memoranda relating to this instrument contained in the Fifth Report from the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments (House of Commons Paper No. 34-v.)]

7.14 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I beg to move,

That the Collective Redundancies and Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (Amendment) Regulations 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 2587), dated 2nd October 1995, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5th October, in the last Session of Parliament, be revoked.

I cannot let this moment pass without remarking on the fact that the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs is the first Department of Trade and Industry Minister to reply on an industrial relations issue since 1915, when the Ministry for Labour and National Service, as I believe it was then called, was set up. I have no doubt that he will revel in being a historical anachronism. However, his anomalous position may turn out to be short-lived.

The origins of the regulations are the acquired rights directive of 1977, which was transposed into UK law by the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981, and the 1975 directive on collective redundancies, which was transposed into UK law by the Employment Protection Act 1975 and the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation Act) 1992.

However, in a ruling in June 1994, the European Court found that UK law did not properly implement the two directives in three respects. It imposed a requirement to inform and consult worker representatives only when the employer chose to recognise a trade union for collective bargaining purposes. It did not require consultation with worker representatives on prospective transfers to be conducted with a view to seeking agreement. It did not provide what the European Court called an "effective, proportionate and dissuasive" penalty for employers who failed to inform and consult.

The Government, therefore, had to issue new regulations to comply with European Union law. As a result of consultations with the Trades Union Congress, the Confederation of British Industry and others, leading to amendments to the draft proposals issued in April 1995, the second and third points have been largely addressed. But the issue in tonight's debate is the manner in which the Government have decided to address the first point.

The Government now propose to require the employer, at his choice, to consult either a recognised trade union or elected representatives of the affected employees before making redundancies or transferring his business. At the same time, the Government have used the necessity for the new regulations to exempt employers if there are fewer than 20 redundancies over a 90-day period. They have also weakened the previous requirement to consult at the earliest opportunity by saying, in the new regulations, that consultation must start in good time. That is the background, which is clear and straightforward.

We strongly object to the new regulations on four main grounds. First, the Government have manipulated the requirement to comply with European Union law in such a way as to promote their campaign to achieve trade union derecognition by the back door. The European Court ruling was designed to extend consultation to workplaces where there was no recognised trade union; we all accept that that is perfectly fair and right. The Department of Trade and Industry has undermined consultation with trade unions even in workplaces where there is a recognised trade union.

What was objectionable in United Kingdom law prior to the European Court judgment was that consultation excluded non-trade union organised workplaces, so that employers could avoid consultation simply by failing to recognise a trade union. The intention of the European Court judgment—I hope that the Minister will be able to disagree—was to universalise consultation. It was clearly not intended to undermine existing systems of industrial relations or to encourage employers to derecognise unions. Yet there is absolutely nothing in the regulations to stop an employer who intends to make collective redundancies consulting an ad hoc group that he had a hand in setting up precisely to circumvent a recognised trade union.

The Government have been far more concerned with hijacking the regulations to satisfy their own anti-union prejudices than ensuring that employees are properly consulted before redundancies are made. That is the central thrust of our objection. The Government have gone out of their way to undermine the concept of social partnership, which is widely accepted on the continent and provides a far more successful and productive model of industrial relations than anything in Britain during the 1980s or 1990s.

The Government never wanted to introduce the regulations and they have finally done so in a thoroughly curmudgeonly and resentful manner. As it was so aptly and nicely put in another place, it is as though the Minister were to begin his speech tonight by saying, "I move these regulations in the spirit of a wine waiter asked to serve a coke."

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor): That was Lord Tebbit.

Mr. Meacher: It was indeed Lord Tebbit. I am only too grateful to attribute the source of that remark, as it applies aptly to the Government's attitude tonight.

Our second charge against the regulations is that there is no test of the independence of elected employee representatives. They can be men and women of straw who are beholden to the will of the employer and that defeats the entire purpose of the European Court ruling. There cannot be much dispute about the criteria that should govern the choice of employee representatives. They should be chosen freely without interference from the employer or his agents. The electoral procedures should be impartial and fair and certainly not subject to influence from the employer. Many Conservative Members will agree that employee representatives should be chosen by secret ballot and should have the ability and the resources to reach an agreement with the employer and to carry it through, yet not one of those requirements is written into the regulations.

Mr. Taylor: Although it is quite true that the selection procedures are not prescribed, the onus of fairness is made perfectly clear. Any employer who did not act fairly in those circumstances would risk an adverse finding and

possibly a compensation award against him at either an industrial tribunal or an employment appeal tribunal. It is made perfectly clear that the emergent elected representative should have paid time off, access to facilities, lists of names of workers and so on. Any employer who did not honour the spirit and outline of those requirements would find himself at severe risk in the appropriate tribunal.

Mr. Meacher: My answer is extremely simple. If that is what the Minister and Government intended, why did not they write it into the regulations? It is extremely simple. It is not as though the Government have failed to prescribe in great detail what the trade unions should do, but when it comes to what the employer should do, that is left to his good faith and the onus on him to behave properly.

Mr. Taylor: I am quite prepared to read *Hansard* tomorrow and check what I said in my last intervention. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way to me twice, but he will find that everything that I said in my last intervention is on the face of the regulations.

Mr. Meacher: I do not believe that it appears anywhere in the regulations. I have a copy of the regulations and regulation 3(2) covers those matters. If the Minister can show me where it states how the electoral procedure should be operated to ensure that there are proper constraints on the employer so that he cannot use his influence and put forward his own candidate, I shall withdraw my remarks, but in the absence of that, I insist that those crucial matters are not in the regulations.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Not only are the operation of electoral procedures and the ability of employees to appoint workers' representatives not in the regulations, but employees cannot take the matter to an industrial tribunal unless there is a breach of the regulations. An implied breach of the European Union directive is not admissible at the tribunal. That is the problem. The fact that those matters are not included in the regulations makes it extremely difficult for individual employees successfully to take their employer to a tribunal.

Mr. Meacher: The regulations also contain other gratuitous deregulation measures, which have nothing to do with the European Court, to restore the two-year waiting period, but that is another matter. My hon. Friend makes a critical point. Even if a dispute reaches the industrial tribunal, it is impossible for an employee to win the case unless the regulations contain a clear and detailed prescription of the duties on the employer and they do not.

According to evidence to the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, of which my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) is such a distinguished Chairman:

"The Regulations do not prescribe any particular means by which this should be done, they merely state that the employer may consult at his choice either the representatives of the trade unions or the elected representatives. If he has not done either of those things there are certain sanctions".

However, if an employer chooses to consult elected workers' representatives, the manner in which they are chosen is crucial. I repeat, as it is a critical point, that the regulations contain nothing that prescribes that in detail.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): The Speaker's Counsel advised the Committee to examine that in great detail because it is at the heart of the matter. If an employee goes to an industrial tribunal, on what judicial authority would the tribunal rely? According to Stephen Mason, the Speaker's Counsel, there is no judicial authority.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend is forcibly repeating the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish has already made. I hope that the Minister will provide an answer. What he told me across the Dispatch Box is not validated by the regulations. We want an explicit answer on that critical point.

There are elementary requirements that even the Government should have considered necessary. Unless it was a slip, one Minister did. Lord Inglewood, as Minister of the now defunct Department of Employment, said in another place on 20 March last year that workers' representatives

"must clearly have appropriate guarantees of independence".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 20 March 1995; Vol. 562, c. 1095.].

I ask again, as my hon. Friends have asked—it is a general demand from Opposition Ministers—where in the regulations are those guarantees?

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): There is none.

Mr. Meacher: If the Minister wishes to intervene, he can freely do so. I take the fact that he has not done so as a silent assent to my point. Let us clear it up as we go along. If the Minister wishes to refute that, perhaps he will do so. Perhaps he could quote to me the regulations which are relevant to this point.

Mr. Taylor: I am quite content with what I have said in my two previous interventions to the hon. Gentleman's speech. I am grateful to him for giving way to me again, although I am not sure that I asked him to. I will stick by what I said, and I am more than happy to return to the point when I address the House or, with the leave of the House, when I speak again towards the close of the debate. I shall select one of those two opportunities to deal with the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Meacher: I do not know why the Minister is so coy or, if he is able to tell us, why he does not tell us now. We shall certainly be looking forward to a precise quotation. I have in front of me regulation 3, which is headed "Duty to consult representatives". That is the critical point. I have read it through in detail—it is quite lengthy—and there is absolutely nothing to justify what the Minister has said. The truth is that giving preference in the elections to the employer's chosen candidate or fixing the electoral machinery in such a way as to benefit some candidates and not others will not stop an employer from discriminating.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: Let me complete this. All that the regulations say, at 3(2)(1B), is:

"employee representatives elected by them, or . . . representatives of the trade union . . . as the employer chooses."

[Mr. Meacher]

Those are the critical words in the regulations, and it is to those that I expect the Minister will respond.

Mr. Stephen: The hon. Gentleman has suggested that an employer might seek to fix the election. If he is suggesting that the employer might act fraudulently, surely he will accept that that is a matter that clearly will be overruled by the courts.

Mr. Meacher: When I said "fix" I was not suggesting anything illegal. I am simply saying that the employer can structure it—if the hon. Gentleman prefers a more neutral phrase—in such a way as to produce a given result. That is perfectly legal, and it is compatible with the regulations.

Mr. Stephen: How?

Mr. Meacher: Perfectly easily: the employer can ensure that particular candidates are offered the opportunity to stand for election; he can ensure that those candidates receive the benefit of his and other people's support; and he can arrange the consultation mechanism and the electoral preparations in a manner that benefits them. It is perfectly possible to do those things. That directly contradicts what the Advocate-General in Brussels has said. The Government have been fond of repeatedly quoting what he said because it supported their case. However, in this case, he said in his report:

"the designation of representatives ought not to depend on the free choice of the employer".

I believe that those words are directly contradicted by the letter and the spirit of these regulations.

I think that there is more than a whiff of humbug in all this. The Government have gone to great pains during the past decade, in several Acts of Parliament, to prescribe in the minutest detail exactly how a trade union should operate and precisely what it can and cannot do. On the crucial test of independence, for example, the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 states of an independent trade union:

"(a) is not under the domination or control of an employer or group of employers . . .

(b) is not liable to interference by an employer . . . arising out of the provision of financial or material support."

Why are not similar rules now applied here to employee-elected representatives? Why should trade unions be strictly independent, yet elected employee representatives—whom the employer can choose as an equal alternative—are allowed to be under his thumb? How can it be right for the employer to decide which employees will be eligible for election, whether they will be elected directly or indirectly and whether the ballot will be by a show of hands or by secret ballot? Why should the employer be able to decide who counts the votes, whether there should be an independent monitor or how any complaints should be handled? Under these regulations, those are the sole and untrammelled prerogative of the employer, and that is what we object to.

It is obviously not the first time under this Government that there has been one law for the unions and another for the employers. In the Government's eyes, trade unions are dangerous animals whose activities have to be ensnared in comprehensive bureaucratic detail, while employers are very laudable chaps who can be trusted and allowed to get on and do whatever they like. That fantasy may have been the politics of the 1980s, but I suggest to the House that it is wide of the mark today, when job insecurity is rife almost everywhere, like a plague afflicting workplaces up and down the country.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I do not recognise the hon. Gentleman's description of Conservative Members' views on trade unions and companies. It certainly does not represent my views. On this point, does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is a major difference between a trade union that is charged with a series of responsibilities during a long period, and the much narrower responsibility of the people who are elected to represent a specific and probably small group of employees during a specific period in relation to redundancy?

Mr. Meacher: Even in relation to the specific question of electing those who will hold authority for a particular purpose—whether it is carrying through redundancies or as elected members of the executives of trade unions—how the election will be conducted is laid down and prescribed in much greater detail for the trade union side. There is not even an attempt to do so for the employer; it is simply left completely open. If the hon. Gentleman does not recognise that description, after six—or is it eight—trade unions Acts, he should examine himself and his party more closely in the mirror.

Our third charge against the regulations is that the Government have unilaterally decided to put such a high threshold on their application as to largely nullify their purpose. Employers are exempted from consultation under the regulations in cases in which there are fewer than 20 redundancies during a 90-day period. A very important point is that that has nothing to do with the European Court judgment of June 1994. It did not require that threshold in any respect. In revising the regulations, the Government have gratuitously added that exemption, entirely on their own account. It need not have done so because it was not in any way required by Brussels.

The effect of the new threshold will of course be dramatic, and the Government intend it to be so. The threshold seriously erodes the existing rights of consultation, and it will automatically exclude nearly 6 million workers in small firms and a great many people in larger firms. The Government have openly boasted that it will result in no less than 96 per cent. of employers being free to implement redundancies without any consultation with their work forces.

Mr. Stephen: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: This will be the last time.

Mr. Stephen: Surely the hon. Gentleman will accept that what he is suggesting is over-bureaucratic and, frankly, rather silly. If there are fewer than 20 people involved, the employer could consult them directly. He could get them all together in the canteen, if there is one, or in his own office, if there is not.

Mr. Meacher: If the hon. Gentleman is seriously suggesting that the purpose of the exemption was to enable the employer to pull employees in one by one

to discuss their forthcoming redundancy with them individually, I must say that he is more ingenuous than I thought.

The significant point is that the regulations, instead of extending consultation rights—which was clearly the European Court's purpose—reduce them. There are many areas in both the private sector and public services where the impact will be damaging. In the education service, more than 8,000 teachers have been made redundant in the past three years, of which I think 1,300 were compulsory redundancies. But in a great many other cases, consultation has prevented redundancies or has reduced the numbers to be made redundant. It has certainly ensured that the procedures are properly followed.

Under the regulations, consultations may well be minimal—in the case of education, they will almost certainly be minimal because no school will make 20 or more teachers redundant. Therefore, consultation will not take place in the education service. That will also be true in many public services and throughout great swathes of the private sector.

Why have the Government inserted the huge exemption loophole? The answer is clear from a letter of 19 July last year, which was written by the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs' predecessor before they carried out a job swap.

"The Government believes that it is important to alleviate any unreasonable burden on employers which would otherwise result from the extension of the consultation requirements."

The meaning of that letter was made clear in the Department of Trade and Industry's press notice of 5 October, which stated:

"This measure will remove the statutory obligation to consult through representatives from some 96 per cent. of businesses and has been estimated to save up to £85 million per year."

There we have it.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No, I shall not give way any more. The hon. Gentleman can make a speech, but I should draw my remarks to a close.

The Government are prepared to sell off the consultation rights of millions of workers as long as they save £85 million for employers. One notes that Ministers have been up in arms over the past few weeks about being fully consulted in advance of the Scott report next week, when they think that their own jobs may be at risk. When it comes to other people, they are quite prepared to sacrifice any right to consultation for 13 shekels of silver. I do not wish to be unkind, but some people might call that the politics of hypocrisy.

Our fourth charge against the regulations follows from everything that I have said. In several respects, they breach the spirit of the European Court's ruling and they may well be ultra vires. Employee representatives will be ad hoc; there is no prescribed method for their election; only those affected by the proposal can nominate representatives; and there is no way of ensuring their independence from the employer. All those factors suggest that the regulations are wide open to a legal challenge. In addition, as I have said, in some respects they actually weaken existing protection—something that is not generally approved by European directives. I realise that the Minister may not be unduly worried by the Opposition's case, however convincing it seems, because he has in his pocket a block vote from the whipped majority of the Conservative party. But when, as I understand it will, the matter comes up for judicial review in the High Court shortly, it may be a different story.

The Labour party would extend consultation rights, as the European Court intended and would not use them to undermine or derecognise existing unions. We would require a proper test of independence for elected employee representatives and proper procedures for their election. We would not exempt 96 per cent. of all employers by a threshold that includes cases where there are fewer than 20 redundancies.

The regulations are deeply flawed; they are inconsistent with natural justice. They breach both the letter and the spirit of the European Court judgment. On those grounds, we demand that they be withdrawn.

7.43 pm

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor): There will inevitably be disagreements between myself and the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), who opened the debate, but I cannot fault him in one respect: his deployment of the history of the subject, which derives from the collective redundancies directive of 1975 and the acquired rights directive of 1977. All hon. Members who take an interest in such matters can trace the acquired rights directive, via the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981, to the infraction proceedings, and the collective redundancies directive, via the Employment Protection Act 1975 and the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992, to the two cases that were heard in parallel in the European Court of Justice. It is our contention that the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993 put right all but one of the deficiencies that were raised in those proceedings. On 8 June 1994, the European Court gave its judgments following those proceedings. The Government contend that the measures before the House regularise the one outstanding matter to which the Government should give their attention: the obligation to consult.

Conservative Members may like to be reassured that the measures are four times blessed. First, they are deregulatory. It is true that the infraction found against the Government by the European Court of Justice has provided the Government with an opportunity to take the gold plate off their response. Conservative Members are pleased to take the gold plate off regulations and directives.

The second virtue of the measures is that they set the law right in the case of Milligan and Bailey. I shall not dwell on that case because it is a bit of a side show. In fairness to the hon. Member for Oldham, West, I should say that he was right to concentrate on the subject of consultation—which seems to be the point of argument between us—rather than Milligan and Bailey. I think, however, that reference was made to that case in the judicial review proceedings—which the hon. Gentleman also mentioned—where matters will come before the divisional court and where the Government will be quietly confident that their arguments will be sustained.

The third virtue of the measures is that they clarify uncertainties for everyone's benefit. At present, the position is uncertain because the United Kingdom

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has been found against in both cases. Both matters were originally brought to the English statute book by Labour Governments. I shall not make a meal out of the fact that those Labour Governments brought them to the English statute book in the wrong form, but I shall defend the fact that we are putting them into the correct form. We reached a point of considerable uncertainty where it looked as though an employer had to consult in cases of collective redundancy only if there were a recognised trade union. If there were no recognised trade union, the employer was apparently under no obligation to consult anyone, which cannot be right. The European Court of Justice must be supported in its judgment. Tonight we are trying to ensure that, in the case of collective redundancies, everyone is consulted, either through a recognised trade union or through an election.

The hon. Gentleman challenged me twice on a certain subject and, at the risk of saying it for the third time, I repeat that I am well content with the words that I previously used from the Dispatch Box, although I shall look at the report in *Hansard* tomorrow. Provisions relating to the details of election procedure would not be easy to implement, but elections are necessary. One difficulty is that the regulations refer to much base legislation elsewhere.

The absence of express provisions concerning elections and the rights of organisers does not mean that access to employees and the use of facilities need not be extended to the organisers of elections. Regulations place a strict duty on the employer to consult appropriate representatives. If the employee representatives or a recognised trade union consider that the employer has not consulted them as required, or the employees affected have not been given a proper opportunity to elect representatives, they may present a complaint to an industrial tribunal. An employer will run a serious risk of an adverse finding if he fails to take such steps as allowing organisers access to the affected employees or providing a list of their names, and in appropriate cases allowing time off and access to facilities. That is almost a paraphrase of what I said earlier. It is necessary to read together paragraphs 4 and 10 and paragraph 3, sub-paragraph 5. Between them, they provide for complaints to be made by an employee, an elected representative or a recognised trade union if there has not been consultation or if the employer has not taken sufficient action to ensure that consultation with appropriate representatives could take place.

I am sorry to have dealt with that at length, but it is necessary to make it quite clear.

Mr. Bennett: The Minister read out those requirements, but they are not in the regulations. Only a general wish is contained in the regulations. The specifics that he just read out are not in the regulations, are they?

Mr. Taylor: I think that I have been faithful to the debate. I have answered the House correctly, consistently and in good faith.

I want to say one other thing in connection with a complaint made by the hon. Member for Oldham, West, who asked why the Government have introduced a loophole—the threshold of fewer than 20 employees. Perhaps I should say, the 20 threshold that introduces the collective redundancy concept. The loophole to which he refers is in the directive that was agreed by the Labour Government in 1975.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): On the previous point about clarifying the uncertainty, the Minister told the House that he is putting right an omission from previous legislation. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) about how the draft regulations do not contain what is needed. If what the Minister says is not on the face of the regulations, what opportunity will he have to put that right?

Mr. Taylor: That is a hypothetical question. So far, I have broadly dealt with interventions, and I think that I have dealt with that point. I should like now to make some progress, because there is an important Government case to be deployed in defence of the regulations.

Mr. Meacher: Before the Minister moves on, let me say that I do not think that he has satisfied either me or any of my hon. Friends. He read a carefully scripted statement, the essence of which he had memorised and repeated earlier. It is true that paragraphs 4 and 10 of the regulations, and paragraph 3, sub-paragraph 5, deal with complaints, and it is true that complaints may, if people are determined, reach an industrial tribunal. He has not answered the key point: when the case reaches the tribunal, how can one make it stick against an employer who has carried out an election that the employee considers improper in terms of its procedure when there is no prescription in the regulations on the form of that election? One may believe it to be unfair, and it may be unfair, but it is not unfair in terms of the strict rules of the regulations.

Mr. Taylor: I have faced many challenges in my life, but managing to persuade the hon. Gentleman may be a bridge too far. He demeans the ability of employers and employees to arrive at a system of election that will be fair. Nothing is more English or more culturally part of our inheritance than fairness. An industrial tribunal, which is after all a judicial body—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry if the hon. Member for Oldham, West thinks that this is not merely unpersuasive but amusing.

Mr. Meacher: It is not amusing.

Mr. Taylor: I agree that it is not amusing. For the Government to try to lay down in a codified way in the myriad of workplaces how an election should be held is to demean the good sense of our fellow citizens—the employer and employee between them—who are quite capable of setting up an election. If it is not a fair election, an industrial tribunal will be as good a forum as any in spotting that.

Mr. Bennett: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Taylor: I give way to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice).

Mr. Prentice: There are employers who run sweatshop operations, perhaps recruiting Asian women, to take

one example, whose knowledge of English may be rudimentary. In those circumstances, someone from the work force could emerge and act as the group's spokesperson. If the matter were challenged and it reached an industrial tribunal, the Minister told the House earlier that the employer would be at

"serious risk of an adverse finding".

An employer being at risk of an adverse finding is very different from an employer acting unlawfully. That is why it is central to the case for matters to be on the face of the regulations. If they are not, we cannot leave it to a tribunal.

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman helps me in his own appreciation of the eclectic nature of the workplaces of this country. If a group of employees felt that the procedures that were going on around them were oppressive, there could not be a freer country than this one in which they could pursue their grievance. They can take advice if they wish. After all, there are plenty of solicitors in most of our urban centres who will give advice on legal aid green form, which is two hours of advice for free, and that could be extended if the local legal aid authority so wishes. Furthermore—this may be more congenial to the hon. Gentleman—they could, if they wanted to, take advice from the local office of one of the trade unions, perhaps the Transport and General Workers Union. Most of those great unions have offices in our big towns and cities, certainly in our cities.

Mr. Bennett *rose—*

Mr. Taylor: I have given way once to the hon. Gentleman. This might be the last intervention, but I shall give him the benefit of it.

Mr. Bennett: The Minister says that it is important that the process is fair. Which is fairer to elect a works representative: a single transferable vote or first past the post?

Mr. Taylor: I did not know that we would get down that road. I have always preferred an exhaustive eliminator, but that is very much a personal preference, and it is not Government policy, I hasten to add. In that sense, I speak only on behalf of myself, the hon. Member for Solihull.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my hon. Friend not think it strange this evening that the Labour party is criticising small firms for not wishing to comply voluntarily with the regulations—if small firms wished to comply with them they could, but the Labour party wants to force them—whereas the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), who I think is the Labour Front-Bench spokesman for small business, has a letter in *The Times* today praising small businesses as the backbone of the country? I wonder what we are listening to tonight—new Labour, old Labour or a mix. Labour Members obviously do not know what they really mean.

Mr. Taylor: That intervention has completely wrong-footed me: I simply cannot handle it. I think that, as a matter of courtesy, my hon. Friend—for, after all, he is my hon. Friend—should have given me notice of it. If he had, I might have been able to cope with it in a satisfactory way, rather than being left floundering at the Dispatch Box. Perhaps, given my flummox and fluster, I should press on.

We are debating the Government's response, in the form of the regulations, to two judgments of the European Court of Justice made on 8 June 1994. Much has been said about what the regulations do or do not require, and a good deal of that has been based on a misrepresentation of their provision or a failure to understand how they are intended to work. I hope to set the record straight on some of those matters, but on some of them our approach is, and will always be, fundamentally different from that of Opposition Members. We believe in encouraging enterprise and job growth through flexibility, whereas Opposition Members would destroy it with excessive regulation.

The regulations were laid before the House on 5 October, and came into effect on 26 October. They have two purposes. First, they give effect to judgments of the European Court of Justice concerning the implementation in the United Kingdom of the 1975 collective redundancies directive and the 1977 acquired rights directive. Secondly, they deal with the separate matter of the judgment of the employment appeals tribunal in the case of Milligan and Bailey *v.* Securicor Cleaning Ltd. In that case, the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981—generally referred to as the TUPE regulations—were interpreted in a way that Parliament had not intended. Regulation 8 of these regulations reverses the effect of that judgment.

The regulations were made under section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972, as they deal with matters that are for the purpose of implementing—or are related to our implementation of—our Community obligations. Let me deal first with the main purpose of the regulations, which concerns information and consultation about collective redundancies and business transfers. Both directives require an employer to consult workers' representatives in relevant circumstances, who are defined as

"the workers' representatives provided for by the laws or practices of the Member States".

In implementing the collective redundancies directive in 1975, the then Labour Government required an employer to consult only where there was a recognised trade union. In 1981, in implementing the acquired rights directive, the present Government adopted the same approach. It is interesting to note that Opposition Members did not question that approach at the time.

In 1994, the European Court ruled that, by failing to designate workers' representatives to be consulted when an employer did not recognise a trade union, the United Kingdom had not met its obligations under the directives. The regulations now provide for consultation by an employer, whether or not the employer voluntarily recognises a trade union. They bring UK law into line with the directives as interpreted by the European Court of Justice.

When we framed the regulations, uppermost in our mind was the need to give proper effect to the directives in a way that gave employers flexibility in deciding how to meet their obligations. That has always been our intention: it was spelt out in our consultation paper last year, and we have acted accordingly. As the Government have said before and will continue to say, we believe in

[Mr. Taylor]

flexibility—in setting a framework, but leaving the details to the good sense of employers and employees. That is what gives our businesses the edge that enables them to compete in global markets.

The regulations require an employer to inform and consult either a recognised trade union, or representatives elected by the employees themselves. To those who argue that the regulations do not provide a sufficient guarantee of independence for such representatives, let me repeat that they must be elected by the employees.

Ms Walley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Taylor: I will give way in a moment, although I have already given way to more hon. Members than I intended. I believe that others wish to speak.

As I was saying, the representatives must be elected by the employees. They must not be placemen, nor must they be nominated by the employer. If, in practice, the arrangements made for particular elections are such that the employer has not properly consulted those who are representative of the affected employees, the matter may be considered by an industrial tribunal, which may make an award of compensation.

An employer may choose whether to consult a union or elected representatives, but he cannot choose not to consult anyone at all. There are, of course, those who argue—as the TUC has argued—that an employer who recognises a union should not be free to consult anyone other than that union. Why should that be so? The extent and nature of union recognition has changed substantially over the past decade, and we are likely to see further changes as employers and unions must adapt to ever more competitive markets and changing employment patterns. Why should an employer who recognises a union for one purpose necessarily be bound to do so for all purposes? We do not believe that that should be the case, and we have therefore removed the existing statutory monopoly that recognised unions have enjoyed in such matters.

Most employers who recognise a trade union may well wish to continue to consult that union about redundancies and business transfers, but that is properly a matter for them to judge. The regulations provide no obstacle. Unions that are confident that they speak for the majority of the work force and act responsibly in the best interests of both their members and the business should normally have nothing to fear from the measure; but they must also recognise that some employers have developed other channels for consultation with their employees, whether or not they recognise a union or unions. It must surely be right for employers to be able to use such machinery where it exists.

Ms Walley: What does the Minister think the European Court of Justice intended? Does he think that it intended to undermine trade union representation?

Mr. Taylor: I do not wish to place any interpretation on the judgment of the European Court of Justice, other than its reported judgment, which I have in my hand. I shall not try to paraphrase or interpret that now, but I am sure that there are copies in the Library.

Mr. Meacher: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Taylor: Yes, but this will be the last time.

Mr. Meacher: Before the Minister leaves that important point, will he tell us whether he believes that the European Court intended consultation rights to be extended rather than reduced, and that the Court never intended the regulations to be used to undermine or "derecognise" existing trade unions?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman is treating the Court as though it were some kind of political body. I do not need to look behind the judgment to find out what the intention was, because I accept the judgment.

As I was saying, it must be right for employers to be able to use such machinery where it exists. Not only must that be right in principle; there may be sound practical reasons why an employer would wish to consult elected representatives. For example, an employer who recognises a union for some groups of employees but not others may well feel that it would be simpler and more appropriate to consult elected representatives for all the employees affected by a proposal, rather than a mixture of union and elected representatives. Employers will need to judge carefully the longer-term consequences of such a decision in terms of their relations with the union or unions, and given the prospect of subsequent reference to an industrial tribunal. Again, however, that is properly a decision for employers to take rather than for Governments to prescribe.

Some commentators have criticised the regulations because they do not set out detailed rules for the conduct of elections or require standing machinery to be established. Their criticisms have been echoed by the hon. Members for Oldham, West and for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett). We chose not to set detailed rules for good reason. The circumstances in which the obligation to consult arises will vary considerably. Complex statutory rules, designed to cover all possible circumstances, cannot possibly benefit either employers or employees. Employers with acceptable existing machinery should not have to adapt it simply to meet rigid bureaucratic requirements.

Nor could it possibly be right for an employer to have to establish machinery that he may never have to use. Many employers will never, or will rarely, be faced with having to make collective redundancies or be involved in a business transfer. It would be absurd for us to require those employers to establish and maintain some machinery that might never be used. That may be what Opposition Members want, but it is not the sort of bureaucracy in which we wish to indulge.

Mr. Meacher: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Taylor: No. I have given way generously, within the spirit of the House's affairs. Other hon. Members wish to speak and I will not delay the House much longer.

Although ad hoc arrangements are acceptable under the directives, an employer cannot leave it to the last moment to begin consultation. It must begin in good time and,

in the case of redundancies, in a specified minimum time before the first dismissal takes effect. Regulation 3(8) provides that, where there is no standing machinery and the employer invites employees to elect representatives, sufficient time must be allowed for them to do so and for the consultations to take place. A similar provision is made in respect of business transfers by regulation 9(10). It is clear that, if an employer does not take seriously his obligation to consult appropriate representatives, he will be at risk of an adverse finding by an industrial tribunal.

The regulations provide protection for elected representatives against dismissal or detriment short of dismissal because of their status or activities as a representative—that will be regarded as a discrimination. Those protections have been drafted to provide protection not only to people who are currently representatives, but to people who have ceased to operate in that capacity and to candidates for election.

The regulations provide a right to time off with pay to undertake representative duties and a right to appropriate access to the affected employees and to facilities such as telephones. They amend the provisions on who may bring a complaint to an industrial tribunal so that they are extended to include not only elected representatives, but, in appropriate cases, individual employees who have been affected by the proposal. Those are substantial rights and protections and I am sure that hon. Members will recognise their importance.

Although we have provided additional obligations, rights and protections, following these changes it would have been wrong of us not to consider whether it was appropriate for the new arrangements to apply in all the circumstances covered previously. Clearly, there is a balance to be struck between the rights of people in work and the need to ensure that our businesses are not fettered by regulations that divert them from competing, growing and providing jobs for this country's people. It is only by our ability to compete that we are able to create jobs.

In drawing up this package of measures, we believed that it was right to look for ways of balancing the additional obligations and costs that would be imposed on employers. We have therefore limited the statutory obligation to consult through representatives to collective redundancies. That is where the employer proposes 20 or more redundancies at one establishment within a 90-day period. That is one of the options provided for in the relevant directive, which, I remind the House, is called the collective redundancies directive.

The directive imposes specific and detailed requirements on an employer and, in setting a threshold below which those requirements do not apply, the Council of Ministers implicitly recognised that those requirements would not necessarily be appropriate to small firms or to small redundancy exercises.

We make no apology for removing the gold plating that previously existed. As the hon. Member for Oldham, West rightly said, this measure will remove more than 90 per cent. of businesses from the obligation to consult through representatives about redundancies. We have estimated the value of this deregulatory measure at some £85 million per annum, more than offsetting the additional cost to employers of the other measures contained in the regulations. It will provide substantial relief for small and medium employers in particular.

I make it clear, however, that the measure does not absolve employers from the obligation to act fairly and reasonably in handling individual redundancies. That includes informing and consulting employees individually, as appropriate. There is ample case law showing the importance that industrial tribunals attach to such matters in considering whether a dismissal is fair. It is simply not true, as some people have suggested, that the regulations give employers a free hand to dismiss without any consultation or any fear of sanction.

The change made by regulation 8 concerns the right to bring a claim of unfair dismissal in connection with a business transfer. When the draft TUPE regulations were debated in the House in 1981, the then Under-Secretary of State for Employment said:

"The normal provisions governing unfair dismissal, qualifying periods, and so forth, continue to apply in cases where employees are dismissed because of the transfer."—[*Official Report*, 7 December 1981; Vol. 14, c. 680.]

That is how the regulations were understood to operate until last year, when the employment appeals tribunal held in the case of Milligan and Bailey *v.* Securicor Cleaning Ltd. that the 1981 regulations did not prevent an employee with less than the normal qualifying service from bringing such a claim. The tribunal noted that member states were entitled, under the acquired rights directive, to exclude categories of employees who do not qualify for dismissal protection, but it held that, as drafted, the regulations did not exclude such employees from bringing a claim.

The effect of that judgment will be to give employees greater rights against their new employer than they enjoyed against their previous employer. That is not consistent with the purpose of the directive, which is to transfer employees' rights, as they stand at the time of the transfer, to their new employment. It is not to improve rights on employees' way to their new employment. Nor, following what was said in the 1981 debate in the House, would the effect of the judgment have been consistent with Parliament's wishes. No appeal, however, was lodged by the employer in the Milligan and Bailey case. Although a higher court may in a different case effectively reverse the judgment's effect, that will take time. In the interim, there will inevitably be uncertainty about the correct position. Such uncertainty can be damaging and we therefore believe it right to make the position clear beyond doubt. Regulation 8 therefore clarifies that the normal qualifying conditions for unfair dismissal apply in these circumstances.

Whatever the views of the people who would want a return to the disastrous days of compulsory trade union recognition or to impose some still more burdensome provision on business in this country, the Government have no doubt that the regulations provide a proper and coherent response to the European Court judgments on 8 June 1994. It may be one that Opposition Members do not like, but it provides for the maximum flexibility of approach consistent with an employer's overriding obligation to consult. It is a response that demonstrates our continuing commitment to removing unnecessary regulation and to providing our businesses with the right environment in which they can compete with others in the European Union and elsewhere. As I have said, the measures are four times blessed: they are deregulatory, they put the law right, they clarify uncertainties for everyone's benefit and they allow industrial relations to evolve and develop in a flexible way. I commend the regulations to the House.

8.19 pm

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): I start by declaring an interest, as a sponsored member of the Graphical, Paper and Media Union, and later in my speech I hope to explain how the regulations will affect employees in the printing industry. Before doing so, however, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on the objective and lucid way in which he outlined our objections to the regulations.

I wish that the Minister who responded had spoken in a similar fashion—and perhaps also more succinctly than he did. I have a fond regard for the Minister, but I am afraid that his previous job has followed him here in two respects. Professionally he is a lawyer, and in this place he also dealt with the law. He responded to my hon. Friend's arguments much in the manner of a lawyer—a lawyer who simply wanted to understand what the judgment was, rather than finding out what its consequences might be.

I timed the Minister's speech: it took 36 minutes. That is not bad for a lawyer, I suppose, especially one who is not being paid the going rate. *[Interruption.]* Another lawyer, in the person of the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen), speaks. I had thought that the Minister would respond to my hon. Friend point by point, but he spent the first 17 minutes talking about nothing. Then, probably as a result of looking at the civil servants' Box, he decided that he had a speech to read. For the next 19 minutes he sounded like a lawyer not summing up the case but giving the introduction to it—head down, bolting along and allowing no interruptions.

I remain unconvinced by the Government's case. The Minister used the phrase "four times blessed", both in his preamble and in his set speech. Yet every time he used it, he gave examples that made the same case as my hon. Friend made on our behalf. He reinforced the deregulation question, but described that as "removing gold plating".

I forget the exact figure, but more than £80 million was to be saved per year. What will that cost in stress to the workers, and in increased fears and uncertainty in the workplace as a result of the deregulation? I guess that in the long term it will cost more than £83 million per year. To refer to that as gold plating constitutes a sneer at ordinary working people who, because of the nature of their employment, happen to work for an employer with fewer than 20 employees.

The Minister failed to understand our objections to the election process and method. If the regulations extend consultation to include workers' representatives, I accept that, but we must ensure that the method of election is fair, and is seen to be fair. There is no guarantee of that in the regulations or in what the Minister said. We want neutrality on the part of the employer, who should not seek to influence the election. Despite what we heard about references to the courts, there is no guarantee that that will be so.

Now that I have got that off my chest, I shall make a few points on behalf of my union and myself. The Minister failed to acknowledge that some concessions have been made on the details of the regulations—as a consequence, I presume, of representations from the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress. I especially welcome the stronger protection against discrimination against employee representatives, which also extends to candidates in elections.

If the Minister for Science and Technology, who has replaced the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs on the Government Front Bench, is listening to me—I see that he is making notes, for which I am grateful—I urge him if possible to extend that protection to former representatives, too. A rogue employer may still seek to exact retribution from someone who is no longer a representative, simply because he or she used to serve in that capacity.

That change, among others, is to be welcomed. But it does not remove my fundamental opposition to the regulations as they stand. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West cited three criteria on which they fail. I will summarise under two main headings the reasons for my opposition.

The first reason is that the regulations undoubtedly strengthen the position of employers in comparison with that of trade unions. Despite the bluster from the Minister who spoke, that represents a continuation of the knock, knock, knock policy that the Government have pursued against trade unions over the past 16 to 17 years. The regulations have been used to make a further attempt to undermine the unions' position.

Secondly, as a consequence of removing the gold plating, deregulation removed from millions of workers the right to consultation prior to redundancy or the transfer of their undertakings. I find it unbelievable—or rather, as it comes from this Government, unacceptable rather than unbelievable—that an employer should have the unilateral choice whether to consult representatives of a recognised trade union or representatives simply elected by the employees. If there is to be such a choice, I should have thought that the employees should be consulted, rather than the employer making a unilateral decision.

Whether that is deliberate or unintentional—I agree with my hon. Friend's opinion that it is probably deliberate—one result of it would be to undermine established industrial relations machinery throughout British industry. That must be bad, irrespective of one's views on the function and role of trade unions in our society.

Moreover, the employer's ability to set the date for the elections and to specify the arrangements for them, could—I am tempted to say "will"—undermine the position of employees in the consultation process. The ad hoc arrangements for the election of employee representatives will mean that there is no guarantee that the person elected will have had any training or preparation for the role. How can such an arrangement ensure any degree of equity in negotiations between such a person—on behalf of his fellow workers—and his employers? Clearly the relationship is inequitable.

On the other hand, the vagueness of the obligation on employers to call elections—I believe that the phrase used is "long enough" before the time that the consultation should start—may be used to thwart the consultative process.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West speaks for all of us when he says that he opposes the deregulation measures in the regulations. There is no argument from the Government; they applaud the fact that it could well mean that millions of workers have no rights to be consulted about their continued employment or the transfer of their undertaking to an alternative place.

I should like to adumbrate what the regulations mean to the printing industry. The effect on the printing industry will be quite dramatic. As hon. Members probably know, the industry has a large number of small companies—approximately 19,500—of which about 17,000 employ fewer than 20 people. In a nutshell, the regulations mean that almost 90 per cent. of companies in the printing industry will not have to consult their work forces in any way on redundancies and business transfers. Almost 90 per cent. of firms will be able to shut down or move, and their employees will have no right to know about it whatever. That is unfair, inequitable and needs to be opposed.

8.30 pm

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall). However, it struck me that he said that he spoke on behalf of the trade union that he represents, not on behalf of his constituents. He actually said so. That should not surprise us, I suppose, because the trade unions created the Labour party and the Labour party is still the creature of the trade unions.

The regulations stem from the European collective redundancies directive of 1975, which was agreed to by the then Labour Government. I fear that the directive is a very good example of the kind of pettifogging European interference in the affairs of this country that so annoys so many of our constituents. We do not need Europeans to tell us how to regulate relations between employers and employees; we are perfectly well able to do that ourselves. It is about time that the Council of Ministers reviewed the matter and removed the directive altogether under the principle of subsidiarity.

We have to compete in a global market and, to put it simply, the more the regulation, the fewer the jobs. I am interested in securing jobs for the people of this country. I am glad that, as a result of our relatively relaxed and deregulatory approach compared with that of our continental friends, our unemployment rate is far below the European average—about 8 per cent. at the moment, compared with 13 per cent. or more in France.

Opposition Members suggest that employers should be obliged to consult only trade union representatives, but why should the employees not elect representatives of their own? It is suggested that employees might elect unsuitable representatives. Coming from the workers' friends on the Opposition Benches, that is a pretty poor view of the British worker's intelligence. British workers have more common sense than their representatives on the Opposition Benches give them credit for.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) was saying that where there is not a recognised trade union, there should be an obligation for the elected representatives to be elected fairly. The hon. Gentleman has skated over that point.

Mr. Stephen: As I understand it, Opposition Members were saying that where there is a recognised trade union, there should be no option but that the representatives of that trade union should be the persons consulted, and that there should be no option for the employees to elect representatives of their own.

It is suggested that the employer could fix the elections. The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) accepted that he was not suggesting fraud on the part of the employer—clearly that would be justiciable in itself. He was suggesting that by measures short of fraud, the employer might somehow procure an election result that was to his liking; the employer might put forward candidates and support them, with the intention that they should be elected. However, I suspect that that would be counter-productive in most workplaces. I should have thought that in a redundancy situation the last person for whom the employees would wish to vote would be someone who was seen to have the approval of the employer.

If the employer were to succeed by measures short of fraud in rigging the election result, Opposition Members have asked for the juridical basis on which a complaint to an industrial tribunal might be made about that procedure. They will find the juridical basis in regulation 3(1B)(a) on page 3 of the regulations, coupled with regulation 3(2)(1) on page 2 of the regulations.

Clearly, if the employer had rigged the election, it is perfectly arguable—and would be argued—that the persons elected were not representatives elected by the work force. In those circumstances, an industrial tribunal would have no hesitation in saying that the employer had not complied with the regulations.

Mr. Bennett: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could answer the question that the Minister failed to answer. How does the employer decide between first-past-the-post elections, a single transferable vote system or some sort of exhaustive ballot? How would the employer demonstrate to a tribunal that elections had been conducted fairly?

Mr. Stephen: We can all disagree about what types of election produce a better result, but almost any system of election that might be put forward—first past the post, single transferable vote or whatever—might be said to be fair. If in the circumstances the election could be shown to be manifestly unfair, as I have said, the employer would be in danger of being found by an industrial tribunal to have breached the regulations to which I referred.

Let us be quite clear what we are talking about since it has not yet been defined. We are not talking about the election of persons whose agreement to the redundancy has to be obtained. We are talking about the election of persons to put forward the views of the employees about the prospective redundancy. We are talking about the election of persons to whose views the employer must listen.

Why should the employer want to fix the election of those persons? Why should he not be interested in listening to any constructive or reasonable point of view that his work force may wish to put forward? The work force may not dissuade him from the unenviable task before him of dispensing with the services of some of his employees—some might be very valued employees—but why should he not be prepared to listen? Why, as has been suggested, might he even go so far as to intimidate those representatives? I have not heard so much nonsense in this place since this morning.

It has been suggested that the person elected will be less likely to be representative of the views of the employees concerned than a trade union representative might be. It has also been suggested that a trade union representative will always be a faithful representative of the interests of

[Mr. Stephen]

the particular workers concerned, while the elected person may not. I would suggest that both categories could conceivably not be true and faithful representatives of the workers concerned. As the workers concerned are those facing redundancy, it could well be that the trade union representative will attach greater weight to the interests of the rest of the employees in the company than to those few who have been selected for potential redundancy.

It has been suggested that Conservative Members are anti-trade unions, but very few of us are today. Most of us used to be, because the trade unions used to behave in a thoroughly reprehensible and irresponsible manner and did enormous damage to labour relations and the competitiveness of this country. By and large, the unions do not do that any more. I have no confidence, however, that if Labour ever formed a Government and gave the unions back the powers of intimidation that they once enjoyed, we would not see the old trade union movement resurrecting itself like a phoenix from the ashes to do the kind of damage in the future that we are all well aware that it did in the past. For the time being, however, the trade unions are acting responsibly, and no Conservative Member has any objection to them performing the role for which they were formed and which their members expect them to perform.

The regulations exempt companies where 20 or fewer redundancies in a 90-day period are envisaged. The first point to make about that is that the exemption is provided for in the regulations themselves. If—like the hon. Member for Leicester, South—Opposition Members object to that, why did the Labour Government in 1975 sign up to the directive that contained the exemption? These regulations will merely give effect to that directive.

As I pointed out in an intervention on the hon. Member for Oldham, West, it is rather bureaucratic—and, frankly, rather silly—to say that an elaborate system of collective representation is needed in situations where there are fewer than 20 people involved. The employer could get all the workers concerned together in a small room. Even the printing industry has such rooms where 20 people could gather together to be collectively consulted by their employers. It is fatuous to suggest that fewer than 20 people need such an elaborate system of representation.

Where employees elect a representative for the purpose of giving their employer their views about potential redundancies, there is no prohibition upon the employees or the employees' representatives consulting trade union officials. Indeed, employees could actually elect a trade union official to be their representative if he worked in the same company. If trade union representation is as desirable as Opposition Members seem to think it is, I would expect employees to elect trade union representatives.

I dealt earlier with the suggestion that the elected representative may be intimidated. In addition, the regulations state clearly that those representatives are protected against discrimination. They are also entitled to time off and to the necessary facilities to discharge their duties to those who elected them.

Regulation 8 rightly reverses the decision of the Milligan and Bailey case, which resulted in employees whose firms were being transferred being put in a different position from those whose firms were not being transferred. The effect of these regulations is to provide the same qualifying period whether there is a transfer of the undertaking or not.

Finally, the hon. Member for Oldham, West said that the regulations might be subject to proceedings for judicial review and, for all I know, they may be already. This is a very worrying trend. Some people think that if central or local government do something that they do not like, all they have to do is get a judge to overrule it. That is a very dangerous trend and could lead to constitutional implications that Opposition Members may not have considered.

Our constitution—although it is unwritten—has, over many centuries, developed a fairly clear division between the responsibilities of the judiciary on the one hand and the elected representatives of the people in this House and Members of the other place on the other. I fear that, of late, judges have trespassed too much into areas that the people have entrusted to their elected representatives. No one has elected the judges, and most of them accept that fact and conduct themselves accordingly: they do not get involved in politics. Indeed, Lord Denning always made a point of not getting involved in political issues in the other place while he was still sitting as a judge.

I am afraid that today many judges do not have so much regard for those self-imposed constraints as they should. Clearly, judges are there to make sure that the Executive do not stray outside the legal powers that Parliament has given to them, but we have had a number of cases of late where there has been no clear breach of the law by a Minister. Cases have arisen where a Minister might be considered, by one interpretation, to have trespassed outside an Act or regulation, while another perfectly reasonable interpretation of that legislation might produce a different result.

A good example was the criminal injuries compensation scheme where, from memory, about half of the judges who considered the case thought that the Secretary of State was right, while the other half thought that he was wrong. The decision went against the Secretary of State because the majority in the supreme court of the land—the House of Lords in its judicial capacity—thought that he was wrong. That does not negate the fact that about half of the judges who directed their minds to the case thought that the Act could perfectly reasonably be interpreted in another way.

In my respectful submission, where regulations or an Act of Parliament can be interpreted either way, it is the duty of the judges to give Ministers the benefit of the doubt. Otherwise, they are interfering in the political process, taking sides on political issues and bringing the judiciary into disrepute. *[Interruption.]* I notice that the hon. Member for Oldham, West is laughing, but I do not consider this a laughing matter.

8.48 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I do not want to follow the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) down the path of praising or castigating judges, but I do want to say who I am speaking for. The hon. Gentleman criticised my hon. Friend the Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) for speaking on behalf of his trade union. I wish to make it quite clear that I am speaking for the employers in my constituency, who are—to run two clichés together—at the cutting edge of the global market.

Those employers require two things—good trade unions in the works they run, and certainty in the law. In the years that I have been representing Stockport and Tameside, I have been amazed at the number of times that employers have praised the trade unions and shop stewards within their workplaces. They understand the vast advantages to running a business of good negotiations within it. They go further, and point out the number of occasions when companies have announced redundancies, but some other solution, such as short-time working, has been found after negotiations with the trade union, which has avoided that necessity. Some months later, the management will say how thankful they are that they did not put people through the door because they will need their skilled work force once orders pick up.

I must make it clear that there is no advantage in wearing away or reducing this sort of regulation. There is every advantage in having them in place.

Mr. Stephen: Of course, when a company is blessed with good trade union officials, in which the employer has the sort of confidence to which the hon. Gentleman referred, there is nothing in the regulations to prevent the employer from consulting such trade unionists. One would expect the employer to do so.

Mr. Bennett: I am sure that he would do so. I am pointing out that it is in everyone's interests to set up good situations, in which trade unions are respected by the employer and an effective negotiating process is in place, in as many companies as possible.

On the question of certainty, employers do not want to have to face the prospect of being castigated by an industrial tribunal. They do not want to have to go to the courts. They want to be able to look at the regulations and be confident that they are carrying them out correctly, and that they will not be challenged through an industrial tribunal or the courts in some other way. I came here to point out that I fear that the regulations fail on that question of certainty.

Hon. Members will notice on the Order Paper a note to the effect that an extract from the fifth report of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments is relevant. I chair that Committee, and in November we were advised by Speaker's Counsel that it appeared from the regulations that the Government had failed properly to implement the European directive. Speaker's Counsel suggested that it would be reasonable to ask the Department for a memorandum, which is published in the extract mentioned.

As a result, Speaker's Counsel made it clear to the Committee—made up of Members of this House and of the Lords—that the directive had not been fully implemented. At our meeting just before Christmas, it was clear that the Committee would not be able to produce a unanimous report, as we normally attempt to do. We therefore decided that we would take oral evidence in the first week after the Christmas recess.

Following that oral evidence, which is printed in extract from the report, it was clearly the view of the Speaker's Counsel that the Government had failed to implement the European directive fully. That is a pretty serious warning to the Government. Obviously, Speaker's Counsel is most experienced when it comes to considering such regulations, and does not lightly suggest to a Committee that the Government have failed to implement a directive.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that there is a danger that the regulations will be referred back to Europe at some stage, and that our Government will be found to have been negligent?

Mr. Bennett: Speaker's Counsel certainly suggested that that was a possibility. Since the Government have already been found wanting by the court, this time round they could face a substantial fine. Clearly, the system does not work if Governments keep failing to implement directives.

The Joint Committee was given a clear indication that everything was not right with the regulations. Most of the time, the Committee manages to pass reports unanimously, and there is no party political pressure. On that occasion, regrettably, it was obvious from the way in which the Committee voted that Conservative Members were determined to defend the Government, and were not prepared to accept the criticism. That is why hon. Members have the memorandum, but not a recommendation, from the Joint Committee that the regulations demonstrate that there has been a failure to implement the European directive.

Uusually, the Government majority can carry them through, both in Committee and in the House. I must warn the Minister, however, that, once someone as respected as Speaker's Counsel suggests that the Government are failing to implement a directive properly, there is a great possibility that someone outside this place will decide to challenge them and take the matter back to the European Court. Even at this late stage, I suggest that the Government should have second thoughts and look carefully into fully implementing the directive.

I am particularly concerned about the lack of facilities for people who want to organise an election to put representatives in place. There is the question of a room being made available. It does not happen often, but one does get companies that do not recognise a trade union and are irresponsible. They might feel that they want to negotiate with a particular worker, perhaps to come up with an alternative scheme to make one group of people redundant as opposed to another. The company will offer that individual a room within the factory or the workplace in which to negotiate with his or her fellow employees, while someone else whom the management do not view so sympathetically will be told that they can negotiate outside the factory gate or in the yard.

We want the regulations to spell out clearly the right of individuals to have the time to negotiate and to get a list of the people involved so that there can be a proper ballot. Without an electoral register, it is difficult to guarantee a fair vote. From the point of view of the employer, I should have thought that it was important to have a check list to enable him to say, "These are the things I have done. I am safe. I cannot lose in an industrial tribunal."

The Minister says that he wants it all in regulations, but he wants finally to leave matters to the good sense of the people involved. It is that good sense that it is almost impossible to challenge in an industrial tribunal. I think that the Government will be in difficulty.

On behalf of the Joint Committee, I must also point out that we are in a mess with statutory instruments resulting from European directives. In many ways, the directives

[Mr. Bennett]

do little more than the long title of a Bill—perhaps, one could say that they go a little further and that one gets the first explanatory clause as well. A great deal of the material that would normally form legislation now goes into statutory instruments, which cannot be amended. We must consider carefully whether new procedures are necessary to deal with regulations that come from European directives. I suggest that the Government could study regulations such as these to try to find some new procedure.

I must point out to my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), who is to reply on behalf of the Opposition, that I am concerned, when we get a Labour Government, which is not far away, that the House will have a limited amount of time for primary legislation. There is a premium, therefore, on ensuring that, in the first 100 days of a Labour Government, we get on with doing things by regulation.

I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to say that he has examined the regulations—he now has a long list of all their defects—and will quickly be able to come forward with a replacement regulation that would put back the things that are missing from the present regulations. I hope that he can give me that assurance, and say that we are doing the work to make sure that we have regulations ready to remedy the mistakes about which we have criticised the Government over the past few years.

8.58 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I am mainly concerned about the law on redundancy, of which these regulations are part, because, sadly, there are going to be a number of redundancies—perhaps a large number—at the biggest employer in Beckenham. The House will remember how, last year, the large pharmaceutical company Glaxo took over Wellcome. The biggest employer in Beckenham is the Wellcome research laboratories at Langley Park. As part of the rationalisation that followed the takeover, Glaxo decided to close the laboratory, with the loss of some 1,600—or perhaps slightly more—jobs.

My first concern was for what would happen to the work force—whether those people would be made redundant or offered other jobs, and, if made redundant, what help they would be given. Like any hon. Member in the circumstances, I talked to the company and to trade union representatives. I also talked to other people in the work force who were not members of a trade union, so that I could get the view from all angles.

I am pleased to be able to report that, at the moment, in so far as anything good can come from such a situation, the matter has been well handled by all those involved. Glaxo is a large, responsible company, which abides by its social obligations, and is doing the best it can to look after the workers who will no longer have jobs in Beckenham.

A large number of workers have been transferred elsewhere. There has been thorough consultation over that—not only through official union and other channels, but individually, with every member of the work force—to try to find out what is best for them: whether it is best for them to be transferred, made redundant or to take early retirement, and, if they are to be made redundant, whether some help can be given to them in, for example, setting up in business or retraining and moving to a different sort of job.

That happens in the majority of cases where there are redundancies. Companies, perhaps sadly, are used to handling them, and go out of their way to ensure that there is thorough consultation. They accept their responsibilities to their former employees. They try to keep the number of redundancies to a minimum, and find alternatives for those who are made redundant.

The truth, perhaps also sadly, is that there is a limited amount that can be done during consultation once redundancies are inevitable. Obviously, as much consultation as possible should occur; I thoroughly support that. However, we would be fooling ourselves if we imagined that that would cure the fundamental problem that resulted in the redundancies in the first place. Often, all the discussions can do is try to ease the passage and explain to those involved, if they did not already realise it, why the situation has come about.

I speak as someone who has been a trade union convenor, and twice been in such a situation. I have also been on the other side of the fence, and realise what it is like to manage and the difficulties involved when the work force must be rationalised. I also speak as someone who has been made redundant twice—once in industry and once in 1987, when I was made redundant from this place. I might add that the people who made me redundant, my then constituents, did not consult me until election day.

Sir Michael Grylls (North-West Surrey): I have listened carefully to my hon. Friend. Is it not the case that, the more Parliament or Europe imposes complicated social regulations—the intentions of which are good—on companies, the more redundancies may result? Firms find it difficult to compete when there is so much paperwork and bureaucracy. Their main competitors on the other side of the world do not have such difficulties. We are making a major own goal.

Mr. Merchant: My hon. Friend is correct, except that I would say that it is not that such regulations "may" make more redundancies, but that they will. They would certainly prevent jobs from being created in the first place. Perhaps the most important thing when redundancy occurs is that there should be alternative jobs available to try to soak up those made redundant.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) stereotyped Conservative Members' opinions by suggesting that we all supported companies, which we believed never did any wrong, and that we regarded trade unions as beasts, which were entirely evil. That was the impact of what he tried to say.

I reject that, as I said in my intervention. I believe, and have always believed, that trade unions have played, and play, a very important role in industry. I felt wholeheartedly that the law needed reform, but even before that reform, I recognised that trade unions played an important role, which is why I was an active member of a trade union.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West is stuck in the groove of the 1970s. That may make him feel nostalgic, and I hope he is happy in the groove, but it does not reflect today's world. He portrays an era when there was

perpetual confrontation in industrial relations. The main thrust of his speech related to a confrontation between a wicked employer who was trying to do down the work force that he was about to make redundant.

In the vast majority of cases, that is not the position; employers desire full and proper consultation. In the worst case, they do so because it is in their interests to do so, to make the process easier, but in the best cases they do so because they recognise their responsibilities.

The hon. Gentleman implies that company bosses would conspire to fix the consultation process by fixing the election of representatives of the work force. Why should they go to the trouble of doing so? In a sensitive redundancy position, the last thing any sensible employer wants is to stir up the animosity of the work force. I can imagine no better way of annoying the work force and making the redundancy more difficult than blatantly trying to fix the representatives' voice.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of derecognition. Why should an employer who had recognised a trade union suddenly derecognise it during a difficult period in industrial relations, with impending redundancies? The suggestion is absurd. An employer who did not want to recognise trade unions would have derecognised the union long before that critical point was reached. The hon. Gentleman sinks into paranoia when he suggests that that is not so.

The hon. Gentleman spoke as though, under the regulations, the company had the power to appoint the representative of the work force. As he well knows, that is not so—there must be elections. I do not understand how the employer could control the result of the free election that the regulations require.

I believe that the hon. Gentleman wrongly interprets the impact of the regulations. I accept that, in unusual cases, an employer may choose to bypass trade union representation. Those cases are as follows.

First, the employer may choose to bypass trade union representation when the trade union—or representatives of the trade union—obviously does not represent the employees. That happens occasionally, as the hon. Gentleman knows. In those circumstances, the regulations will help employees, by ensuring an alternative means of consultation.

Secondly, the recognised trade union may represent only part of the work force. The employer may, on receiving representations from employees who are not members, decide that it is better to have an elected representative of the entire work force, instead of a representative of the trade union portion of it.

Finally, there may have been severe confrontation between the employer and the trade union. The hon. Member for Oldham, West appeared to believe that severe confrontation was universal. In my opinion, it is rare. In such circumstances, the only way to achieve meaningful and positive consultation may be to bypass the trade union apparatus completely and hold an election of representatives from the part of the work force affected, purely for the purpose of consulting on redundancies. In those circumstances, the regulations would effectively protect employees' interests should that prove necessary.

Finally, I refer to the question of independence, which the hon. Member for Oldham, West made great play of. I believe that the regulations contain sufficient requirements to ensure that independent elections take place. My hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen)—who has left the Chamber temporarily—quoted the regulations chapter and verse, but he did not refer to three very important aspects—the right not to suffer detriment, which is extended to all those who are elected to represent the work force; the time-off provisions; and the granting of provisions, such as telephones and office space, to elected representatives.

Those measures will ensure that elected representatives are independent and that they cannot be intimidated or denied the means with which to represent the work force. That proves that the hon. Gentleman did not represent the situation fairly.

The regulations are constructed in a flexible way, in accordance with the real industrial relations situation in Britain today. They represent a light touch in regulation terms, but why should we have more regulation than is necessary? That is not in anyone's interests. I think that the regulations generally strike the right balance, and I am therefore very happy to give them my full support.

9.11 pm

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I have asked myself why we are having this debate this evening, and I have concluded that it is the product of an almost unprecedented vote in the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments. As my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) said, the Committee usually operates on a consensual basis, trying to find common ground wherever possible. However, it divided on this issue—which is not a trivial matter. It was not maliciously invented by the Opposition, but flows from the considered advice provided by Speaker's Counsel.

I shall begin by addressing the point that Conservative Members make incessantly. They recite the deregulation mantra: the Government have cut the red tape and freed small businesses from oppressive burdens. We hear that week in week out, month in month out, and year in year out.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): It is true.

Mr. Prentice: I have considered the number of statutory instruments—like the one that we are considering this evening—that have passed through this place and I discovered that, in 1987, there were about 2,300 statutory instruments and in 1995 there were 3,300. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish for providing those figures. There has been an explosion in the number of statutory instruments, yet Conservative Members claim that they want to cut red tape. The much-trumpeted deregulation initiative is a damp squib; it is a mouse.

I am serving on the Committee that is considering the Finance Bill, including the provisions relating to landfill tax. Much of that tax will be implemented by regulations and the Committee has received submissions from the Institute of Chartered Accountants—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I am sure that the Committee has received submissions from all sorts of people, but that is not terribly relevant to the debate this evening.

Mr. Prentice: I shall move on, but I just wanted to make that point about the difference between reality and the rhetoric from the Conservative party.

[Mr. Prentice]

We are here because of the advice that we received in the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments from Speaker's Counsel. That advice was unequivocal. Mr. Mason told us that, in respect of the two judgments of the European Court, United Kingdom law—in a non-recognition situation—allowed an employer to frustrate the protection offered by the directives. That is not my understanding; it is from Speaker's Counsel.

Speaker's Counsel had reservations on a whole raft of matters, and he was very critical. He was concerned about the duties on employers to organise the elections and he was also concerned about the absence of any duties on employers to those organising the elections. The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs talked eloquently about the rights that are conferred by the statutory instrument on elected representatives. However, the elected representatives do not materialise out of the ether. They must be elected. Who organises the elections? There is no duty imposed on employers to make time or rooms available or to give facilities to the people who organise the elections that produce the elected representatives. That may seem a very arcane point, but it is right at the heart of the debate.

Another point that I wish to make was picked up by my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish. As he said, there is no certainty with the regulations. There is no judicial authority to which a tribunal can turn. The Minister was pressed on that point by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), but he was incapable of citing the judicial authority to which tribunal members could turn. When we quizzed the civil servants at that extraordinary meeting of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, they could not point to a judicial authority either. Speaker's Counsel could not point to any judicial authority. It will be left to the members of the industrial tribunal to lick their fingers and stick them in the air to determine whether an employer in a given situation may have acted unreasonably. There is no authority to guide the tribunal, and that is a very serious matter.

The statutory instrument is another example of the deep antipathy that the Government have towards organised labour. It is frankly astonishing that the regulations should build in an either/or provision that, where there is a recognised trade union on site, the employer is allowed to set aside all the previous relationships that he has had with that recognised trade union and may consult a representative of the work force. That is absolutely bizarre.

There is a massive chasm between the Government and the Opposition. The Government trumpet the virtues of non-recognition, but we would give everyone the right to be represented at the workplace by a recognised trade union.

The consultation period is very short. For undertakings that employ fewer than 100 employees, it is only 30 days. That is no time at all, as anyone who has had experience of organising an election knows. That is a serious matter which has not been properly addressed.

I address my next remarks to the hon. Members for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen), who is not in his place at the moment, and for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant), who touched on this point as well. Both hon. Members relied on the virtues of sensible employers and could not imagine employers acting in a way that would get them hauled up before an industrial tribunal. In the magical, fantasy world they painted, employers would always behave reasonably. Real life is not like that and life outside the Bar of England is not like that.

There are rogue employers; some in my constituency pay people derisory sums, such as £1 to £1.50 an hour. They employ, as I said earlier, people who are illiterate, people who are not at home with the English language and people who have hitherto lived a cosseted existence, such as Asian women. There are rogue employers and people need to be protected from them. Who must do the protecting? It must be Parliament. If we pass that responsibility to an industrial tribunal, which will have no guidance, we are not doing our job.

9.20 pm

Sir Michael Grylls (North-West Surrey): This debate has been valuable, and I hope that it will be widely reported because it lifts the veil—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where were you?"] I have heard a good deal of the debate which, once again, lifts the veil and reveals that we are dealing not with a reconstructed Labour party but with a Labour party that has the same old boring, irrelevant prejudices.

Although the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) is an agreeable parliamentarian, I have to take him to task: he is not in the real world and he does not appear to represent the new Labour party; he is going back over the old stuff again. The debate also lifts the veil on what we could expect in the unlikely event of a Labour Government being elected. My hon. Friends may well roar with laughter; the prospect is such an absurdity that it is not worth spending 30 seconds discussing it. However, the country is entitled to know Labour's views, because people will have to make judgments.

Horrors would come from the social chapter. The hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) rightly talked about the fact that there was far too much legislation; I am with him on that. However, this Government are at least trying to deregulate. They may not be as successful as they should be, and I would like to them to do even more, but at least they are trying. A Labour Government would flood us with legislation and we would be up to here in paper and red tape. That may not matter too much in the House of Commons, because we are up to here anyway in paper and bumph, but it does matter in business. Hard-working firms throughout the country battle to win export orders and to compete against firms in countries outside the European Union that are not shackled by the social chapter, which shackles so many companies on the continent and from which our Government have, happily, saved Great Britain.

The debate has lifted the veil. The statutory instrument is, of course, important, but the debate is even more important in showing what could happen. The statutory instrument is a sensible reaction to the two European Court of Justice decisions, and I am glad that there are exemptions for cases in which a small number of employees are made redundant. That will help smaller firms which, if they are to survive and to maintain work for the remaining employees, need to be quick on their feet—

Mr. Meacher: In getting rid of their employees.

Sir Michael Grylls: The hon. Gentleman has lifted a bit more of the veil—this is fascinating—by saying that firms would get rid of people.

In the real world, if a firm suffers a setback and loses an order, it may have to reduce its work force. If it does not, it goes bust and all the employees lose their jobs. That is something that Labour has never understood and that is why the reforms carried out at the beginning of the 1980s by Lord Prior, when he was Secretary of State for Employment, were so important. They freed businesses—particularly small and medium-sized firms that need to be able to take people on and lay them off according to prevailing circumstances. It has been proved that, ultimately, flexibility leads to more, not fewer, jobs. Sometimes one has to take some medicine in order to get better.

The House has had many debates about British Leyland. I remember when it had to get rid of people, but when it became Rover and was more efficient, it started taking people on. That is the real world of business, so we must not shackle people as Labour would do.

We have had a valuable debate, because it has lifted the veil and showed British people what would happen if a Labour Government were elected. I end on an optimistic note, as nobody in the House or outside really believes that that will happen, but it is as well that we are warned.

9.25 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): I must place it on record that the hon. Member for North-West Surrey (Sir M. Grylls) made a speech based on the debate in the House, but he was not in the Chamber throughout the debate. He criticised the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), yet he was not present to hear it. He said that Labour would flood the country with regulations on companies. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should have done the House the courtesy of reading out a list of his own remunerations. He is flooded with directorships and other little earners outside the House, representing, I assume, some of the people who will benefit from the proposed regulations.

The Minister's speech was more reminiscent of the Old Bailey than of the House. He ploughed on regardless of evidence and continued representing his client in the certain knowledge that his client was as guilty as hell.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I am enjoying the spirit that the hon. Gentleman brings to the debate, but I must tell him that I have no right of audience at the Old Bailey.

Mr. McCartney: Perhaps a Labour Government will deregulate and make sure that the hon. Gentleman has that right. It would give him something to do after the next election.

The Minister said that his deregulation formula was four times blessed. One could take that seriously if one had not seen the Government's record on burdens on business. They have produced record levels of bankruptcy among small businesses. The Deputy Prime Minister practised late payment of bills, as he boasted recently, and that can lead to companies going bust. The Government refused to take action on bank charges, although the banks have ripped hundreds of millions of pounds out of the system at the expense of businesses. The Government have done nothing about the crippling record increases in unified business rates and have lumbered small businesses with the costs of implementing statutory sick pay legislation. The Government are no friend of small business and nor are the regulations, as I shall explain.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) made some telling points about the printing industry and the necessity for the regulations to set out a fair method of electing workers' representatives—an issue that has been avoided. He made another fair point, on which the Minister failed to give any assurance, concerning the employer's neutrality during the process of a ballot. The Minister failed to respond to points raised by the Speaker's Counsel and other serious complaints about the flaws in the regulations.

The hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) is not in his place. I am not surprised that he took part in the debate, as he may be made redundant at the next election. I am surprised, however, that he did not remain to hear the end of the debate, as he made allegations about employment and trade union rights. He missed the point that we are debating not trade union rights but employees' rights that can be facilitated, if they wish, through a trade union of their choice. The regulations try to prevent that from happening.

The hon. Gentleman made another amazing contribution—perhaps it had something to do with the fact that the Conservative party has been in power for 17 years. He argued that the Government had the right to be above the law. He argued—cogently in his terms—that the legal profession and the courts had no right to determine whether the Government were acting within the law in respect of the legislation before the House. That was an incredible attack—after 17 years of Conservative Government, it is not the first one from a Conservative Member. Conservative Members are so arrogant about power that they believe in dismantling our constitution, under which the judiciary is independent. That independence should be jealously guarded and attacks on it, whether from wild Back Benchers or from Ministers, should be rejected. We utterly reject the notion that this Government or any other Government can be above the law.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) made telling points on behalf of his constituents, particularly employers. He put the employers' case for social partnership and made an important point about the deficiencies in the regulations. He spoke of the uncertainty for employers, even those who want to act reasonably and to co-operate. The regulations fail to give them the appropriate guidance.

My hon. Friend made the most damning attack on the Government in relation to the Speaker's Counsel's opinion and he made a sensible suggestion which I hope the Minister will take up with his colleagues. My hon. Friend suggested that we should look at regulations and how we introduce them in the House. Many hon. Members are frustrated by the system which sometimes undermines Members' rights to scrutinise legislation.

My hon. Friend also asked about what we, as an Opposition, would do. I can assure him that we are working seven days—and seven nights—a week preparing for government. We are considering all types of legislation, including primary legislation, to ensure that an incoming Labour Government are not only prepared to govern but understand the priorities for government in terms of social partnership, and the sort of legislation to

[Mr. McCartney]

introduce to ensure minimum standards at work and the co-operation needed between employers and employees in developing the economy, both here and in Europe.

The hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) made an interesting contribution about the effects in his constituency of the merger mania which has become a plague in substantial parts of the United Kingdom economy. As a consequence of that merger mania, thousands of well-paid, well-established jobs have been stripped out as part of short-term measures to pay for the acquisition costs in different sectors of the economy.

One of the most telling points that the hon. Gentleman made involved the consultation programme introduced by a company in his constituency. In consultation with trade union representatives, it set up a retraining programme, a relocation programme, a self-employment programme and an early retirement programme that ensured that anyone retiring early would not find himself or herself in abject poverty. That is precisely what the court ruling in Europe was supposed to be about—it was supposed to facilitate such a process, not as a one-off but as a matter of course to deal with all aspects of redundancy negotiations. Although he did not intend to do so, the hon. Gentleman's contribution supported the arguments so eloquently set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West.

The Minister failed to give a detailed response to the opinion of the Speaker's Counsel and others about flaws in the regulations; instead, he ploughed on, on the basis that the Government are likely to have to return to the court on this subject. They are prepared to defend themselves in court—that is not an unusual practice for a Government who regularly find themselves before the European Court or courts in this country owing to their failure to act within the law. The hon. Member for Shoreham, although a radical, right-wing Back Bencher, made comments on that subject with which Ministers agree and in which they believe. They believe that they are above the law, so they are not prepared to take the advice of those who advise the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, those who advise the European Commissioner, or, indeed, European Court judgments.

The Minister is arrogant in another way: he decided that the consultation process on the introduction of the regulations would be private. He decided that it was not to be reported to the House or to individual Members of Parliament. Indeed, he wrote to me and refused me access to the consultation process. One thing that he could not refuse me was access to the organisations that participated. I contacted them by letter and telephone, and the overwhelming majority were astonished to learn that the consultation was not public. They thought that the reason for giving a view—whether it was pro-Government, anti-Government or a mixture—was to give Members of Parliament an understanding of what the situation should be in the workplace regarding the European ruling. They were amazed and astonished that the Minister had refused me access. No one refused me a copy of the submissions, and when I received them it became clear why the consultation was not made public.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I do not know what the hon. Gentleman is talking about.

Mr. McCartney: Of course the Minister does not, because he does not understand his job. That was clear from his speech earlier.

The Minister signed the letter. Perhaps he was ill advised in not providing information. It was a personal letter. He took time out from his busy day to ensure that neither the House nor I could have access to the consultation process. I shall give two examples to give hon. Members the flavour of the independent advice that the Minister and his Department failed to put before the House, and which they did not want the House to see.

The first letter is from the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, which is an independent body, a tripartite organisation, protected by law, and which represents employers and employees. It was set up by statute of the House to advise the Government and industry on procedures to improve industrial relations and to resolve industrial relations problems. It wrote to the Minister on 2 May 1995, and said:

"The Council views with some concern the requirement . . . of the proposal for employers to consult, at their choice . . . 'either a recognised independent trade union or elected representative of the affected employees.' The Council felt that allowing employers such freedom of choice might well result in established and accepted procedures being overturned. In ACAS's experience such a consequence would not be conducive to good industrial relations."

That was the independent advice that the Government had sought and received. They not only decided to ignore it, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said, but tried to suppress the information by not giving it to the House.

Secondly, I received a letter—a very nice letter—from the Engineering Employers Federation, the voice of engineering, which responded to me immediately. This is what it said of the Government's position:

"It is our view that proposed changes to the law do pose a number of new practical problems for many employers."

So much for deregulation. The letter continued:

"The Regulations will need to be clear and sufficient time will need to be given after the details of the Regulations are known but before they are brought into force to enable companies to understand the changes and to plan how they intend to comply with the new requirements."

The Government did not do that, either. The letter stated:

"Unless the Regulations are carefully drafted, they may result not only in increased litigation but also may adversely complicate and undermine existing employee relations practices."

We cannot get any clearer than that.

The EEF went on to say that the regulations should include a process to ensure that the balloting procedure is independent and can take place, to ensure that effective voting arrangements are available to employers and employees, to ensure that it is clear who can vote and to ensure the rights and duties of elected representatives in ballots.

That is the suggestion of an employers' organisation, but it has not been included in the regulations. It has been ignored. Ministers, however, still parrot the fallacy that the regulations are, in fact, about deregulation—about removing burdens from industry. They are nothing of the sort; they are simply an ideological attack on organised labour and the right of individuals to be represented by that organised labour.

The regulations have not secured the wholehearted support of industry, and on that basis I ask the Minister to withdraw them. Why did he reject the advice of ACAS

and the Engineering Employers Federation? Are not the regulations concerned with the deregulation of the United Kingdom's labour market, with a sweatshop Europe, with dragging down standards—imposing minimum standards as regards rights at work—with increased working hours, with low pay and with insecurity? Is all that not part and parcel of proposals that, over the past 10 years, have led us into three recessions?

The Minister refused to appear before the Joint Committee considering the statutory instrument, choosing instead to hide behind his officials and let them face the music. They could not respond, either in principle or in detail, to the allegations and complaints made by the Committee; they simply said that, in all circumstances, an industrial tribunal would be available to individuals wishing to seek redress.

We know that the tribunal system is experiencing a crisis. Tens of thousands of cases are awaiting consideration; in some areas, people may wait for six months. Equal access to tribunals does not exist, because there is no right to legal aid. Is the Minister suggesting that industrial tribunals should be the sole recourse for employees who wish to resolve a grievance? Will he return to the matter later, and announce financial provision to make that possible? If people are not represented by trade unions, they will have to meet the cost of tribunals from their own pockets—and they may already be in receipt of benefit, because their redundancies may already have taken effect.

Is the Minister going to tell us, clearly and specifically, that the Government will change their policy and provide legal aid? I do not think that he will. If I am right, the issue of access to tribunals was no more than a smokescreen to get the legislation past the Joint Committee. The Government, however, could not get past either the members of the Committee or the cogent legal argument that their proposals were flawed.

It is interesting to note that nearly 8.5 million people have been unemployed at least once since the last general election. Since the election of the present Prime Minister in November 1990, 11 million people in England alone have been unemployed at least once. The Government see unemployment and redundancy as a key element of their economic strategy. The regulations are intended to do no more than facilitate the continuation of that strategy, and their proposals for deregulation.

The Government will not get away with this. Either they will be forced to go back to court and defend their position, and lose—as they are likely to—or it will be up to an incoming Labour Government to resolve the issue, as we shall. No intellectual, moral, economic or social case can be made to exempt 96 per cent. of employers in Britain from allowing employees access to consultation—allowing them their minimum rights—in the event of redundancy. It flies in the face of the European Court ruling and puts up two fingers to that court.

The threshold in the Government's proposal negates the court's proposals, which contained the simple proposition that, when a redundancy situation exists, employees are entitled to a minimum standard of representation, and that that representation and consultation are about an amelioration of the redundancies to take place. They also aimed to put in place an agreement with employees to facilitate a reduction in redundancies, retraining or relocation—all the things that the hon. Member for Beckenham set out in his speech on behalf of the Government.

The Government's proposal negates that responsibility. As a consequence, they will again face being a lawbreaker instead of a lawmaker. Whether it be the Secretary of State for the Home Department, for Trade and Industry, for Social Security or for Scotland, Cabinet members end up before the courts as lawbreakers. They have brought the House into contempt.

An incoming Labour Government will rectify that position at the next general election. If the Government will not give people appropriate opportunities to have discussions on redundancies, at the next general election, it will be Conservative Members who will be made redundant. We will have a Government in place who not only give people basic rights but have an economic policy that gets rid of redundancies and starts producing jobs.

9.45 pm

Mr. John M. Taylor: With the leave of the House, in a breathless and breathtaking winding-up speech, the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) asked me why I had not slavishly followed some selected employer representative. He then hopelessly exaggerated the improving process times of industrial tribunals. He gave us a clear glance of old Labour in all its bitter fulmination and then asked me about the consultation process. A copy of the Department's consultation paper was placed in the Library of the House. Perhaps he cannot find the Library. The replies informed the Government in drafting the regulations—that was the purpose of the consultation. As a matter of courtesy to the people consulted, I did not send him copies of their responses, but of course he could have approached them and asked them for a copy. I am entirely happy that he should have done so.

Hon. Members have referred to the advice of the Speaker's Counsel. Whatever advice the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments may have received, it has not drawn that advice to the House's attention. The courts will decide whether the regulations implement the judgments. We are confident that they will decide in our favour.

The hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) asked about judicial authority. If by judicial authority he means case law, there can be no case law—certainly not yet—because this is new law on employee representatives. If he means legal authority, the text of the regulations is sufficient, as my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) ably explained. They clearly provide that the employer must consult representatives and include sanctions if he does not.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Surrey (Sir M. Grylls) wanted more deregulation and, separately, more glimpses of old Labour so that the electorate would not be beguiled. In short, he wanted to save small firms and save England too. Even so, he concluded optimistically and reassuringly, at least in my opinion.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) spoke cogently—as he always does—and vividly about his qualifications to speak on these matters. He lent to the debate special authority, sympathy and insight in his sharply focused approval of the Government's proposals.

The hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) implied that he thought that former representatives do not have protection. I must tell him that former

[Mr. John M. Taylor]

representatives are protected under the regulations. I am sure that if he looks carefully at the wording of regulations 12 and 14, he will see that protection against dismissal and detriment short of dismissal applies not only to candidates and representatives, but to former candidates and representatives, if their dismissal or the detriment suffered relates to their status or activities while acting as representatives.

The hon. Members for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) and for Leicester, South both asked me to summarise for them the gist of the European Court judgments. The main point arising from those judgments is that there should be consultation of employees' representatives regardless of whether there is a recognised trade union. Most hon. Members who take an interest know that at present the only consultation required is consultation with a recognised trade union, if there is one. If there is none, there is no current obligation to consult at all. That is the deficiency in our law—laws that were put on the statute book by the Labour party. The Government are now putting that right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham developed his arguments lucidly, as always, not least on the subject of judicial review. His remarks will merit rereading tomorrow, and what he said about the right of employees to challenge the way in which an election was conducted, was exactly correct.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) has played a particular part in the deliberations outside the Chamber, not least in the Joint Committee. Tonight he spoke about employers in his constituency, and described how careful and well-conducted industrial relations had often resulted in short-term working rather than lay-offs, and how both employers and employees had benefited from that mature form of industrial relations. He took me with him there, and I understand and respect what he said.

The hon. Gentleman spoke in favour of certainty. So do I, but there our convergence falters. We agree that there was uncertainty, but on behalf of the Government I say that the regulations before us properly remove that uncertainty.

It has been said both in the debate and outside the Chamber that the Government oppose trade unions. That is not the case. We are neither for nor against unions. Just as we believe that every individual employee must have the right to choose freely whether to be a union member, so we believe that every employer should be free to decide whether to deal with trade unions. That was not so under the Labour Government's legislation, which both permitted and encouraged the closed shop, and enabled unions to compel employers to recognise them. That remains an area in which there are clear differences between the policies of the Government and those of the Opposition.

Since 1980 we have implemented a series of reforms to industrial relations and trade union law to correct the previous imbalance of power between unions and employers, and between unions and their own members.

I remind hon. Members that it is as a result of the Government's reforms that workers are free to choose whether to join a union; that secondary industrial action and flying pickets are unlawful; that trade union members have the right to vote in postal ballots on industrial action, the election of leaders and the establishment or maintenance of political funds; that trade unions rather than their officers are legally accountable for their actions and can be sued if they act unlawfully; and that employers can no longer be forced to recognise trade unions if they do not believe that it is in the interests of their business to do so. At every stage those reforms were bitterly opposed by the Labour party and the union movement.

I am happy to say that strikes, whether official or unofficial, no longer dog our economy as they did in the 1960s and 1970s. The Government's trade union reforms have transformed industrial relations, and I make no apology for quoting some more statistics. The average number of working days lost for every 1,000 employees between 1975 and 1979 was 512. Between 1990 and 1994, it was 37—a reduction of 93 per cent. There were only 205 recorded strikes in 1994—the lowest annual total since records began more than 100 years ago.

That transformation in our industrial relations has generated greater confidence in the economy. That has attracted inward investment, which has of course brought jobs and opportunities. During last year alone, almost 37,000 new jobs were created through inward investment, while more than 51,000 jobs were safeguarded. Better industrial relations and the positive climate for growth and enterprise that we have created have brought more work and better opportunities for the people of this country—whether they are trade union members or not—and strengthened the economy.

I should not need to add that the Labour party has voted against every reform that we have introduced, just as it will vote to revoke the regulations. It was no more right about the other issues than it is about this one.

We have had an interesting and instructive debate—for some of the time. It has been interesting not only because of what has been said, but for what was not said by the hon. Member for Makerfield and other Opposition Members. We have heard no more than might have been predicted in a Trades Union Congress brief on the issue.

As I said, I would not expect any meeting of minds on some points for we approach such matters from fundamentally different standpoints. I would not expect Opposition Members to welcome a provision that allows an employer freedom of choice on whether to consult through a trade union or through representatives elected by employees themselves. I did not expect Opposition Members to approve measures designed to minimise the statutory burdens on UK businesses to enable them to remain competitive and create jobs.

Nor did I expect to hear—although I challenge him to tell us now—how the hon. Member for Makerfield would give effect to the judgments. Would the hon. Gentleman return to the practices of the past? Is he a representative of old Labour? Looking down the bench below the Gangway, I see that there are rather a lot of old Labour members in the Chamber. Where the others? Where is new Labour? Where are the stakeholders? We have the old stakeposts here tonight, and I think that they will win the battle for the heart and soul of the Labour party.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 258, Noes 295.

Division No. 44] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Malcolm Chisholm and
Mr. Joe Benton.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles

Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Simon Burns and
Dr. Liam Fox.

Question accordingly negatived.

Frances Withers Home, Sutton Coldfield

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

10.15 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): The previous Adjournment debate that I initiated was about the Good Hope hospital in my constituency. I criticised the position at the hospital and argued, among other things, that more beds needed to be opened there. I am glad to report that that has been done, and almost everyone in the community has welcomed that—the sole exception being the Labour party's health spokesman, the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman).

I hope that the hon. Member for Peckham will take note of the issue that I draw attention to tonight—the future of a 40-bed residential home for elderly people, the Frances Withers home which, contrary to strong local feeling, the Labour-controlled Birmingham city council intends to close. It is a case, not of reducing beds, but of cancelling them and withdrawing care. Once that policy, which is in its last stages, has been implemented, no facilities will remain at the Frances Withers home for the elderly people who are there, or for any future residents from Sutton Coldfield and the rest of Birmingham.

I was Secretary of State for Social Services for six years, and this is one of the most extraordinary cases that I have come across. The media are rightly used to becoming passionate about the health service. I hope that the television companies which frequently visit Good Hope hospital will visit the Frances Withers home and confirm what I am about to say. The impression has been given that the Frances Withers home is decrepit and run down, requiring hundreds of thousands of pounds to bring it up to standard. In fact it is a modern, purpose-built home, providing single rooms for all 26 current residents and with other single rooms available to bring it up to capacity. The home is below capacity only because new entrants are being refused.

On entering for the first time, any visitor receives an impression of space. There are lounges on both floors and the atmosphere is self-evidently happy. The home, situated in a quiet part of Sutton Coldfield, is surrounded by gardens and has a good view of Sutton park. In other words, it is an ideal spot for a residential home for elderly people and, in the opinion of some people who have visited all the homes in Birmingham, it is one of the best homes in the city, if not the best. That makes the proposal to close that excellent home, with all the consequences that it will bring, all the more extraordinary. In my opinion, it is a policy of social vandalism.

What does the closure of Frances Withers mean? First and foremost, residents who have lived there for several years will be moved from what they rightly describe as their home. They are very elderly men and women, almost all of whom are in their 80s and 90s. There is Alice who is 96, Mary who is 91 and Gregory and Jessie who are both 90. No one should doubt the trauma involved in moving people of that age.

My mother died before Christmas, aged 93. She spent the last years of her life in residential and then in nursing care. As far as she was concerned, stability was essential. She would have been devastated had she been shuffled about at that stage of her life. Fortunately, she was not, but the 26 people now staying at Frances Withers face that traumatic prospect.

No one should doubt the strength of feeling of the relatives who are witnessing what is happening at Frances Withers. One wrote to me in the following terms:

> "I believe this to be a mean and heartless measure on the Council's part. For many of the pensioners residing at Frances Withers this is the only home they have known for several years and to move them elsewhere would be a sad and traumatic experience."

The policy means distress for residents and relatives as the council breaks up an established home. It will also mean splitting up the excellent team of staff who work at Frances Withers, some of whom have been employed there since it opened in the early 1970s. The closure of Frances Withers is opposed by me and my team of Conservative councillors—Alan Rudge and John Hood. David Roy, the Lord Mayor, obviously steers clear of controversy, but he has also kept himself informed about that issue. The closure is also opposed by Unison, the union which represents the staff, and by a number of Labour councillors. In other words, the policy has very few friends.

If the closure of the nursing home goes ahead, the supply of much-needed residential accommodation for elderly people in north Birmingham and the surrounding area will be permanently diminished. Apologists for the closure quietly suggest that demand for places in residential care is diminishing and that that is likely to continue, but that argument flies in the face both of present experience and of the estimates of future demand.

Last Friday at my advice bureau I met relatives of Frances Withers residents who are deeply anxious about the future. I pay tribute to the way in which they have put their case. My next appointment was with another resident of Sutton Coldfield who was concerned about her mother who is almost 80. At the end of October her mother fell and broke her hip and she was admitted to Good Hope hospital on the same day. It was decided that she could not return home—her daughter had cared for her for the past 18 years—as she now needed a greater degree of care. It took no fewer than 95 days to find her an alternative place—during which time she waited in the same bed, in the same ward, at Good Hope hospital. I acknowledge that that was an exceptional case, but we would be foolish to ignore the warning.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Norman Fowler: Yes, I will, although the hon. Gentleman's knowledge of Sutton Coldfield and Birmingham is not exactly encyclopaedic.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I do not claim that it is. Has not the local authority said that it has to make so many closures because it does not have the resources to keep the facilities going?

Sir Norman Fowler: I shall come to that point and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be persuaded by what I have to say about it. I hope that he will not rely on that point, however, because it is a dud and invalid point.

I was making a serious point. If the Frances Withers home is closed, the same will happen as happened to my constituent: beds in the local hospital at Good Hope will

[Sir Norman Fowler]

be used for people who should be in residential care. That lady was kept in Good Hope hospital for no fewer than 95 days in a bed that could have been used for other patients. That is a disgrace. Doubtless, that is an exception and I do not claim that it is common, but the risk inherent in the council's policy is that such cases will become more and more common.

I will deal now with the argument that the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) raised. What arguments have been used to defend a policy which, frankly, I believe is indefensible? Money, of course, is one of the arguments used. Birmingham has a budget of £1.2 billion a year. In 1996-97, some £188 million will be available to spend on social services. That is an increase of £11.5 million over 1995-96, and an increase of almost £83 million on 1990-91. I simply cannot believe that, in that vast budget of Birmingham council, the only decision that can be taken to save money is to close a purpose-built—I emphasise purpose-built—20-year-old old people's home. If that is the case, the council should pack up and go home.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Norman Fowler: I will not give way. The hon. Lady was not here at the beginning of the debate. If she wants to have an Adjournment debate on the situation in her area, she has opportunities to do so.

When the press has asked about the policy, another argument has been advanced by the council spokesman. The press has been told about an estimated £530,000 that needs to be spent on refurbishments to meet the "1998 regulations". It has been suggested that they are European regulations—not so. It has been suggested that they are Government regulations—again, not so. Indeed, they are not regulations at all but a policy and a time scale that Birmingham council has itself decided to follow to make improvements to the home. It is, of course, sensible to improve physical standards in any home, and that should be done steadily year by year—councils should not allow spending to pile up so that they need to make a big investment all at once and have an enormous single bill—but there is no reason to set down an inflexible timetable.

The Government's policy was set out in the ministerial introduction to "Home Life":

> "It will be for registration authorities individually to ensure that the code is applied positively and sensitively in a way that makes sense in local circumstances".

Personally, I endorse those words entirely as I wrote them in conjunction with Lord Crickhowell, then Secretary of State for Wales. No one ever envisaged in a million years that a local authority would misuse guidance on best practice as an excuse for closing down a modern residential home.

I am not talking about an ancient, decrepit building. The home was purpose built. No requirement has been laid down by the Government or anybody else that certain standards should be met by 1998. That is a rod that the council has devised for its own back. If the net result is to close down a modern building, that is bureaucracy gone mad. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health will confirm that there is nothing in Government regulations that would force the spending of £530,000 by 1998.

I do not think any more of the further argument that has been made—that residential provision for the elderly is above average in the Sutton Coldfield and Erdington areas. That is a fascinating statistic, but it is next to meaningless because the people there do not always come from Sutton Coldfield and Erdington—certainly, as I well know, their relatives come from all over Birmingham.

I believe that the policy is wrong because of the potentially disastrous impact that it will have on present residents. I believe that it is wrong because of the effect that it will have on future residents. I believe that it is wrong because it is bound to have the effect of increasing the pressure on local hospitals. And it is wrong because many of the reasons that have been given as justification for it are misleading.

We now know that alternative uses for Frances Withers are being actively considered. A letter from the head of acquisitions and valuation services to the social services department says:

> "I should be grateful if you could kindly let me have some indication of when vacant possession of the premises is likely to be obtained and your thoughts on their future use, particularly with regard to the need to satisfy your committee's policy regarding the disposal of surplus homes."

Another letter at the end of October from the social services department notes that the North Birmingham Mental Health trust, in partnership with MIND—the National Association for Mental Health—is among the organisations that have expressed interest in alternative uses for Frances Withers. In other words, we can take it that the policy of closure is being pursued vigorously.

The question is what can be done. I am highly critical of the policy and I do not withdraw one word of what I have said about it. I hope that there are now sufficient people of good will in all parties who do not want to see an excellent home closed down and residents moved against their will. One solution is obviously for the council to reverse its policy and to continue to run the home. If that is not to be the case, it needs to be said now that all other options should be explored to see how the home can go on running and how its residents can be cared for.

It may be that some new partnership arrangement can be reached with the council. It may be that a voluntary organisation will be able to help or even that a new voluntary organisation can be formed. However, I make it clear that it must be a voluntary organisation that wants to preserve the home for the elderly people who are there and does not want to dedicate it to some other use. Perhaps some form of private sector organisation may be interested.

If the council is not to run the home, the aim must be to continue to run Frances Withers as a residential home for elderly people. Clearly, options for the future cannot be explored sensibly with an axe poised over the home. What is now required is a minimum six months' stay of execution so that all the options can be explored. I very much hope that the council will agree to this, and I very much hope that the Minister will be able to confirm my understanding of the requirements that govern the home and to confirm that what I propose is an option that is open to the council. Above all, the aim must be to develop new policies that will give fresh hope to the elderly residents of Frances Withers home.

10.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) for raising the issue this evening and for bringing it to my attention, to that of the House and to that of the decision makers in the city of Birmingham. As a distinguished and long-serving former Secretary of State for Social Services, my right hon. Friend brings great personal experience and expertise to the subject, so much so that I am almost tempted to sit down and let him answer the debate. However, I will not do that tonight.

I know, too, that my right hon. Friend will acknowledge that we have built on his years of achievement, and have gone on advancing the provision of care for elderly people, especially since the introduction of the community care reforms in 1993. I also welcome his reference to the progress that has been made in the NHS in Birmingham, where, as he has acknowledged, work has started on two new operating theatres with emergency facilities at the Good Hope hospital, at a cost of £1.4 million. A further £1.4 million is to be spent on work at the City hospital NHS trust for refurbishment of the accident and emergency department.

At both national and local level, care for the elderly has, rightly, become one of the highest-profile and closely followed aspects of health and social services. In this place before Christmas, we had a debate on care of the elderly in Lancashire. A couple of weeks ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) examined the regulation and inspection of homes. Last week, I was able to give evidence to the Select Committee on Health on the future of long-term care.

I very much welcome the attention that my right hon. and hon. Friends have given to this area of policy implementation, and the scrutiny that they have given to the decisions by local councils, so many of which are currently in the hands of the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. Tonight is no exception.

The introduction of community care represented a major step forward in the delivery of services to the elderly. By the end of 1996-97, local authorities will have been given an additional £2.2 billion for their new responsibilities, representing a massive injection of resources at a time of tight restraint in public spending, and a total of well over £5 billion for community care. To take Birmingham as a example, the local authority's total personal social services resources will have risen by 46 per cent. in real terms since 1990-91. Its total social service resources in 1996-97 will represent an increase of 9 per cent. over the 1995-96 figures, as my right hon. Friend said.

Dr. Lynne Jones: Will the Minister acknowledge that Birmingham already spends well in excess of the standard spending assessment for social services? The council may be Labour-controlled, but the Government impose budget constraints. The Government grant has increased by about 0.5 per cent., and overall expenditure has risen by 2.5 per cent., so Birmingham faces cuts of about £41 million.

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Lady is quite right. Birmingham has to manage with the generous resources that it receives from the taxpayer. As my right hon. Friend pointed out, the increase in resources to social services from £105 million in 1990-91 to £187.8 million in 1996-97 is fair funding indeed, and Birmingham should be able to provide good and efficient services. Perhaps it needs to be more efficient.

Important as investment has been, we are committed to developing services that increase user and carer choice and control—choice in the services they receive and the way in which those services are delivered. Our reforms are about putting people first, and my right hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that, first and foremost, local councils should be looking at what is best for the residents of the Frances Withers home. He mentioned Alice, Mary, Gregory, Jessie and the other residents. As he says, they are at perhaps the most vulnerable stage of their lives, and they deserve utmost consideration from those entrusted with their care.

My right hon. Friend would be among the first to recognise that improving care for the elderly is not a task that central Government can approach by seeking to intervene and interfere in every local decision. Good-quality local care can be delivered only if the elected leaders of local authorities take responsibility for the planning, commissioning, inspection and, in some cases, management of services.

The Government have set out a clear policy framework within which local authorities can discharge their statutory duties. In addition to the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, we have in recent years issued guidance to local authorities on the procedures they should follow in making service changes, such as closing homes.

We have supported the development of guidelines for standards in residential care homes. My right hon. Friend will no doubt recall endorsing the "Home Life" report of 1984, to which he referred. He will be reassured to know that we have not endorsed the draft "Home Life II" report which has been circulating in recent weeks and caused such dismay as a result of its intrusive and politically correct content and tone. We have introduced a statutory direction on choice that gives anyone entering residential care, following an assessment by the local authority, the right to choose the home in which they wish to live, subject only to availability, appropriateness and reasonableness in terms of cost.

We have continued to develop the role of the social services inspectorate in overseeing standards and the local inspection of those standards. The Audit Commission is developing its work, and we have a Bill before Parliament to develop that further.

Within that framework, we want to allow local authorities as much scope as possible to carry out their functions, enabling them to diversify and, in partnership with providers, users of services and carers, to determine appropriate provision for the local population. The people of Birmingham elect their councillors to do exactly that job. They will be looking to them for solutions to problems such as those that my right hon. Friend raised this evening, and in due course they will hold them to account.

Local authorities around the country are increasingly providing residential care through contracts with independent sector providers rather than running directly managed homes many of which do not meet the registration standards required of independent sector

[Mr. Bowis]

homes. There is no requirement on local councils to provide directly managed homes, and that has been clarified by a recent judgment in the House of Lords. Their duty is to arrange for appropriate and good-quality care to be provided by residential and domiciliary care providers, no matter in which sector they are.

The key current responsibilities of local authorities towards their local populations are to assess needs and to make arrangements as necessary for residential and other forms of care. Their prime function is that of purchasers of care, but we make no requirements on them to reduce, or divest themselves of, their own homes. We certainly do not include the sort of requirements to which my right hon. Friend referred. Local needs and priorities must drive local decisions.

I stress that, even if a local authority decides that it is not best placed to run its own homes, there are alternatives to closure that should be considered. Many local authorities have transferred the ownership or management of their homes to the independent sector—private or voluntary—as my right hon. Friend suggested. Such transfers can take place without any disruption to the lives of the residents themselves, while giving better value for money for residents and ratepayers alike.

When a decision is being made to close a local authority-run home, we have made it clear in guidance—and it has been confirmed in judicial reviews—that local authorities have a duty to inform and consult existing residents. They should take fully into account the welfare and wishes of both residents and staff of the home involved.

Factors to take into consideration should include the availability of other homes in the area and any deficiencies in the existing buildings. Residents of a home should be informed of any proposal to close as quickly and sensitively as possible; they should be fully consulted about the range of alternative homes in which they can and might wish to be accommodated. When doing that, local authorities are expected to make every effort to enable residents to preserve friendships that they may have built up in the home, so that the move is carried out with the minimum of disruption.

There are two avenues that can be pursued where anyone is not satisfied that a closure has been carried out with due regard to such considerations: the first is judicial review, which I believe has recently happened in terms of another home closure in Birmingham; secondly, there is the local authority complaints procedure, with eventual recourse to the local authority ombudsman. I know that my right hon. Friend will understand when I tell him that Ministers cannot and have no power to intervene in individual cases. To do so would undermine one of the strengths of community care—that it puts local people in charge of local decisions.

With regard to the Frances Withers home in Sutton Coldfield, I can understand why feelings run so high on such a sensitive issue, which affects very elderly and vulnerable people. I understand that the director of social services has given an assurance that the council will not undertake any precipitous action. He has stated that the decision to close the home was taken after due consultation and consideration of the options available. I understand that his officers in the social services department have sought to engage residents in discussions about alternative accommodation, although there remains a group of people who have so far declined to engage in such discussions.

I know that, in arriving at its decision, the social services committee claims to have considered a number of factors, including the overall level of provision in the area—to which my right hon. Friend referred—and the extent to which the services are provided by the council. I believe that the council's provision is higher than the national average.

Other factors include the occupancy levels, which I am told have been less high in Frances Withers than in other nearby homes. That may be partly due to the uncertainty over the home's future. Some 23 of the home's 40 beds are currently occupied. The council claims to have concerns about the levels of staffing and the maintenance of good-quality care. It also claims to have taken into account the number of admissions, which suggested that the home was not being used as much as neighbouring homes, particularly for respite care.

There was also the question of the cost of refurbishment, to which my right hon. Friend referred. That is certainly not due to any Government requirement.

Sir Norman Fowler: My hon. Friend is making an important point. Will he confirm and underline the fact that there is no Government requirement that £530,000 should be spent on Frances Withers home, by any regulation propagated by Government, by the year 1998?

Mr. Bowis: I can give that assurance. There is no such requirement to do so, by 1998 or any other date.

I have listened carefully to the points made by my right hon. Friend. I was particularly concerned to hear about the wait endured by the lady who was finally admitted to a home. If he would like to let me have further details of that case, I shall certainly look into it. I shall be asking the social services inspectorate to keep a close watch on the position in Birmingham and to report back to me as appropriate.

The council in Birmingham, the social services and we in government need to ensure that there is a coherent strategy in place that is flexible enough to take account of the wishes of local people, particularly the residents of local care homes. I hope that Birmingham councillors will consider carefully the fact that, if they cannot continue to run the home—for whatever reason—they must adequately consider the option of inviting the independent sector to take it on and keep it going. I think that that is what my right hon. Friend is asking for on behalf of his constituents. It seems to be a perfectly reasonable option, which should be considered by the city council.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 7 February 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Horticulture

[*Relevant documents: The Fourth Report from the Agriculture Committee of Session 1994-95, on Horticulture (House of Commons Paper No. 61–I and –II), and the Government Reply thereto contained in the Fourth Special Report of Session 1994-95 (House of Commons Paper No. 778).*]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

9.34 am

Sir Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): The Agriculture Committee is deeply honoured to be the first Committee to take advantage of the new procedure, which you, Madam Speaker, kindly approved, to allow Select Committees more time to debate their reports. All of us on Select Committees agree that the former arrangements were totally unsatisfactory, particularly when hon. Members and people outside the House give up so much of their time to give evidence to our Committees, and it is a tragedy that we do not have more time to debate them. This is only the third debate that the Agriculture Committee has had in the past seven years.

We published our report on horticulture last August, and it shows that, despite the problems that the horticulture industry faces in the United Kingdom and the relatively low common agricultural policy support that it receives, horticultural holdings in the United Kingdom employ almost 10 per cent. of the agricultural labour force. Some 60,000 people, including farmers and their wives, work on holdings where horticulture accounts for more than two thirds of the total standard gross margin, and that figure does not include the substantial number of seasonal and casual workers who are employed at harvest and other busy periods. Nor does it account for those who work further up the food supply chain and those who work in the ancillary sectors.

We were left in no doubt that, in some parts of the United Kingdom, horticulture plays a role in the local economy that is much understated by mere employment statistics, and it is fair to say that the substantial attendance at what, for Parliament, is an early hour to debate what appears on the face of it a somewhat dry subject demonstrates that hon. Members recognise the importance of the industry to their constituencies. We held our inquiry at a time when the fortunes of some sectors of the UK horticulture industry were, and, I am afraid, still are, at a low ebb. A snapshot of the industry when we made our inquiry shows the problems that it faces. There has been an on-going, long-term decline in horticultural production in the United Kingdom; the value of output has been falling; and horticulture's share of total agricultural output has also declined. Despite rising output per hectare, due largely to technological advances, incomes have also been in decline.

In addition, and perhaps amazingly, the United Kingdom runs a substantial and growing trade deficit in fruit and vegetables, which in 1993 reached £2,818 million. Even when produce that cannot be grown in the UK is discounted, there is still a substantial trade gap, and all that despite the fact that per capita consumption of fruit and vegetables in the UK is among the lowest in the European Union and is less than half the amount consumed in some of the southern member states.

We paid some visits during the inquiry, and in Almeria, southern Spain, we were astounded by the results of a latter-day "gold rush", where what was once a wilderness has been transformed into a highly productive and low-cost nursery, with not just acres or hectares but what seemed to be square mile after square mile of plastic sheeting spread along the coastline. Those vast, cheap, makeshift greenhouses, with the aid of irrigation water from the aquifers beneath, produced peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers and numerous other salad crops, all of which are transported throughout the European Union.

In Holland, we saw similar crops being grown in more elaborate and expensive systems under glass, but we should bear in mind the favourable arrangements that the Dutch created for themselves to supply gas to heat those greenhouses. Although the Dutch, like many producers in the UK, fear Spain's low-cost producers, the Spanish are concerned that there may be increasing penetration of their markets by even lower-cost producers from Morocco.

Little can be done about the climatic advantages for the salad crop producers whom we visited in Spain, although it is clear that Almeria is an environmental eyesore that would not be allowed in the UK. Nor can UK apple growers expect to benefit from the growing conditions prevalent in South Africa and other southern hemisphere countries. Even so, the UK could benefit from many aspects of the horticultural sectors that we saw in Spain, Holland and South Africa, not the least of which was the organisation of their marketing systems.

The UK has the most developed retailing systems in Europe and probably the world. The major multiples are taking a larger and larger share of the retail market, and their central purchasing and distribution systems give importers relatively easy access to outlets capable of handling large volumes of produce. It would be wrong to assume that the supermarkets are the only outlet for produce—others include independent retailers, market traders and the catering sector—but the major retailers are the potent force in the market, eager to give their customers a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables at a competitive price.

It was frustrating to hear supermarket buyers speaking of the ease with which they could purchase produce from an importing nation's growers, frequently by dealing with a single point of contact. That, we were told, is not the case with the sales of UK produce, whether it be for the domestic market or for export.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Does my hon. Friend accept that that might be the general picture, but that, in a region such as west Cornwall, local growers are

[Mr. David Harris]

making strenuous efforts, through co-operatives and marketing organisations, to produce exactly what the supermarkets want? The number of new pack houses that have opened in the past couple of years is testimony to that enterprise. Should not their example be followed in other parts of the country?

Sir Jerry Wiggin: Needless to say, I agree with my hon. Friend. The supermarket buyer who wants to buy 10 tonnes of a product can lift a telephone and be sure of getting the quality and quantity that he wants from many of those foreign countries' marketing agents. Unfortunately, despite the efforts of the British industry, large gaps still exist in our marketing system, which have been obvious for many years. Having been a farmer and worked among horticultural growers, I know that they are, by their very nature, an independent bunch. It is extremely difficult to get people to co-operate in this country. There must be a sacrifice, but when it comes to it, too often people pull out. They will not take the strain when things are difficult.

During our inquiry, we received numerous suggestions as to how the UK industry's performance could be further improved at home and abroad. In particular, we were eager to ensure that Ministers argued strongly for reforms to the European Union's fruit and vegetable regime which would not disadvantage UK producers. Other changes, however, are needed in the horticultural sector, as the Committee report's conclusion and recommendations show.

Not the least of the problems that we identified was the lack of reliable statistical information on the UK's horticultural sector. We asked the Government to discuss with the industry the means by which information can be collated and disseminated, and pointed out the need for the Government to encourage the European Commission to ensure that similar information on the horticulture industry throughout the EU is available. The Government accepted those recommendations and we should be grateful for further information on their implementation.

Of course, any industry requires skilled people to work in it and, although much can be learnt through training while in employment, it is also important that people entering the industry have access to suitable courses. The Committee asked the Government to keep a weather eye on that, to keep local education authorities aware of the need to maintain funding for discretionary grants in that sector at appropriate levels, and to consult employers in the industry on the most suitable content of courses. That recommendation was also accepted by the Government. We made it because, in these days of stringency in education, we found that it was easy for such authorities to drop horticultural courses from their syllabuses. We wish to put up a marker that that will be damaging for the industry in the long term.

The Committee recommended that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food should take a lead in exploring ways by which the wholesale marketing system, which faces many difficulties and a declining market share, can be rationalised. During our inquiry, it became obvious that an increasing number of retailers and producers are trading directly with each other. The Committee welcomed the new producer contracts that were being introduced by Tesco, which gave its suppliers greater security. We recommend such initiatives to all producers and retailers in the hope that it will help to stem the growing tide of imported produce.

We also hope that retailers will realise that they will benefit from working with producers in funding near-market research, thus helping to ensure that UK customers are able to buy the type of produce that they wish from UK producers.

We were also concerned that the UK was not performing well in export markets. We urge the Government to investigate ways by which producers could be encouraged to explore and exploit the opportunities presented by the single market for their produce. We were pleased that, following our report, MAFF appointed a horticultural export promoter, seconded from industry, and to hear news of the establishment of the Horticultural Export Bureau. That bureau appears to be a direct response to our recommendation that horticultural exporters should establish a representative organisation to co-ordinate export strategies. We still, however, hold the view expressed in our report that the redirection of Food From Britain's role away from import substitution was misconceived: for fruit and vegetables, import substitution will be by far the most effective way to reduce the trade deficit.

On the fruit and vegetable regime, although in 1996 the cost of support for both fresh and processed regimes will amount to only less than 4 per cent. of the total common agricultural policy budget, it will still amount to about £1,252 million. What is more, much of the expenditure is to "withdraw" produce that is not wanted by the market. Many producers in southern Europe grow their crops solely for withdrawal. Withering criticism of the regime is contained in the 1994 European Union Court of Auditors report, which described systems for inspection and approval of producer organisations by member states as very weak and found many irregularities in the withdrawal of produce from the markets.

We were generally dissatisfied with the withdrawal system's operation, but its effects are especially damaging to the UK apple industry. The Committee was keen for the Government to pursue their policy to end the system completely for all fruit and vegetables. With that in mind, it is a disappointment, as many people have already noted, that the current proposals for reforming the fruit and vegetable regime do not give a final date for the end of the system, but simply make it slightly less attractive. The Committee's report made it clear that there would be distinct advantages to UK apple growers from ending the system completely. It is unacceptable that producers in some member states produce apples for no other purpose than sale into intervention.

We were also made aware of the way in which UK producers are disadvantaged—and would still be at a disadvantage under the new proposals—because of the way in which producer organisations are defined. The British horticulture industry has played little part in the creation of surpluses and it would be iniquitous if it was disadvantaged simply because of historical differences in the industry's structure in the UK. The definition of a producer organisation should allow for a variety of legal and commercial entities. I am sure that the Minister will wish to comment on that.

Our recommendations have been echoed by the European Communities Committee in the other place and by our Select Committee on European Legislation,

a formidable phalanx of informed parliamentary opinion. I call on the Government, who have shown their support for those views, to stand firm when the European Commission's reform proposals return to the Agriculture Council.

Besides the European marketing regime, we received evidence about other inappropriate and burdensome regulations. I stress two main problems, the first of which is the ridiculous and unscientific European Community proposals to impose maximum nitrate levels on spinach and lettuce. As originally suggested, those would have had devastating effects on the British lettuce industry, yet there is no scientific evidence that nitrates are harmful to human beings.

The Commission's original proposals have been relaxed, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food says that the revised standards are achievable by British growers following good agricultural practice, and represent the best possible compromise. None the less, I still ask what the scientific basis is for having maximum nitrate levels at all.

Secondly, horticultural producers often have trouble getting hold of appropriate pesticides, because of the expense and delays in pesticide registration in the United Kingdom. Partly because of what we heard in our horticultural inquiry, we subsequently held an inquiry into the Pesticides Safety Directorate, and we are glad to report that much progress has been made in reducing backlogs in pesticide registration.

However, problems still exist concerning "minor use" pesticides—those used in small quantities, especially in the horticulture industry. We were disappointed that the Government did not adopt one or two recommendations for streamlining the system that we made in our horticulture report. I hope that they will keep the matter under close review.

I shall not detain the House much longer, but our report also dealt with the mechanisms and funding for horticultural research and development, recommending in particular that reforms of the funding and accountability of the Horticultural Development Council be considered. For example, we found that much of its money was going towards research into pesticides, which should have been funded from other budgets.

We recommended that the Government should divert some of their applied research funding towards joint funding of near-market research with the HDC. I should be grateful if the Minister would comment on any progress that has been made. We are glad to see that MAFF has retained sponsorship of Horticulture Research International—the option universally supported by those who gave evidence to us.

Finally, I shall tell the House about a large mushroom farm in my constituency. The Irish Government's market development fund was misused to establish a mushroom industry in Ireland that progressively strangled our mushroom business, and the company in my constituency has now been sold to an Irish company. The loss to the original owner is quantifiable and should be assessed. It should be the Commission's duty to ensure that repayment is made to the original owners, who suffered from the direct and unfair competition created by the Irish Government.

Madam Speaker, I repeat my gratitude to you for arranging our procedures so as to allow horticultural matters to be aired in this way. I understand that the procedure requires the approval of the Minister and myself if any other hon. Member wishes to intervene, so I make it clear that anyone who wishes to intervene has my approval to do so.

9.52 am

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): I thank you, Madam Speaker, for calling me, and I thank the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) for his all-embracing courtesy. I welcome the opportunity to debate a Select Committee report in the Chamber. After all, an awful lot of work goes into producing such reports, apparently for little return, sometimes.

The difficulty of the investigation resulted from the immense diversity and complexity of the horticulture industry, and the consequent variety of difficulties reported to the Committee. None the less, underlying the investigation were three important factors that occupied our attention.

The first was the trade deficit in horticultural produce, and the scope that that offers for substantial import substitution, which could do nothing but good for our national economy. In that context, I agree with the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare that the shift in the responsibilities held by Food From Britain was regrettable, although one welcomes the efforts to put something in its place, in the form of the export bureau.

The second main issue is the relative labour intensity of the sector, with its potential for job creation, its seasonal nature and all the implications for horticultural training. Thirdly, there is the capacity of the European Union, while responding to pressures from its widely varying regions, to blunder into regulations that could damage some growers in this country—and no doubt, at times, in other countries too.

The proposal to impose an illogical upper limit on nitrates in lettuce was of particular interest to me, as it would have wiped out many lettuce growers in my constituency and in other areas, notably Cambridgeshire. I was heartened by the united front against the proposal presented on both sides of the House and by the United Kingdom scientific community—an approach also embraced by the Minister's predecessor, who is now the Financial Secretary to the Treasury.

I was grateful to the Committee for its energetic questioning on the nitrates issue. My colleagues on the Committee will be glad to know that the Lancashire lettuce growers whom they met have had a good year. Mr. Keith Ball, who runs Lovania Salads and formed the Solfresh marketing group in Tarleton and Hesketh Bank, is one of my constituents whom they met. Last month he won the national salad grower of the year award for the quality of his produce, and he tells me that this year his firm will produce 300,000 boxes of lettuce.

The nitrate threat has not completely gone away, but at least the immediate threat has been allayed. I hope that the Ministry and its Ministers will keep alert, to ensure that the issue does not become a serious threat again.

I shall touch briefly on two or three other matters raised in the report, the first of which concerns employment and training. There is much anxiety about developments in horticultural training in recent years. The Committee's recommendations on the subject were pretty bland, simply asking the Government to keep a weather eye on the

[Mr. Colin Pickthall]

matter and keep it "under close review". But the Government could not even go along with that fully, declaring that

"The Government has no locus to intervene in those decisions"—

that is, decisions on discretionary awards.

The take-up of specialist horticultural courses depends, of course, on discretionary awards. Although it is rather outside the scope of the debate, it is important to know that discretionary awards represent one of the aspects of local education authority spending that have been most brutally cut in recent years. Because the awards are non-statutory, obviously they get clobbered, along with other non-statutory education provision. In my county, as with many other local education authorities, the provision has been cut to ribbons.

Local authorities naturally concentrate such awards as they can still afford on students attending local further education colleges, often at the expense of specialist colleges. As the awards shrink in size and number, the problems of specialist colleges are increasing. The example of the Welsh college of horticulture at Northop in Clwyd has been brought to my attention. This year it may not offer any full-time courses in edible cropping at all, and may have to close its glasshouse production unit because of the lack of grants for students to take up places there.

Horticulture workers are in general the lowest paid in agriculture, and they have the least security of employment. Despite that, unlike the agricultural community as a whole, several of the groups whose representatives we interviewed opposed the retention of the Agricultural Wages Board.

That reveals an interesting problem. Seven-day opening by the supermarkets over the past year to 18 months, plus the moves by big retailers to buy more British produce and offer greater security to growers, which we must welcome, should mean a welcome increase in jobs in the horticultural sector. However, those developments also mean seven-day working, and employers in horticulture, both in growing and in packing, are reluctant to pay premiums to their workers to cover the seven-day regime.

One fact uncovered by the Committee's investigations in the preparation of the report was that the flexibility allowed by the 1993 changes to the Agricultural Wages Board secured much of what employers wanted in the way of flexible rostering, but also brought some safeguards for workers. Nevertheless, many employers, especially in mushroom growing, use casual labour at weekends to avoid premium payments. I make no point, at this stage in any case, about employment practice, save to say that the AWB arrangements seem to be both adequate and flexible in regard to the problems and I fully support the Select Committee's recommendations.

The Select Committee also considered representations from the industry about foreign workers. I understand the concerns about the potential use of eastern European casual workers to undermine UK casuals or even permanent workers. However, the National Farmers Union's evidence in particular clearly pointed to the need for more foreign student labour in horticulture during the summer, especially in the south-east. Foreign students form a particular and circumscribed group of about 4,000 workers, the use of which is worth reconsidering. Casual labour among United Kingdom students in European horticulture and viniculture is a long and valuable tradition, and if we can maintain it and at the same time help the horticulture industry by expanding such labour, it can do little but good.

The horticulture industry, specifically vegetable and salad growing, which most interests my area, exists—I hope thrives—without much help, subsidy or grant. Nevertheless, the industry requires Government help from time to time. It cannot, for example, completely sort out the problem of discretionary awards and training. National and local governments must do that.

On an entirely different subject, but continuing the theme of Government help, the Committee noted when it visited the Almeria region of Spain that there was enormous investment in renewing the irrigation system—paid for, as far as we could tell, by the regional government, which was helping growers to compete more effectively with UK and other European growers, and to try to extend the season. By a remarkable coincidence, the following summer in Britain was the most drought-ridden on record. People involved in the industry in my area feel very strongly that there should be grant aid or a taxation incentive to encourage the increased provision of water storage facilities and water preservation and recycling systems in anticipation of global warming causing more and more wonderful, hot, dry summers. It is a serious point, because people waste much water and the horticulture industry is no exception.

It seems odd that the Government have decided to withdraw from the European Union processing and marketing fund from 31 March, years before the expiry of the original deadline. English growers might be seriously disadvantaged in comparison with other EU states, and Scotland and Wales, where I understand the fund is to continue. It is hard to see how that decision coincides with the Government's desire, which I am sure we all share, to correct the trade deficit in fruit and vegetables.

Since I come from an area with an extensive glasshouse industry, I also urge the Government to take a much more positive stance on the Committee's recommendation that the glasshouse industry should be exempted from any possible energy tax from Europe. Historically, our glasshouse industry has been disadvantaged, as the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare mentioned, by artificially lower energy prices for glasshouses in Holland. A similar or greater disadvantage should not be allowed to recur.

Should the wholesale market experience the severe decline that has been forecast, large supermarkets would enjoy a type of monopoly that would damage the horticulture industry. I therefore urge the Government to take a more proactive role in the rationalisation process than their response to the Committee's recommendation suggests.

The potential for the horticulture industry is immense. At present, it employs many workers. The Transport and General Workers Union estimates that there are 36,000 workers, of whom 16,000 are casual. I agree, however, with the view that its contribution to the economies of many areas such as mine is out of all proportion to the number of employees. The sector is extraordinary for its relentless hard work and apparently infinitely flexible enterprise. In recent years and usually in partnership with supermarket chains, it has become the centre of exciting research and development, which is dramatically

improving the quality, yield and taste of its products. The standard of many products, such as tomatoes, is capable of challenging produce from much more favoured areas of Europe.

The trade deficit in fruit and vegetables remains at about £3 billion, and much of what we import can and should be grown and processed in this country. To enable our businesses to make strong inroads into that deficit, the Government do not have to play a strong interventionist role, but should be nudging and tweaking the system in ways identified by the Committee and the industry, such as continuing their level of support for Horticulture Research International; bringing on and off-label approvals more into line with most of our EU counterparts at the speed that they seem to be able to organise such things; reconsidering some of the planning obstacles to development, especially in green-belt areas and for horticultural haulage firms, which have particular difficulties with planning regimes; being more proactive in helping to make the marketing system more efficient—the single contact point that the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare, the Chairman of the Committee, mentioned—and negotiating the redefinition of producer groups to allow for grant aid, where it is available, to EU co-operatives. By such relatively small means, the Government could reap huge economic dividends and help the revitalisation and growth of rural areas.

The Select Committee has done a good job, if modest. All its recommendations should be pursued by the Government with some vigour and urgency.

10.7 am

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) and his Committee and congratulate them on an extremely well-researched and valuable report. I am glad that our new procedures give us the opportunity to debate it. I wholly endorse what my hon. Friend said about the imperative need for radical steps to be taken to stop the grotesque wastage of European Union taxpayers' money in horticulture, and indeed the wider agriculture sector.

Like other hon. Members, I have had the good fortune to be able to travel fairly extensively during the years that I have had the privilege to serve in the House. In doing so, I have found that one place only in my constituency is known around the world. It is known in the deep recesses of the African bush and, as I found out only last month, in the huge terraced hill sides of the cultivatable parts of Nepal. Unhappily, that one place is not either the town of Tonbridge or the village of West Malling, from which my constituency takes its name, but the East Malling research station, as it was called until a few years ago. The East Malling research station is Britain's premier research establishment in the fruit sector—both soft and tree-borne fruit. Over many decades throughout the century, it has built up an unrivalled reputation for excellence that extends around the world.

It was, I suppose, inevitable that when the Government came to office in 1979—committed, in my view rightly, to examining the public sector across the board and to asking what functions that had been carried out by the public sector should continue to be done in that way in the future—an establishment like the East Malling research station should come under scrutiny. That scrutiny took place during the 1980s, a time of considerable difficulty and near trauma for the research station and its staff.

At the end of the period of uncertainty, there emerged Horticulture Research International, resulting in a great deal of reorganisation, restructuring, staff changes, and changes in the research programme at East Malling. The outcome was generally regarded as satisfactory, as it produced the continuation of the research establishment with a new focus on the requirements of the horticulture industry. The decision was strongly supported by the industry—a fact that emerged in the Select Committee's report—and the establishment continued under the sponsorship of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Having been through that long and difficult period of uncertainty in the 1980s, the staff at East Malling not unreasonably hoped and expected that there would then ensue a period of stability and certainty, during which they could continue to build on their remarkable reputation for research and excellence. Sadly, that hope has not been realised so far in the 1990s.

A report on the matter was produced by the Cabinet Office's efficiency unit. I have no doubt that that unit has made many recommendations in the interests of efficiency, but that was not the case in 1994, when it recommended that the research establishment be treated as a branch primarily focused not on agriculture and horticulture, but on pure science. The unit recommended that the sponsorship of the establishment be transferred from MAFF to the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council.

I was delighted that the Select Committee report threw out that recommendation, and I was equally delighted when the Government—in responding to the Committee's report—also threw out that recommendation. Having disposed of the uncertainty engendered by the Cabinet Office, further uncertainty has now been created by the Government's exercise called the prior options review, which extends to some 40 or 50 Government or Government-sponsored research establishments in different sectors.

News of that further review—not surprisingly—was greeted with great dismay by those who work at East Malling. We all know that a premium is attached to the continuity of personnel in research establishments, because they are all "people places" where the people involved are fundamental to the value that can be obtained from the establishment's activities. Continuity and certainty are of primary importance. I am not a great horticultural expert, but I believe that if one picks up a plant by its roots, shakes it around and puts it back in the soil, and then redoes that several times, it will not be wholly conducive to the plant's growth. I would suggest to MAFF that that is true also in the case of horticulture research establishments.

I hope that when my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister comes to make his own recommendations under the prior options review exercise—as he is due to do next month—he will have at the forefront of his mind the critical need to maintain stability and continuity at East Malling. I earnestly hope that he will decide to leave unchanged the new status of the East Malling Research Establishment within Horticulture Research International, and that its sponsorship by MAFF will remain.

10.15 am

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I do not intend to follow the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) on the specific point that he makes,

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

although I am sure that there is wide sympathy in the House for it. I do not have his knowledge of the East Malling research station, but I agree that it is important that continuity is maintained in such research establishments.

I share the view of other hon. Members about the value of the report from the Select Committee. We are all grateful to the Chairman of the Committee, the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin), and his colleagues not just for the succinct and effective way in which the Committee covered the subject, but for the succinct and effective way in which the Committee Chairman introduced the report, which will enable a number of hon. Members to speak in what would otherwise have been a short debate.

I do not know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, whether you share my nostalgia for the days when one knew when a particular product came on the market—for example, the first asparagus, the first strawberries, the first Cornish early potatoes or daffodils from the Isles of Scilly. Sadly, those days have to some extent gone. I think that we have lost something, as we now get very little seasonal, or even regional, variety. We can have almost anything at any time of the year.

One of the lessons that I hope that we take from the Select Committee report is that careful sourcing of local and regional products by major buyers could reintroduce an element of the previous system to good effect, with an element of freshness, variety and speciality that many of us would relish. It is not just old 'uns like me with my nostalgia who would enjoy that.

The whole issue of sourcing in horticulture is complicated. Clearly the Select Committee has taken great care to obtain the best possible advice on the matter, and we should listen to the recommendations. I saw some figures recently giving the distance travelled by the average vegetable to arrive at a supermarket in the midlands. It is literally hundreds—sometimes thousands—of miles, depending on the particular vegetable and the time of year. The traditional market down the road actually sells fresh fruit and vegetables that have usually travelled less than five miles. The contrast between the sourcing policies of independent traders and big multiples is very stark, and that discrepancy needs to be attended to if we are to deal with the question of import substitution that I believe is rightly at the heart of the Committee's report. I shall come back to that matter in a moment.

We all know that horticulture is exceptionally sensitive to the time of day or year and to climate. Today, somewhere out in the snow, someone will be reckoning on whether it is worth pulling up or picking vegetables. At any time of year—despite the weather—people are having to think carefully by the hour, and even by the minute. Therefore, pressure on the growers is intense. I echo the point that has been made about the ingenuity, enterprise and sheer hard work that those involved in the industry must put in to make a reasonable living against difficult competition.

In those circumstances, we must also be sensitive to the continuity and security of a contract that a grower may get by supplying to a big supermarket chain. The other side of the coin is that that security may lock the grower into a long-term relationship that he may find extremely difficult to break if it becomes necessary to do so. The most secure contract of all was the slave contract. Some growers regret very much the extent to which they are locked into particular organisations.

The report refers, as did the chairman of the Select Committee today, to the need to make sure that our producer organisations are not mistreated, ill treated or unfairly treated by the rules and regulations that may emerge from the European Union and the Council of Ministers. I agree, but we also have much to learn from our competitor countries in the EU in respect of the co-operative principle. As the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) said before he left the Chamber, we in Cornwall have moved in a small way towards some effective co-operatives. That is also true in other parts of the country.

The core of the Committee's report is the contrast between its advice and the advice of the Government on import substitution. It is apparent from the report that the Committee took most careful evidence from a huge range of extremely well-informed organisations. After exhaustive inquiries, the recommendation of the Select Committee is specific. It is that the reorientation of Food From Britain towards export promotion is misguided and that the organisation should be much more concerned with import substitution. I believe that to be true, and I believe that the industry does, too. Many of us are disappointed that the Government in their, albeit short, reply to the report have not dealt with that specific and well-based recommendation. I hope that the Minister will expand on that matter.

Of course import substitution and export promotion are not mutually exclusive. That is acknowledged in the report, but paragraphs 88 and 89 make a good case for the issue to be most thoroughly reviewed in the light of the most recent advice. The report states that we should not simply rely on previous views, evidence and data. I hope that the Minister will at least tell us today that Food From Britain is to be commissioned to carry out an appraisal of the advantages of reorientation along the lines suggested in the Committee's recommendation. Such an appraisal should, of course, take into account what would be cost-effective. If reorientation in the longer term necessitates some increase in resources to make the organisation more effective, I hope that that will also be possible.

One issue is not touched on at any length in the Committee's report, but it is extremely important in many parts of the country. The amount of casual labour used in the industry has been referred to briefly. A substantial proportion of the labour is casual. The treatment of casual labour for the purposes of social security benefits causes a considerable problem in many parts of the country. It is one of the difficulties that face many vegetable growers in Lincolnshire. It has been a long tradition in Kent that casual labour provides the hop growers with their main source of assistance. In Cornwall we have had major problems in recent years, especially in the flower fields.

One must bear it in mind that in many of the areas to which I refer not only does horticulture provide great employment potential but there is high joblessness and women in particular find it extremely difficult to find part-time work. It is important that we try to find a way out of an absurd mare's nest of red tape. I am sure that that concern is shared throughout the House.

We must also arrive at a simple system that prevents fraud as far as humanly possible. We all know that there has been fraud. My experience and that of the National Farmers Union is that the complexity of the present rules encourages rather than reduces fraud. Therefore, we must find a simpler system. At present, if a picker in Lincolnshire, Kent or Cornwall does some short-term picking because the time of year or the daylight hours or the nature of the crop—as in the case of early daffodils—make that possible, just one day's picking may exclude that individual from days and days of not only direct unemployment benefit but everything else that goes with it, such as housing benefit or council tax benefit.

The result is that a young woman, for example, whose only employment may be picking finds it impossible to take up that employment. The regulations have forced local labour out of many pickers' fields. As a result, many growers have perforce had to rely on gangmasters from other parts of the country or even other parts of Europe to provide gangs of pickers. That cannot be a sensible solution. It is damaging to local employment prospects.

I have made representations to the Department of Social Security, the Department of Employment, as it then was, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I note from the report of the horticulture committee to the annual meeting of the NFU yesterday that negotiations between the union and the Department for Education and Employment have continued for months and months, but small progress is now being made. I hope that the Minister might be able to give us some examples of what is intended.

The NFU suggested a simple pilot cheque book scheme. I understand that that was ruled out for one reason or another, but somehow we have to make it easier for local people to give their casual labour. Otherwise, an all too sad sight in Cornwall in the past couple of years will recur year after year. Last March, I found myself driving past a wonderful golden field full of daffodils in full flower. That was a disaster. It might have been good for the tourists coming down to Cornwall for an early spring holiday, but it meant that some grower had lost his whole crop. When I asked why, I was told that it was because the grower could not get local pickers for love nor money because none of the local people could afford to do the job.

It would be the most appalling example of failure to deal with import substitution if we had more and more fields of Cornish daffodils in full flower and the Welsh had to import their daffodils from overseas for St. David's day.

10.26 am

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): Time permits me to intervene only briefly. I do so to congratulate the Select Committee on an excellent report. I read it soon after leaving ministerial office last August and I found it interesting and extremely knowledgeable.

I am interested to follow the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall). He speaks with some knowledge on horticultural matters. He represents a good chunk of the area to the south of the Ribble, adjacent to my constituency. I shall inherit four of the wards that he now represents under the boundary changes. In addition to my existing constituency activities in glasshouse and vegetable cropping, I will take on some of the growers whom the hon. Gentleman represents. Like him, I know about horticulture from my experience in South Ribble. I also know about it from when I was a Minister in the Northern Ireland Office and had responsibility for food.

I share the concern expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) about the Irish mushrooming operation which sends vehicles all the way through Northern Ireland to come across to this part of the United Kingdom, with all the consequences to which he referred.

I am impressed by the quality of the activities performed by the growers in my present and future constituencies. They are a remarkable bunch, as my right hon. Friend said, and an independent bunch. They work extremely hard at all hours of the day and night and different periods in the year to produce the food that we need. I am in the process of carrying out a survey among all the growers in my constituency and nearby to find out what their concerns are. The House will not be surprised to learn that many of the points which the Committee investigated are dear to their hearts. We have heard about the import substitution argument. Certainly, as the hon. Member for West Lancashire will confirm, the problems relating to the import of Spanish and Moroccan tomatoes, nitrates in lettuces and what growers perceive as unfairness about what they call the unlevel playing field—the growing industry in Europe—require that something must be done about them.

I am sure that the report will provoke the Government to do what I know my hon. Friend the Minister has begun to do, and what his predecessor, my next-door neighbour, the hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, was doing, and fight our corner strongly in Europe to ensure that the growing industry in Lancashire, about which I am concerned, and in other parts of the country, is protected and developed. The capacity and potential of the industry is enormous. If it is properly treated by the Government and by the European Union, its ingenuity and its capacity for hard work, new marketing techniques and exploiting new varieties of crops is such that it can build on its reputation as the best producer of those crops in this country, as well as in the rest of Europe and even further afield.

I am pleased to be able to speak about horticulture and add my congratulations to the Committee for an intelligent, exhaustive report to which the Government's response has so far been so good. There has been unanimity across the House on the matter. If the unanimity of commitment to the industry continues, I suspect that the growers in my present and future constituency will have cause to thank the Select Committee for its report and the Government for their response.

10.30 am

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Tucked away in paragraph 95 of the Select Committee report, students of development and agriculture will find an especially interesting passage on which I should like to comment. The Committee states:

"we consider that the EU can provide substantial assistance by judicious relaxing of the terms of entry for South African exports of horticultural produce: whether by association with the Lomé Convention or under a separate trade agreement. Any such agreement should be absolutely dependent upon conditions assuring that no disruption is caused to EU markets, taking account of the

[Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours]

respective marketing seasons of European and southern hemisphere produce. There may also be advantages to British agriculture in freer trade with South Africa".

I quote that because, during the inquiry, which I joined quite late on, we visited South Africa—in somewhat controversial conditions, if I remember rightly.

There was an important underlying characteristic to our visit. While we were there to consider the implications for British horticulture of developments in South Africa—we examined its extremely efficient single-channel system for marketing its products—some of us went with the additional agenda of examining what was happening in South African agriculture and horticulture after the major political changes there. I concluded, as did some hon. Members of all parties, that, to some extent, horticulture held the key for development in South Africa.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) and I visited Khayelitsha, a township of some 700,000 people outside Cape Town in the middle of the area in which the South African deciduous fruit industry is based. While we were there, we were given a little document, which stated:

"Today Khayelitsha is the fastest growing residential area within the greater Cape Town area. Current projections put the population at one million by 2000."

Current estimates give the population as some 700,000 in an area of only 6,500 acres. That is the nature and scale of the problem in South Africa. I cannot describe the conditions that existed in that township, but we know that South Africa has huge potential for horticultural development as long as markets are opened up worldwide and it is given the access that it requires.

Unless we are prepared to open up markets—and in particular the European Union market—to the products that can come from South Africa when they are out of season in the European Union, and unless there are parallel developments in other parts of the South African agriculture and horticulture economy, there will inevitably be trouble again in South Africa. We have it in our hands in the European Community to bring about those changes.

In paragraph 95 of the Select Committee report, we comment:

"South Africa is also seeking the closest possible association with the Lomé Convention: the European Commission has been mandated by the Council to negotiate possible South African membership of the Convention and, in the longer term, a free trade agreement. COPA/COGECA has fiercely resisted this move, claiming that the EU's processed fruit and vegetable sector might face extinction."

We have a choice to make: either we concede on that front and the developed nations of the world—especially Britain, in the context of Europe—argue the case for greater penetration of our markets by South African produce, or we pay the inevitable price in future.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, over the years, Britain has been very interested in doing trade with South Africa and, in Europe, we have led the cause for improving the conditions of that country? Is not the stumbling block, as we have heard already in the debate, the other European nations?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: That is absolutely right.

I should like to take up my point in a future debate, perhaps on development. I understand that we are short of time. I shall resume my seat, having put my case that we should open our eyes to what is required.

10.36 am

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): I also congratulate the Select Committee on producing this excellent report. Unfortunately, because time is so limited, I must confine my remarks to certain aspects of the proposed new EU fruit and vegetable regime and to research and development.

The Minister knows the strength of feeling in Britain about the EU's spending taxpayers' money on buying certain surplus crops and then destroying the bulk of them. That scheme has led to massive fraud and overproduction. The Select Committee was right, when talking of apples, to recommend that the Government pursue vigorously their policy of ending all fruit and vegetable withdrawal payments. When the Commission made proposals for reform in August 1994, they were greeted as a step in the right direction. The Select Committee supported the Commission's proposals to reduce withdrawal prices to an uneconomic level over a four-year period and wanted the eventual abolition of withdrawals. The Government agreed with that.

One major difficulty for British growers has been that payments are made only through producer associations, of which there are fewer in Britain than elsewhere. For that reason, the Select Committee made the important recommendation that producer organisations eligible to receive money should be defined so as not to leave Britain at a disadvantage. That was agreed by the Government.

To sum up the Select Committee's position, it wanted an end to withdrawal payments, supported making them uneconomic over a four-year period and, if taxpayers' money was to be scattered around, wanted it to be easier for British growers to get their hands on some of the loot. That is what it wanted; what it got was another matter entirely.

Their credibility in Europe being nil, the British Government achieved nothing in the discussions on the proposals studied by the Select Committee. If anything, they went backwards. The draft Council regulations on the common organisation of the market in fruit and vegetables and in processed fruits and vegetables, adopted by the Commission on 4 October 1995, were extremely disappointing from the British point of view. They were a complete let-down for British producers and consumers, to say nothing of the taxpayer. That general view is expressed in the report, dated 19 December, of the Select Committee of the European Communities in the other place. The report said that, in the evidence of witnesses:

"Aspects of the proposals were welcomed as steps in the right direction but the overall tone was one of disappointment that there was no signal of the end of withdrawal and criticism of the proposal".

The Committee concluded:

"the perpetuation of the intervention system and the enhancement of the role of Producer Organisations . . . are not . . . the right way forward."

Hon. Members should read that report to understand how matters went from bad to worse between the communication of August 1994 and the draft regulations of October 1995. First, the proposed transitional period had been extended from four to five years. Will the Minister tell us how the Government allowed that to

happen? Secondly, the withdrawal system may be extended by a proposal to allow producer organisations to use funds to buy in produce that is not covered by the intervention scheme. Thirdly, to quote the report:

"None of our witnesses have been convinced that the reduction in the level of withdrawal compensation by 15 per cent. over five years would reduce the compensation to a non-remunerative level."

How does that leave our Select Committee report? Its recommendation, which has been accepted by the Government, was:

"We support the Commission's proposal to reduce withdrawal prices to an uneconomic level for producers over a four-year period and would like to see the eventual abolition of withdrawals."

As the proposals have become regulations that will, during a five-year period, reduce the payments—but not, in the view of informed witnesses, to uneconomic levels—is it any wonder that people feel let down? The position in relation to producer organisations is, if anything, worse.

In the original proposals, the Commission laid down that, to be able to receive payments, producer organisations must effectively market a high percentage—80 per cent.—of the marketable produce of their members. Although British producers thought that 80 per cent. was far too much, the percentage was raised to 90 per cent. in the draft regulations. Worse still, the producer must place 90 per cent. of his total—perhaps varied—produce with a single producer organisation. How on earth did that happen? Even imagined benefits are disappearing under re-examination.

Witnesses in the other place expressed concern that the destruction of good produce will continue under the proposed regulations and that, despite the creation of a corps of inspectors, massive fraud will continue. That would be a disgrace. The Minister and his colleagues must do better in looking after our interests in the negotiations on the draft regulations than they have in the discussion on the communication.

I should like clarification on one other matter. In paragraph 29 of their response, the Government question the Select Committee's support for the creation of a forum, which would include growers, customers and scientists, to debate the research strategy for horticulture. The Government have said that they intend to build on existing mechanisms that give a clear focus on priority matters and bring together the key players. In his reply, will the Minister explain what he has in mind?

When I recently visited the headquarters of Horticulture Research International, people there clearly said that they do not want to face any further changes as a consequence of the prior options review. As they see it, their work is well focused on an industry with a clearly defined mission, and it is going well. They argue that the organisation is already close to being privatised or quasi-privatised and they want to avoid losing key sites and work to other organisations.

I am sorry that there is insufficient time to do this report justice. I only hope that some of the Select Committee's drive and sense of purpose will rub off on to this feeble and ineffectual Government.

10.44 am

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Mr. Tim Boswell): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate this important issue on the Floor of the House. I am also honoured to be the first Minister to take advantage of the new arrangements to debate Select Committee reports, even if—as some hon. Members will know—it means missing the start of the annual Bramley and spoon race that may even now be taking place on College green. With luck, and because of our arrangements, it may be possible for us to be, metaphorically, in at the kill.

I am extremely grateful to the Select Committee for its efforts in producing a wide-ranging and considered report on an extremely diverse industry, for the tone of its report and of this debate and for the understanding that has so far made it possible, in a short time, to accommodate seven hon. Members. That has been extremely encouraging.

I thought that the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) put it extraordinarily well when he said that the Select Committee has done a good, if modest, job. It occurred to me that that was a motto that one could properly apply to horticulture as an industry: it does an excellent job and it does not make a fuss about it. Its achievements should be acknowledged and problems should be actively and sympathetically considered.

Mr. Harris: In relation to the problems facing the industry, my hon. Friend is of course aware of the great concern in west Cornwall about Dutch seed potatoes, which are probably infected with brown rot. I have heard reports that what growers had feared has happened: the potatoes delivered to at least one farm have been found to be infected with brown rot. Will my hon. Friend comment on this situation? It is a very important point.

Mr. Boswell: I must acknowledge that the situation is serious, and growers' concerns are understandable. The Government supplement the tests that already take place in the country of origin, the Netherlands, with our own, both of which are drawn to the attention of the European plant health authorities. As a result of those tests, out of 300 samples, we had suspected infection in one case of stock. We have now confirmed that it is brown rot and the potatoes are being destroyed. We shall continue to exercise the utmost vigilance on the industry's behalf.

As hon. Members have raised so many detailed matters of concern, I shall endeavour to reply briefly to as many of them as I can. If anything has been overlooked, we shall certainly take account of what has been said in the debate and, if appropriate, reply in correspondence. I am anxious to get on with the major points that have been made.

The introduction to the debate by my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) clearly encapsulated the report and the main matters of interest. He was concerned about the organisation of marketing systems, about which I shall say a little more later in relation to the domestic situation. He was also concerned about reform of the European Union regime. He was concerned about nitrates in lettuce—a matter that also exercised Conservative and Opposition members of the Agriculture Committee. We have worked very hard to achieve an acceptable solution—we have introduced some changes in the European approach and a derogation for our growers in terms of domestic trade. We shall continue to work on that matter, and scientific evidence will have to be produced for a continuing restriction to be justified.

My hon. Friend also mentioned his concern about the Irish mushroom scheme, the market development fund. The House may be interested to know that approximately

[Mr. Boswell]

85 per cent. of the moneys that have been improperly paid out have already been recovered by the Commission. Any compensation to individual growers appears to be a matter for private law between the grower, the Commission and the Irish Government. If I may, I shall write to my hon. Friend about that.

My hon. Friend mentioned one of the report's major recommendations about the improvement of statistics. We have certainly taken that issue on board. We must find a balance between making them not too intrusive, but as effective as possible. At the European level, we are discussing the issue with Eurostat.

Lest we overlook them, it might be useful if I deal with the two recommendations of the Select Committee which the Government felt unable to accept, and to which hon. Members have referred. The first relates to funding for Food from Britain, which the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) mentioned. Three years ago, we carried out an independent review that took evidence from a wide cross-section of the industry and considered all areas of activity. We decided, broadly, that the Food from Britain initiative should concentrate on exports. That approach has been successful. While the Government continue to provide funding of £5 million per annum, the level of funding from industry is also increasing—it rose by 17 per cent. last year. That would suggest that industry endorses what is being done and that the new focus is appreciated.

In view of the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for North Cornwall, I should make it clear that a specific interest in the Food From Britain initiative is speciality foods. Perhaps with a little ingenuity, his local growers could involve themselves in that sector.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): We understood that Food From Britain had been asked to focus on value-added products as opposed to fresh products. The Government were criticised for their response to the Select Committee in that they had not made such a request. Can my hon. Friend confirm whether that emphasis on value-added products has now been put on Food From Britain?

Mr. Boswell: There is a clear interest in the export of food and drink, which is handled by my ministerial colleague. I shall reflect on the question and give my hon. Friend a considered reply on Food From Britain's exact current remit.

The Government were unable to accept the Committee's recommendation about pesticides—on notification to growers ahead of the type of problems that we encountered with organophosphates in carrots. We understand growers' concerns, but we have an obligation in the interests of food safety to release information as soon as possible to all those with an interest who may have a need for it. We have been considering the possibility of giving a day or so's notice to allow interested parties to prepare a considered response. Hon. Members will be familiar with the type of arrangements that apply through the usual channels in this place, but we must find the right balance to meet the occasion.

I was interested in the tenor of today's debate in relation to employment and training. As one who used to be a practitioner in horticulture, I understand the importance of a labour force. The Committee referred to the possible exclusion of horticulture from the Agricultural Wages Order 1994, but it would be for the Agricultural Wages Board, under present legislation, to alter the structure if it so wished.

The main concern has been about seasonal workers. In relation to United Kingdom workers and those from the European Economic Area, there is no difficulty establishing who is working here. Seasonal workers from outside the Community are covered by the seasonal workers scheme. We have recently announced some changes to that scheme, which I hope will make it more flexible. We continue to discuss it with our colleagues in the Department for Education and Employment.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall expressed some concern about the employment of casual workers from the United Kingdom. He will be aware, as he rightly said, that it is a problem as much for the benefit structure as for the tax structure. I have no definite news to offer him or the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) except to say that discussions continue at a technical level. Their concerns will be drawn to the attention of the relevant Departments and will reinforce our efforts to reach an acceptable solution.

Hon. Members will be aware of my previous involvement in further and higher education. I have seen both sides of the argument and I can assure the House that, even if I have no direct locus in the discretionary awards, which are as they are described and the responsibility of local authorities, that does not mean that this Minister does not take a keen interest in a satisfactory resolution of some of the problems that have been identified.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Using his knowledge, and his friendship with Baroness Chalker, will the Minister bring home to her the need to ensure that aid to South Africa for education, in particular about horticulture, is channelled where it will benefit black students and not just white ones?

Mr. Boswell: I shall bear that point in mind. The Government broadly support liberalisation of trade with South Africa and are therefore able to agree with the terms of the Select Committee's recommendation, which contains a number of important safeguards for British growers. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising his genuine concern about a matter that concerns many of us.

My hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare advocated—as does the report of the Committee of which he is Chairman—a more effective system of marketing top fruit. In many ways, the Committee's considerations have proceeded in parallel with those of the Government. We have, therefore, been able to agree readily with the Committee.

We have been able to make a number of structural changes in relation to the English Fruit consortium and the work of the Fresh Produce Consortium, which goes rather wide of the work of English Apples and Pears. Much is happening to meet the difficulty of local sourcing. I am also aware of the concern about imports of soft fruits from east and central Europe. A trade interest exists and we need to have proper discussions to ensure that trade is not disrupted. We look for a proper measure of liberalisation in the adaption of the European agreements.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Will my hon. Friend say something about the state of the wholesale markets? It is

important that choice should be available within marketing arrangements so that produce from this country is not just sold through the big supermarkets but is available to independent traders and caterers. The Strathclyde report made some recommendations, but does my hon. Friend agree that a catalyst is needed to bring about necessary and ordered change in the wholesale market sector to ensure that better hygiene standards, better quality and a better service are delivered to its customers?

Mr. Boswell: Some of those recommendations are a matter for decision by the trade itself. A new code of practice will be introduced on hygiene. It would be possible to promote the wholesale markets. We cannot, however, provide the resources centrally to do that; the initiative must come from the trade, but we will offer it our encouragement to restructure.

Mrs. Winterton: Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

Mr. Boswell: My hon. Friend must forgive me, but I cannot give way. I may respond to her question in more detail later.

The hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) mentioned the European context. Of course we believe that the present regime is wasteful. We do not believe that the Commission's current proposals for reform are satisfactory. The hon. Lady did something of a disservice to the Government by suggesting that we have not resisted those proposals vigorously. It is precisely because we have resisted them vigorously that we have not settled for anything. Substantive negotiations are about to start and we will argue the interests of British growers and the British taxpayer, which in this case happily coincide, vigorously and firmly. Our argument will be reinforced by today's debate.

I listened carefully to what my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) said about East Malling research station, and I endorse his remarks about its quality and excellence. We must take research seriously; that is one reason why we provided £42 million in capital funds to restructure Horticulture Research International. We cannot avoid the need for a review from time to time to get the best possible value for the taxpayer, but the points that my right hon. Friend made so eloquently will be taken into account in forming opinions in our prior options review.

The whole House should acknowledge our debt to the Select Committee for a very constructive report. It has done a service to the House and reflected the horticulture industry, which deserves acknowledgment and serves the nation well.

10.59 am

Sir Jerry Wiggin: With leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have but one minute to thank my hon. Friends and Opposition Members for contributing to the debate. We have all learnt a good deal this morning, not only about horticulture but about our procedures. I am sorry that not all hon. Members who wanted to speak could get in, but I am glad to have had the opportunity to debate the report. I hope that other Select Committees will be able to take advantage of this procedure, as we have this morning.

Employment Creation (Northern Ireland)

[*Relevant documents: The First Report from the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee of Session 1994-95, on Employment Creation in Northern Ireland (House of Commons Paper No. 37–I and –II) and the Government Reply thereto, published as the First Special Report of Session 1994-95 (House of Commons Paper No. 642).*]

11.00 am

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): I welcome the opportunity to introduce the Select Committee's first report. A Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee is a fairly recent innovation. Importantly, it gives us the opportunity to debate on the Floor of the House the economic and social issues that affect Northern Ireland. All too often in the House we speak about the troubles in Northern Ireland, but other issues affect Northern Ireland in the same way as they affect other parts of the United Kingdom, and it is important to consider those issues thoroughly.

Our first report was on unemployment, because we regarded that as profoundly important. The Committee was chaired by the late Sir James Kilfedder until his death in March 1995. Most of the report was completed under his chairmanship, and it is an appropriate time to remember his contribution. The hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) chaired the Committee for the remainder of the time before I became Chairman.

We all wish to thank, not only the members of the Committee for the way in which they involved themselves in producing the report and their work since then, but the staff who service the Committee. The Committee is composed of 13 hon. Members, representing five different political parties, so it is very different from many Select Committees in the House of Commons, but it has worked well and focused on some important issues, which I anticipate that it will continue to do.

We chose unemployment as the first issue because we regarded it as profoundly important to the people of Northern Ireland. We have known for a long time that Northern Ireland has specific serious problems in that respect. It is one of the poorest regions in the European Union—136th on the list of 179 regions—and the poorest region in the United Kingdom.

One of the oddities about Northern Ireland is that the growth rate has been faster there than in other parts of the United Kingdom, even throughout the past 25 years of the troubles, so economic activity has been better than many people expected. It is important not to lose sight of that fact, despite the problems that we mention in the report.

It will be seen in the report, and is common knowledge, that the public sector in Northern Ireland is disproportionately large. Given the circumstances of the past 25 years, that is to be expected, but about 32 per cent.—a third—of all employed and self-employed people in Northern Ireland work in the public sector. That is a large percentage.

With the welcome ceasefire, we all hope that the need for spending on security will gradually decrease, but we make the important recommendation to the House and the Government that it is vital that the Government manage the decline in public sector spending. We cannot simply decide that we need fewer security guards and fewer people policing areas in the infrastructure of communities.

[Mr. Clive Soley]

I remember, as many hon. Members do, the number of people guarding hotels who were employed by the hotels. With luck, that type of thing will no longer be needed, but it is not enough to withdraw those jobs and hope that those people find employment. We need some emphasis on retraining and special skills for people who leave such services, which have been vital. We owe a great deal to those people, so it is important that they are given the support that they need in finding new jobs and retraining.

We drew specific attention to long-term unemployment because in Northern Ireland it stands out as an especially difficult problem. Fifty-six per cent. of unemployed people are unemployed for more than a year and 23 per cent. are unemployed for more than five years. That is a very large percentage, and 50 per cent. of unemployed people have no qualifications.

In that context, as in other parts of the United Kingdom, the pattern of work is changing. I hope that the Government will not assume that the fact that more jobs are being created solves the problem; it does not, for two reasons. First, long-term unemployed people need specific help and, secondly, employment is growing faster in part-time work than in full-time work. Nothing is inherently wrong with part-time work, but that has implications for the benefit system and implications for families, who often have lower incomes because jobs are part-time.

Useful background reading to the report is Coopers and Lybrand's "Northern Ireland Economic Review and Prospects". The review says that

"most of the increase in employment was in part-time jobs which now account for 30 per cent. of total employment".

The pattern is no different from that in other parts of the UK and other parts of the western world.

The changes that occur in other industrial regions when heavy industry declines mirror the problems of Northern Ireland. There are periods of long-term unemployment for males especially. Then part-time employment grows, linked to some of the new industries entering the region. There is a need to retrain people who previously worked in the shipyards, for example, and to encourage research and development so that the part-time jobs that are created are not only light assembly jobs without significant skill input. That is why there was a great welcome for the Daewoo plant that was set up in Northern Ireland, which has brought with it some research and development.

There are many similarities between the economic problems and structural change that are evident in Northern Ireland and those that have characterised other parts of Britain—the north-east, south Wales and especially southern Scotland. In southern Scotland, the link between Edinburgh and Glasgow was vital in redeveloping an economy that, 20 years ago, had similar problems to those of Northern Ireland. Southern Scotland is now a major chip producer, producing about 80 per cent. of the chips in Europe. If we brought about similar development in Northern Ireland—especially if we used the link between Dublin and Belfast to build the new economy—the advantages to the people of Northern Ireland might be enormous.

Another of our recommendations, therefore, is that the Government consider the infrastructure between the north and south so as to improve development in that area. Six of the United States' mainframe computer manufacturers are located in the south of the island, but in Northern Ireland, where I believe that we have significant potential for chip development, hardly any work of that type goes on, which is a shame. We need that type of research and development.

In parallel with that type of development, we should develop the infrastructure in Northern Ireland. Specifically—the right hon. Member for Strangford is very keen on this—the road to Larne should be developed. It is used significantly by exporters from Northern Ireland and from the Republic of Ireland, as we say in the report. Developing the infrastructure is very important.

The relationship between the benefit system and the employment patterns that I described is vital in Northern Ireland, as it is throughout the United Kingdom. I have argued for many years that we need a system that recognises the fact that people move into and out of work with increasing frequency and makes it easier for them to do so without losing income and getting into debt, which discourages them from giving up benefits. The system should also recognise the part-time work factor. If the cut-off points are too severe, obviously people are disinclined to take low-income, part-time jobs that might otherwise be available. The report recognises that that is a national problem, and the Secretary of State and his Ministers have an opportunity to reflect that fact in general Government policy.

The report refers also to the core skills needed by the unemployed. As I said earlier, 50 per cent. of the long-term unemployed in Northern Ireland have no qualifications. That is a very worrying statistic because it means that those people do not have core skills. The Committee recommends that core skills should be developed in all training programmes.

The Committee also hopes to examine the education system in Northern Ireland some time in the future. The Minister will know that, although the Northern Ireland education system has many good and attractive features, the more disadvantaged students are under-performing. The report suggests that the Government should spend money more effectively on disadvantaged students and on nursery education. Evidence gathered in the United Kingdom and in almost every other country in the western world indicates that spending on nursery education—introducing children to the education system at a fairly early age—is very beneficial to their later achievements in work.

I shall be brief as a number of hon. Members wish to speak in the debate. However, I must refer to the question of investment, and particularly research and development in Northern Ireland. I was pleased to note that, on page 10 of their response, the Government reacted positively to the Committee's concern about the low level of investment in research and development in Northern Ireland. I touched upon that point earlier. We believe that that investment must be targeted and the Government seem to share that view.

I cannot over-emphasise the importance of targeted research and development. An economy that is on the fringes of the European Union and of the British economy must have the edge in research and development in order to put it ahead of the game. A few years ago when I was shadow Minister with responsibility for Northern Ireland, I examined the question of agriculture and food

processing and packaging. It was clear that Northern Ireland had enormous potential in that area. The report also refers to that matter and it makes recommendations with regard to the role of the Department of Agriculture. There are considerable opportunities in the area of food processing and packaging in Northern Ireland, but it is an advanced technology which is becoming more advanced every day. I often wonder whether Northern Ireland could move into the biotechnology area, because it has the obvious base for that technology. Northern Ireland needs those high levels of research and development.

I was struck by an interesting statement in the Coopers and Lybrand report. Although it does not refer specifically to research and development, it contains knowledge about investment generally. Page 28 of the report states:

"There are no up-to-date data on actual investment spending patterns. The most recent numbers for the manufacturing sector come from the latest regional accounts data which give estimates of investment only up to 1993."

Building on what the report and the Minister have said, I wonder whether we could make an effort to try to get a better picture of the investment pattern in Northern Ireland—in terms of not only total amounts, but of research and development. We do not want to see a repeat of what occurred in the late 1970s when international and national companies received considerable grants to establish their businesses and invest in Northern Ireland but then left during the slump of the 1980s. Virtually no infrastructure remained in place to provide work for those who had been left unemployed. We should have a more detailed look at the way in which the investment pattern in Northern Ireland is emerging, including the balance between industrial investment and research and development.

I would like to refer to a whole range of issues in the report, but I promised to keep my remarks to less than 15 minutes so that other hon. Members can contribute to the debate. In conclusion, the people of Northern Ireland have their fingers crossed about the long-term success of the ceasefire—not least because they know that they deserve, and can achieve, a better life. Northern Ireland is a wonderful place, as everyone who has been associated with it knows, and its people are very good and very decent.

We must recognise that Northern Ireland can have a normal, healthy economic development and that its people can enjoy above average quality of life. To achieve those aims, we must improve the economic conditions in Northern Ireland and improve the unemployment figures. Unemployment is a severe problem in Northern Ireland, which is one of the poorest regions in Europe and the poorest region in the United Kingdom. That is why the Committee's first report is so important and why we ask the Minister to respond to it today and to continue to address the problems that we have put before the House.

11.14 am

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): I support the speech of the Chairman of the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee, the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley). The Committee is a new venture for the House and it introduces to the people of Northern Ireland the same facilities that exist in other parts of the United Kingdom—a fact that is welcomed throughout Northern Ireland. The Committee took many years to establish, but it is now proving its worth.

This is the first report to emerge from the Committee, which commenced its work under the chairmanship of the late Sir James Kilfedder. He was my neighbouring Member of Parliament for the constituency of North Down. He was full of enthusiasm about the future success of the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee. In debating the Committee's first report, I place on record our appreciation of the leadership that he gave to the Committee during its first few months of deliberations.

I also thank the hon. Member for Hammersmith for the way in which he has presided over the Committee's subsequent meetings. He and I have differences of opinion on many subjects—including social and economic matters and certainly about Irish nationalism—but we have managed to work together. As the hon. Gentleman said, the Committee comprises five political parties, including the two largest parties in the House and the three parties from Northern Ireland—the Ulster Unionist party, which is represented in the Chamber today; the Social Democratic and Labour party, which is represented by the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady); and the Democratic Unionist party, whose representatives may be along later.

The Committee addressed the question of unemployment, which is a major problem in Northern Ireland. When one hears that Northern Ireland is the most depressed area of the United Kingdom, one is led to believe that things are very bad in Northern Ireland. However, it is important also to place on record Northern Ireland's successes not just in the past 18 months since the temporary ceasefire began, but in the previous decade.

As the report points out, in the past decade Northern Ireland has been more successful at creating new jobs than any other region of the United Kingdom. However, that has not had a significant impact on that country's unemployment figures because it also has the highest birth rate in the United Kingdom. I was amazed to learn that the birth rate in Northern Ireland is higher than that of Catholic Ireland—and that is saying something. No matter how successful we are at creating new jobs in Northern Ireland—we are particularly successful in that area—we must also contend with the greater demand for jobs as a result of the high birth rate.

It is also interesting to note that Northern Ireland has a very good quality of life. Its educational achievements are great and its transport system is good. We used to talk about migration from Northern Ireland, but people are now moving there from other parts of Great Britain. Not only does Northern Ireland have a high birth rate but more people are coming to the Province than leaving it, creating a greater need for jobs than for many years.

Energy costs in Northern Ireland are the subject of a recently published separate report from the Committee—rightly, because while the Province is subject to a monopoly control of electricity prices, it is under a great handicap.

Transport is also of great importance to Northern Ireland. My hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) has campaigned continually for the improvement of the A8 from Belfast to Larne harbour. No doubt he will dwell on that matter if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As a member of the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee, I want to emphasise that we referred to that road system regularly. As the hon. Member for Hammersmith mentioned, I stressed its

[Mr. John D. Taylor]

importance because only 5 per cent. of Northern Ireland trade goes to the Republic, whereas 95 per cent. goes to Great Britain. The road to Larne is twice as busy as the road to Dublin. A Government commitment to funding the A8 improvement scheme is a priority for the Province's infrastructure.

Northern Ireland is also successful in education, with the best A-level results in the United Kingdom—as was again confirmed last week, when school league tables were published in the Northern Ireland press. The other side of the story is that the Province has the largest percentage of young people leaving school with poor qualifications, which contributes to longer-term unemployment. The hon. Member for Hammersmith mentioned the need for proper pre-school and nursery education provision. That subject is dear to my heart because as someone who has contributed to Northern Ireland's high birth rate, with six children, I am aware of the lack of pre-school and nursery education.

I hope that the £240 million of peace and reconciliation money being allocated by the European Union to Northern Ireland will be used properly, not foolishly. I have great fears and suspicions, as I watch how the money is being controlled at present, that some of that funding will disappear down the drain. If it were to be used properly, one priority should be the creation and provision of nursery education in Northern Ireland, which has the lowest level of such provision anywhere in the United Kingdom.

Jobs are of course difficult to provide. Under the chairmanship of the late Sir James Kilfedder, the Committee visited South Korea. I personally travelled on to Taiwan. Although members of the Committee came from many different political parties, we demonstrated that we could work well together as a team in the interests of trying to help Northern Ireland.

In Seoul, one could not but be impressed by the presence of the Industrial Development Board, its personnel and its acceptance in South Korea. I hope that I will not be speaking out of turn when I say that officials who represent the United Kingdom at various levels in Seoul were able to confirm that Northern Ireland's presence in South Korea is better than that of any other region of the UK, including Scotland. Seven South Korean companies have opened factories in Northern Ireland, and that investment is most welcome. When I went to Taipei, I was impressed by the IDB operation there. The Province has already attracted one firm, Hualon—but it has not yet arrived due to legal problems in Europe. I hope that every effort will be made by the authorities involved to expedite that matter, so that Hualon can make its decision to invest in the south and east Antrim area. The company has promised 2,800 jobs, which is more than the number of people employed in Belfast shipyard. That puts in its proper context that proposed major investment and provision of new jobs. If only we can get over the legal problems. I reiterate my hope that every effort will be made to assist that investment to be made as quickly as possible.

One cause of concern in recent weeks was the Government's decision to reduce by 25 per cent. funding for the action for community employment scheme, which is mentioned at paragraph 254 of the Committee's report. ACE has been important in providing jobs for the young and unemployed, and in creating a service in the community for less well-off people and those who are elderly and require assistance. Out of the blue, the Government announced a 25 per cent. reduction in ACE investment, at a time of high unemployment.

One problem in the House is that when one tables parliamentary questions, it is difficult now to get answers from Ministers. I tabled two parliamentary questions asking why ACE funding had been reduced. On both occasions, the Minister refused to answer. Instead, he got the manager of the ACE operation to write to me. I was not asking about the way in which ACE was administered but about the decision to reduce its funding by 25 per cent. Ministers should not run away form their responsibilities. They decide Northern Ireland policy and they should answer for it. I deplore the new system whereby Ministers from the Northern Ireland Office—who are not elected by the people of Northern Ireland—refuse to answer in the House for their policy decisions. I place on record the all-party opposition to that 25 per cent. cut in ACE funding—which will be confirmed by the hon. Member for South Down and by the Democratic Unionist Members—when they turn up.

Mr. Soley: If I may add to the right hon. Gentleman's armoury, I discovered yesterday that the Coopers and Lybrand report referred to the immense importance of the ACE scheme to local communities.

Mr. Taylor: That emphasises my point. As we have not been able to obtain an explanation for that funding cut through parliamentary questions in past weeks, we would like one on the Floor of the House today.

I conclude with a problem in my constituency that relates to the policies of the Northern Ireland Office and of the Industrial Development Board. Unemployment is worse in some areas of the Province than in others, and social deprivation in some areas is not equalled in others—so priorities must be set in terms of investment and jobs provision. However, the priority policy that is developed should not be used as a means of denying jobs to areas that are perceived as somewhat better off.

I understand that the Northern Ireland Office and the Industrial Development Board have to carry out the policies of the Northern Ireland Office. Its policy objective is that three out of every four new jobs attracted to Northern Ireland must go to specific areas of deprivation. That is, no doubt, a worthy objective, but it places most of Northern Ireland at a disadvantage in getting new firms and jobs, because they are being concentrated in a smaller number of areas considered to have high social deprivation.

My constituency of Strangford is not considered to be an area of social deprivation. It is considered to be one of the better-off constituencies in Northern Ireland. Yet if one looks at pockets in Strangford, one will find unemployment almost equalling the level of unemployment in the so-called areas of social deprivation. I think of villages such as Portaferry, Kircubbin, and Ballywalter and other villages in the South Down constituency, such as Killyleagh, which will soon come into the constituency of Strangford. I am sure that the hon. Member for South Down will agree that that is a good thing.

The hon. Member for South Down and myself, being neighbours, have suffered alarming unemployment decisions in our constituencies in the past few weeks.

In my constituency alone, in the village of Ballywalter, the Ballywalter Clothing Company has closed with the loss of 150 jobs. There is no major employer anywhere in the Ards peninsula. That one factory provided employment for many people throughout the Ards peninsula, and now it has disappeared. In Comber, in my constituency, the Albion Clothing Company, which manufactured trousers, has closed down in the past week. Nearby—and many of my constituents are involved—Shorts has a major problem as everyone knows. There is the threat of the loss of 1,500 jobs, many belonging to my constituents in Strangford. This weekend, more of my constituents have lost their jobs—I hope for a month only, but we do not know—in the Killyleagh Spinning Company, which suddenly told all 150 workers that they would be off work for a month.

All that is happening in a constituency that is considered to be prosperous, yet—I repeat—in places like Ballywalter or Killyleagh, there are very few other opportunities for employment. It is important that the Northern Ireland Office ensures that the IDB is given every encouragement to try to attract new industries to those rural areas, where there is no alternative manufacturing employment. Yes, there are jobs on the land in farming and agriculture that increase the level of prosperity in the constituency, but in the villages and smaller towns there are no alternative jobs. Those villages and towns must get equal and fair treatment from the IDB, compared with the so-called socially deprived areas of Northern Ireland. I ask the Minister of State, in his reply, to confirm that we will get fair treatment from the Government and from the Industrial Development Board, and that we will be not discriminated against in favour of other parts of Northern Ireland.

11.33 am

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): Like the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor), I wish to express my appreciation of the chairmanship of Sir James Kilfedder, the former Member of Parliament for North Down. He was a magnificent Chairman and a kind friend. I wish also to congratulate the present Chairman, the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley), who introduced the debate this morning, on continuing the even-handed and productive way of conducting the debate.

The report touches on a wide variety of aspects of employment creation in Northern Ireland. It would not be possible in a few moments even to consider one facet of it in any depth. Employment creation is a multi-faceted problem, and even the in-depth discussions that the Select Committee has had only touched on some of the factors that contribute to employment creation and unemployment.

During the inquiry into employment creation in Northern Ireland, we had the outbreak of peace. That created a new dimension and a new era for the prospect of employment creation—one that of course we all welcome very much. It will make the job of the employment-creating agencies that much easier to pursue.

The outbreak of peace also had a further dimension, in that it enormously increased the expectation of people for a better way of life in Northern Ireland. The absence of violence has achieved that already, but other aspects of a better way of life include the social ones of a house and a reasonable job. The housing problem in Northern Ireland is reasonably under control at the moment, but unemployment is not. Unemployment is still the greatest scourge that we have suffered in my memory.

When I talk about employment, I mean employment with good conditions. I do not mean employment in a low-wage economy, in which the unemployed, because of their availability, are at the mercy of the would-be employer, whether indigenous or an inward investor. We should sell Northern Ireland not as a low-wage economy, but as an economy that has a very highly educated and skilful work force. We should sell it as an area where the highest quality of training can be provided in the shortest possible time, and where efficiency and quality make up for deficiencies in foreign products. We should not concentrate on being a low-wage economy, but be able to compete on the international stage in efficiency and quality.

Much has been said in the past few years in Northern Ireland about fair employment, and legislation is currently in place and being reviewed to see whether it has the intended effect. There is a problem not only with the allocation of jobs, but with the location of jobs. That was mentioned by the right hon. Member for Strangford. He listed, quite rightly, some of the horrendous losses that have occurred in the recent past, including some in my constituency. I could not help but think as he spoke that, in my constituency, we could not have big losses because we did not have the jobs in the first place.

An article in the local newspaper, the *Down Recorder*, last week gave the statistic that in the past decade, between 1985 and 1995, the number of unemployed increased by 40 per cent. When my constituents read the headlines about the peace dividend and a job bonanza, they wonder where those jobs will go. We are fairly certain that none of them has gone to south-east Ulster between Strangford Lough and Carlingford Lough. In that 10-year period, not one single inward investment job was created in that area. I could repeat the same sad story about infrastructure, which has also been totally neglected in that area. No inward investment jobs have been created in the area and there has been no job bonanza. That is not my interpretation of what I see around me, but the statistical results in parliamentary questions that prove beyond doubt what I am saying.

One can adopt one of two attitudes to the problem. The first is to say that it is an accident of history; the other is that it is the result of deliberate policy. One of our local newspapers this morning carried an article about how the inward investor Sanchez (UK) Ltd. has been treated. It was to come into the area of Warrenpoint, where there is considerable unemployment. I do not know whether the problem was intentional or simply due to inefficiency.

Down district, which I represent, has the second highest unemployment among the nine council areas surrounding Belfast. We have severe infrastructure problems, too. In South Down, the ferry that plies between Portaferry and Strangford is a disgrace; it will not sustain economic trade between the two areas. It was out of action for several days last week and it continually breaks down.

I do not mean to be a dog in the manger, but we need a new approach to job creation and to the areas in which effort is concentrated.

One of the great disadvantages from which areas such as south-east Ulster suffer is that they are always included in Government statistics in the Greater Belfast

[Mr. Eddie McGrady]

travel-to-work area. In fact, unemployment statistics vary from 6.8 per cent. in Strangford—the lowest in Northern Ireland—to 22 per cent. in other areas. So the inclusion of high unemployment areas in the Belfast travel-to-work area statistics completely distorts the unemployment figures. It also means that areas of multiple social deprivation are not highlighted; they are merely camouflaged in the overall picture.

I ask the Department to provide proper statistics, broken down into the natural units made up of the communities of Northern Ireland. I would also suggest a greater element of partnership between the Government, the job-creating bodies and the vibrant local industrial development bodies working with the local councils. That would be an invaluable and fruitful process.

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): My hon. Friend consistently gives the impression that the job-creating agencies run by the Northern Ireland Office seem to neglect the peripheral areas outside the Belfast conurbation. Has he detected any improvement in their attitude recently?

Mr. McGrady: Since the Committee's report to the Government and to the House, I have detected no change whatever. Of course I can speak only for my own area, but I believe that other areas are in the same situation. We seem to be recreating the Pale of the 16th and 17th centuries—this time not around Dublin, but around Belfast. Into this new economic Pale all good things go and nothing emerges for the peripheral areas.

I also suggest that indigenous and inward investment incentives be graded and geared to provide more jobs near the areas of greatest deprivation. After all, that can be done in Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland, so why cannot it be done effectively in Northern Ireland? We also need a redefinition of the so-called priority areas, to ensure that the real unemployment blackspots are more effectively helped by making them more attractive to investors. There is nothing to be ashamed of in providing jobs for those areas.

The not-so-new policy of the Industrial Development Board and LEDU—the Local Enterprise Development Unit—of concentrating on developing companies with an exporting orientation is fine as far as it goes, but it does not help if a constituency has nothing to develop in the first place. It is impossible to develop the export sector, or the research and development sector, of industries in places where there are no industries. I therefore say that the IDB and LEDU must act more assiduously to create the economic conditions that will attract grant aid and make those places more attractive generally.

I am talking about a change of tactics, a change of the grant aid structure and a change of the policy guiding industrial development—especially inward development.

The right hon. Member for Strangford referred to trade with the Republic which, as he stated, is running at only 5 per cent. of our total trade. The right hon. Gentleman seemed to take some delight in that fact. I take no delight in it; it is a scandal that the two parts of Ireland are not trading much more to their mutual benefit.

I cannot close without first mentioning the 25 per cent. budget cut for the Training and Employment Agency, announced on 11 December last. The effects of that cut have percolated dramatically down into the action for community employment programme. I doubt whether the Government fully thought through the extent to which the effects would be felt, but the results of the cut for meals on wheels, care in the community, Barnardo's homes, Age Concern and cancer research will be considerable. It is sad that those most vulnerable sectors of voluntary work have been targeted, and that 3,000 jobs are due to be cancelled by a stroke of the pen that came out of the blue on 11 December last.

The irony is that other Government Departments will have to pick up the tab. The services will still have to be provided, if not by the voluntary sector and the ACE programme, then more directly.

No one has yet touched on tourism in this morning's debate, yet tourism development can be one of the quickest ways of creating jobs in Northern Ireland's economy. There have been huge increases in the number of visitors since the ceasefire of 18 months ago, but I do not detect any urgency about providing the much needed infrastructure to accommodate them. I am talking primarily about beds. The policy of the Northern Ireland tourist board seems very confused. Hitherto it has been creating 50-bed hotels, whereas local market conditions dictate a need for much smaller hotels of up to 15 beds. They can be built quickly and be ready, if not for this summer, then certainly for next summer's tourist trade. I therefore urge a radical rethink of that aspect of the board's policy.

Many parts of Northern Ireland, including mine, have never had the privilege of massive job losses because we never had those jobs in the first place. That is an abiding local problem; and if there is any inequity in the approach to solving it, it must be dealt with and eradicated.

11.48 am

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I start by adding to what has been said about the establishment of the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee, and about the important role played by the late Sir James Kilfedder. He was always enthusiastic and interested in all who served on the Committee, and was keen to get it off on a sound and effective footing. It is a pleasure to work on the Committee, and the current Chairman, the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley), who opened the debate, has continued the tradition of involving us all in the Committee's work.

My right hon. Friend—I call him that advisedly—the Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) spoke of the vigour of the Northern Ireland economy. It has always impressed me that, despite the difficulties in Northern Ireland, those in business there demonstrate such a positive attitude to achieving success for their companies and their economy. The Province provides an extremely attractive life style: it is a good place in which to live and work. I continue to be impressed by all the people whom the Committee meets, and from whom it takes evidence, who are involved in the Northern Ireland community and, in particular, its business life.

The Committee has discussed small firms, and made recommendations. As in many other parts of the United Kingdom, the opportunities for job creation exist largely in the small business sector. Small firms form a larger proportion of the economy per head of population in Northern Ireland than elsewhere, and they are therefore

very important to that economy. A third of those firms are connected with agriculture, and manufacturing also relies heavily on small businesses.

Northern Ireland's small firms are successful in themselves. The Province has a better record in that regard—a record of small business survival, as opposed to a high failure rate—than other parts of the United Kingdom. Small firms have problems, however, many of which relate to the difficulty of raising capital. We made that point in our report. The Small Business Institute had told us of the shortage of venture and development capital for small businesses, and we recommended that the banks should pay particular attention to the evidence that we had received. We felt that they could and should provide more support, within the constraints of prudent banking.

We also focused on the need for training of managers and supervisors in small businesses—a particular interest of mine—and the relationship between such training and the readiness with which banks would lend to small companies. Banks' unease increases if they feel that they are being asked to lend to organisations which may have experienced a vigorous and energetic start-up, but which may be at risk as they grow because management is not trained to handle a larger business. The Government must give all the support that they can to ensure that training opportunities continue to increase.

Cash flow and debt are also problems for small businesses in the Province, as in other areas. I hoped that the Government would legislate to allow those who do not pay their debts within a reasonable time to be fined. There has been considerable controversy about that in the past few days, and it is very relevant to Northern Ireland.

The Committee found that small companies were also concerned about the burden of regulation, which causes them particular difficulties. Large companies have staff to deal with the regulatory framework; they can employ specialists, and they can afford to spend money on ensuring that regulations are followed. The job of small firms with five, six or 10 employees is to secure orders, to ensure effective accounting and, above all, to get the product or service out of the door and to provide customers with what they need. It is frustrating as well as expensive if they have to spend too much time dealing with Government regulation. We appeal to the Government to minimise that burden wherever possible.

The role of LEDU is extremely important to the development of small firms. We felt that some of its procedures were confusing and lacked clarity; we strongly recommended the design of a format for a business plan for small firms that was acceptable and would be used by the multitude of agencies operating under the Government umbrella, often with Government support, rather than the present multiplicity of requirements.

Reference has been made to the importance of inward investment, and the Committee's visit to Korea early last year. We were very impressed by the standing of the Industrial Development Board in South Korea: its work was effective, and has paid off in terms of investment in the Province. The Koreans told us that the board's follow-up work in helping their expatriates to settle in the Province was particularly effective. It is important for managements that are considering inward investment to know that their own people will not be left high and dry, and that help with education and housing, along with advice, will continue to be provided.

It is also important to improve education standards, allied to work requirements, at the lower end of the education spectrum. It was made clear to us that the qualifications and abilities of those leaving university in Northern Ireland were of a high order, and we saw evidence of that; but it was felt that, at the lower end of the spectrum, young people with minimal qualifications found it difficult to obtain jobs, and, even when jobs were available, the qualifications with which they left school were considered inadequate.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Does the hon. Gentleman share the serious concern expressed to me by many of my friends who work in voluntary organisations in Northern Ireland about the savage cut in the ACE budget?

Mr. Wolfson: Given the importance that the Select Committee attached to maintaining that budget, that cut is regrettable. However, the Select Committee also said that the content of the work needed review. It is important that such money should be spent and focused in the most effective way.

I am pleased to have had the opportunity to make a short intervention in the debate and I look forward to further opportunities in the Select Committee to monitor the work of the Department and how it spends Government money.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I shall call the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) next. I emphasise the need for hon. Members, if possible, to attend the whole of a debate.

12.1 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I shall not make a speech—I shall simply make a few points so that another hon. Member may have the opportunity to speak before the Front-Bench spokesmen.

I welcome the opportunity to comment on the Select Committee's first report. I hope that those who were concerned that the Select Committee might result in some sort of revolution in Northern Ireland now see that it can do a useful job for the people of Northern Ireland. It makes more accountable not only the Ministers responsible for Northern Ireland, but the Departments and the civil servants.

I join other hon. Members in paying tribute to the late Sir James Kilfedder. He played a significant role in the formation and the early days of Select Committee, in particular in the report on employment creation in Northern Ireland. The subject chosen by the Select Committee for its first report was clearly considered to be a priority. I suppose that, as with most Committees beginning their work, the report grew like Topsy. We went wider and wider and ultimately had to draw a line under it and bring it to a conclusion.

The significant factor that formed a backcloth to the Select Committee's considerations was the two ceasefires and the resulting change in atmosphere for business. No one would deny that there was a considerable peace dividend for business in Northern Ireland, although it was not long before we also realised that there could be a significant peace deficit.

[Mr. Peter Robinson]

Jobs in Northern Ireland attend the violence—glaziers who put in new glass after bombs, the construction industry that replaces buildings, the security firms that guard the companies throughout the Province and, most particularly, the security forces themselves. Jobs would be lost as a result of the peace, just as jobs would be gained. Of most concern was the fact that jobs that would be lost would be lost much quicker than they could be replaced by new ones being brought into the Province. Firms quickly reduced their security levels. Jobs such as those filled by men doing searches at the door were lost instantly and the task of filling the gap was considerable.

During the past few months in Northern Ireland, there has been a new drive and energy not only among those in Government Departments who are seeking jobs but in the business community itself. That augurs well for the future.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): The hon. Gentleman knows Northern Ireland a great deal better than I do, but can he confirm that I was right during the negotiations to get the impression that sometimes terrorism was being used as the reason for non-investment when peripherality might have been the cause of the problem, and that will remain and will need to be addressed even if the peace process becomes permanent?

Mr. Robinson: Undoubtedly a number of ingredients are to the disfavour of Northern Ireland, and peripherality is one. Members of the Select Committee well recognise that many business men will sit back for a long time in order to ensure that peace has a permanency about it before they invest in the Province.

The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) referred to Sanchez. It was a sad fact that a firm considering investing in Northern Ireland was invited to meet representatives of the IDB in a restaurant's bombed out car park. That did not seem a sensible decision. Nor was it sensible to leave them stranded there afterwards. However, putting that to one side, we saw a much more helpful IDB, particularly, as was mentioned, in South Korea. Most of us were impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment of the IDB staff in South Korea—their organisation and personnel left a good impression on the Select Committee.

It would be wrong of me to fail to take the opportunity to point out that no matter how hard the IDB and others may work in trying to bring jobs into the Province, if some of the core jobs in Northern Ireland were lost, the Province would have a difficult time recreating them. I think particularly of Shorts in my constituency. If 1,500 jobs in Shorts were to be lost, it would take the IDB and LEDU a long time to replace them. As economists tell us, a further 1,500 jobs rely on those jobs in Shorts, making a net loss of 3,000. The impact of that would be on such a major scale that the Minister responsible for industry in Northern Ireland needs to be on the ball, as I know that he is. It is vital that the Government do everything possible to ensure that Fokker stays in business in some form and that the contracts are maintained.

One thing that the IDB and LEDU lack is some type of performance indicator that would enable us to see how well the IDB was doing—whether the targets are being properly met and how good is the work rate. I hope that the Minister will address himself to that, if not now, certainly in the future.

12.6 pm

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Improved cross-border transport and the development of cross-border business and trade are often projected as a means of reducing unemployment in Northern Ireland, but the benefits that will flow to the Province as a whole, and to the Irish Republic, by upgrading the Larne-Belfast road do not receive the emphasis and attention that they merit.

We resent the political decision made some time ago to pour money into the Belfast-Dublin road. That is traversed by only 8,500 vehicles daily compared with 16,000 vehicles through Larne. Last year, 1.9 million passengers travelled through the port of Larne. Cars, caravans and freight transport increased. The relocation of Sealink from Larne to Belfast has not had the dramatic impact that some predicted. That has been largely compensated for by the introduction of additional ferries by P and O.

It is frustrating that higher priority should not have been given to the A8. We do not accept the most recent fudge of all—a suggestion that the Department of the Environment will look into providing passing opportunities along the road. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland must secure the funding necessary to extend the existing dual carriageway from Gingles corner. That was promised to start in 1997. At the very least, we should complete the dualling to Ballynure where the road diverges and traffic moves towards the airport and county Antrim. It is significant that Corr's corner was the chosen location for Hualon, which may still produce up to 2,000 jobs for us.

I am impressed by the work that has been done by the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs. Its report on employment creation highlighted problems and difficulties but identified the positive advantages for foreign investment in Northern Ireland. The Committee's visit to South Korea was constructive and identified why Northern Ireland is attractive to foreign investors. We must continue to highlight the matters that it identified.

The use of Korean nationals as representatives for the IDB in Seoul has proved itself, and perhaps similar use of foreign nationals should be made elsewhere. The staff there were identified as being very competent. Northern Ireland was perceived by Korean firms as being a good place to invest because of the excellence of the work force and the benefits of close links with the United Kingdom and, indeed, with the European Union, where there are opportunities to market. There are 50 million people in the United Kingdom and 350 million in the European Union, whereas the Irish Republic market is limited to some 3.5 million.

The welcome that is given to overseas people by people from all sections of the community in Northern Ireland was recognised as very genuine, warm and welcoming. Praise was heaped on the IDB for the aftercare provided to new companies, ensuring that there were suitable facilities for their personnel, their workers, and, above all, for the excellence of our education system, with opportunity for the children of those who remain permanently to move on to our excellent universities. The success of South Korean companies in Northern Ireland has opened up a path for other Korean companies to follow. They heard the good news by word of mouth.

I reiterate the tourist board slogan, "You will never know unless you go", and now is an excellent time to do so. With the prospect of permanent peace, I suggest that

similar initiatives by the Chairman and his Committee to visit overseas locations from which we have been able to attract foreign investment could be of great benefit. Will the Minister tell us whether much attention is paid to Select Committee reports and whether it would be a good investment and make good sense to develop cultural and sporting links with South Korea?

12.12 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): On behalf of the Opposition, I should like to associate myself with the remarks made about the late James Kilfedder.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) and the members of his Committee on an excellent report, and I add my welcome to it. I also welcome the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), who has said that the report highlights the crucial need to free unemployed people from poverty traps by easing the transition from welfare into work.

The report is concerned about the level of bureaucracy and lack of openness and co-ordination in Government Departments. It seeks new measures to help Northern Ireland's businesses to develop, market and export their products. It sees the advantages of ensuring that all three and four-year-olds have access to quality nursery education, and it calls for better targeting and monitoring of public expenditure.

There is little time for me to respond to many of the comments made in the report, and I am sorry that some hon. Members have not been called to speak in the debate: given the issues involved in the report, a much longer period is needed to do justice to it.

I shall comment on the rationale behind the report itself: the high unemployment in Northern Ireland, especially long-term unemployment. I appreciate that unemployment is at its lowest level for 14 years, at about 11.4 per cent. The key factor, however, is that some 55 or 56 per cent. of Northern Ireland's unemployed are long-term unemployed—that is, longer than one year—and 23 per cent. of them have been out of work for more than three years.

As a number of hon. Members have said, qualifications are crucial. We are told by the Government that unfilled vacancies are at record levels in Northern Ireland. I take on board the comments that have been made about part-time working, and I shall speak in a moment about benefit traps, but it is obvious that measures should be taken to bring the long-term unemployed back into employment. One such measure is the action for community employment programme. The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) referred to all-party opposition to the cuts in ACE, and I add my voice to that.

The report reflects on some of the criticisms of the ACE programme: it is short term; jobs last for only one year; the employment offered is sometimes low grade; and it has a limited training aspect. But the programme did address the problem of the long-term unemployed, which makes it all the more surprising that the Government have decided to cut it by some £12.5 million and implement cuts of between 20 per cent. and 40 per cent., despite the fact that the community work programme, which the Government hope will replace the ACE programme, is still only a pilot in three areas. Cuts to the ACE programme will displace 3,000 placement jobs for the long-term unemployed, and 200 permanent management jobs.

The Government argue that the CWP is a better approach as jobs are for a longer period—three years—and it has an enhanced training element. I remind the Minister that it is a pilot scheme, but the cuts in ACE are happening now. Community programme schemes are chosen according to whether unemployment in a particular area is high, whereas the ACE programme takes a proportion of long-term unemployed in each district, so assistance is spread more widely in the ACE programme. A number of people are on record as complimenting the ACE programme on its success. The Training and Employment Agency is on record as saying that it believes that the ACE programme is one of its most successful.

It has been mentioned that some of the cuts are disproportionate. For example, job placement for the Ulster wildlife trust amounts to 38 per cent., despite the fact that 51 per cent. of participants go on to full-time employment or education. That compares favourably with any training scheme, whether it be in Great Britain or in Northern Ireland. In my constituency, training schemes deliver full-time jobs to some 30 per cent. of people who complete the courses. I suggest that the Government reconsider the cuts, particularly the targeting of resources.

The report highlights the fact that job creation in Northern Ireland is above the average of the United Kingdom or the European Union, yet there is a record number of unfilled vacancies. The right hon. Member for Strangford referred to the high birth rate in Northern Ireland, and the report gives that as a reason why Northern Ireland must achieve a high rate of economic growth, and fill the vacancies.

There is also a benefit culture in Northern Ireland, whereby people will not move from benefit to employment and must be encouraged from long-term unemployment into jobs. The benefit and tax system must adapt to that need. Tax and benefits systems must be in place in Northern Ireland, to encourage people away from benefits and back into secure employment. We have to move away from benefits and poverty traps. One way to do so would be the minimum wage, as proposed by the Labour party. When I mentioned that to the Belfast chamber of commerce recently, it raised no objections, but even that would not make any impact on the number of unfilled vacancies.

The Government's response to the report refers to the Northern Ireland growth challenge. I am pleased that the Government welcome the efforts of the growth challenge, which offered excellent ideas in relation to employment creation in Northern Ireland. They involve a number of private sector companies. It is disturbing to hear the Northern Ireland growth challenge refer to a culture of comfort in Northern Ireland and to the possibility that, unless the peace dividend is properly managed, there could be a gap in its cycle of comfort, as it calls it, which could lead to higher unemployment in the short term.

In the time left available to me, I should like to touch on other issues in the report. I endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) on small businesses. Northern Ireland has a high proportion of small firms compared with the rest of the United Kingdom. Paragraph 184 of the report states:

"Small businesses . . . can suffer from a cautious approach to lending on the part of the banks."

[Mr. Eric Illsley]

Paragraph 189 states:

"The largest problem encountered by Northern Ireland's small businesses is that of cash flow, payments and debtors".

It is probably as well that the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) is not the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, or small businesses in the Province would be in real trouble. The Labour party is on record as saying that it is considering proposals for statutory protection for small businesses in relation to late payment of debts, and a moratorium law to assist in relation to bankruptcy.

Energy costs are the subject of another Select Committee report. That issue needs to be dealt with. The privatisation of electricity in Northern Ireland has left generators in an unregulated monopoly position, with contracts extending well into the next century—until 2024. There is little likelihood of electricity prices coming down in Northern Ireland until the issue of those contracts—including the gas "take or pay" contract—is dealt with.

On transport links, I take on board Northern Ireland Members' comments on the A8 to Larne. The Province has a high level of academic achievement, both at A-level and at universities. The downside is the number of children who leave school without any qualification. I am pleased that the Government's response to the report calls for measures to improve that position.

I have mentioned the peace dividend. It is essential that the Government carefully manage what is referred to as the peace dividend—about £500 million going into the Northern Ireland economy. I hope that it will continue to be the case that we no longer need to spend as much on security and such matters in Northern Ireland. That money should not simply be removed from the Northern Ireland economy in one go.

I do not have much time to debate tourism, but the report says that it has the potential to create 20,000 jobs. That must be dealt with.

I endorse the report's final paragraph, which states:

"The ceasefires, if permanent, are potentially a turning point in the Province's history".

12.22 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler): Like the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley), I pay a warm tribute to the work of the late Sir James Kilfedder, who became the first Chairman of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs. He is remembered with enormous affection in Northern Ireland as a great constituency Member of Parliament. We are grateful to him and to the people who followed him in the Select Committee's chairmanship for their work. We are also grateful to all members who served on that Committee and for the content of their first report. In the time available to me, I shall try to pick up on some of the points that have been raised in this important debate.

The debate has understandably attracted a great deal of interest in Northern Ireland. Consequently, many Northern Ireland Members are present in the Chamber and have sought to speak. Unfortunately, the debate's short duration has prevented many of them from making the speeches that I know they would have liked to make. It is therefore important that I should place it on record that the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) was present and spoke and that the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux) was also here, as were the hon. Members for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis), for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) and for South Antrim (Mr. Forsythe). The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) also spoke.

If I may impishly pick up a remark by the right hon. Member for Strangford on the theme of, "They haven't gone away, you know," the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) also made it to the debate and made an important speech, with which I shall try to deal. My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson), who is a sterling member of the Select Committee, also made some valuable points.

In the brief time available to me, I should like to deal with some of the key, important points that have been a theme of the debate. In his role as the distinguished Select Committee Chairman, the hon. Member for Hammersmith raised the important point of better information on research and development in Northern Ireland. I inform him and the House that the Department of Economic Development has undertaken new research on spending on research and development in the Province. The first results are available. That research will be continued and published in future years, so it will not only assist the Select Committee on future occasions, but guide and inform Northern Ireland Members who consider the effectiveness of investment in Northern Ireland's economy.

The right hon. Member for Strangford and others raised the issue of the action for community employment programme, which I should like to deal with early in my remarks because I know that it is of great importance to Northern Ireland's people and to Northern Ireland Members in particular. I fully understand the concerns that have been raised in the debate and I assure the House that my noble Friend in the other place has received similar representations on the matter. She has advised me that she is preparing measures that will help smooth the transition to an ACE programme that is more appropriate to the current economic circumstances. I assure hon. Members that she will announce those transitional arrangements shortly.

ACE, however, was introduced when unemployment was rising rapidly. As we have discussed during this short debate, that position has changed for the better and employment opportunities have markedly improved. We have 7,000 registered vacancies and we must skill the people of Northern Ireland to ensure that they can take up those vacancies. Next year, ACE expenditure will be about £40 million. In total, about £46 million will be spent on schemes for the long-term unemployed in 1996 and 1997.

The theme of the debate has been, to use the language of the hon. Member for South Down, quality and efficiency, and getting the right jobs in Northern Ireland—not merely low-grade, low-paid ones. The hon. Gentleman made an important point, which I link to the ACE programme. The pot of money that is available in Northern Ireland must be effectively used if it is to realise the Select Committee's objective, as well as meet the interests of the hon. Member for South Down.

The right hon. Member for Strangford mentioned the importance of the rural economy. As the Minister with responsibility for finance, I am only too aware of his point. I assure him that I shall consider that matter in my overarching role. He made a sound point. We must not overlook the needs of people in the rural economy. They are being dealt with, but it is important that that should followed up.

The road to and from Larne is for ever etched on my memory. In constituencies in southern England, the campaign is about not having the motorway at one's front door, but in Northern Ireland the reverse is true; everybody, especially in Larne, would like the motorway to end at his front door. The hon. Member for East Antrim pleaded his case with his usual eloquence, and I hope that the private finance initiative may ride to the rescue and provide in due course investment that would help to solve the problem.

In the one minute that I have left, I shall touch upon another important issue that several hon. Members raised—the question of Fokker and Shorts. I appreciate the importance of the contracts to Shorts, and confirm that Baroness Denton recently met Dutch Government representatives to discuss that subject. Although it is a commercial matter and will have to be resolved by commercial mechanisms, I assure the House—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. We must now move on to the next topic.

One-day sales

12.30 pm

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to raise an issue of immense concern to my constituents and to many other people throughout the country. In Lancashire, there is a scourge of one-day sales, and people are being comprehensively ripped off by silver-tongued professional swindlers.

Last October, a one-day sale was run in my constituency by William Stephen Beach, of Albert road, Cheltenham. In the previous Session of Parliament, in my early-day motion 1497, I described Mr. Beach as

"an unscrupulous and wholly disreputable fraudster and cheat".

Beach was previously a director of Gloucester Fancy Goods Ltd. and J. B. Sales (Gloucester) Ltd., both of which are now dissolved. I believe that he is currently a director of Table Top Marketing Ltd. and Steve's Cash and Carry.

Last October, I outlined Beach's technique. He breezed into the area, having booked venues for his sales at the Great Marsden hotel in Nelson and the North Valley community centre in Colne. He leafleted the immediate area around the venues and conned people into believing that the boxes of goods that they bought contained top-quality merchandise that was bankrupt stock. In fact they were getting cheap shoddy rubbish. Beach then disappeared like a puff of blue smoke, until I tracked him down in Cheltenham.

My constituent, Mrs. Lana Ellerton, ended up with two pillows and a clock that she did not want, and she was typical of many people. She told me that people were put under immense pressure to buy goods.

I was so incensed by what had happened that, last October, I called on the Government to review the law on consumer protection and to find out how it could be more effectively applied. Unfortunately, on 30 October, the President of the Board of Trade told me that the Government had no plans to change consumer protection law as it related to liquidation and similar sales. I sincerely hope that the Government will now reconsider their position, and act.

After the experience with Beach, I called on the local council to ban one-day sales on council-owned premises, telling it that local people were being ripped off and that local traders were losing business to fly-by-night operators. Pendle council voted to ban sales in its properties, but unfortunately it displayed a misplaced generosity of spirit in allowing bookings already in the pipeline to be honoured.

At that stage, enter Mr. Steve Johnson, of 2 Princess street, Blackpool, who for £69.30 booked Barnoldswick civic hall on 23 January for what was described as a public sale. I have a copy of his leaflet, heralding an

"Important Announcement

Owing to the harsh economic situation and collapse of many well known companies"

there was to be a public sale at Barnoldswick civic centre. Goods advertised for sale included a Kenwood food mixer for £8, a Black and Decker cordless powerdriver for £10, a Super Nintendo for £15 to clear, Philips, Sony, Panasonic, and other top of the range videos for £30 each, a 2 in Casio television for £10, and electronic personal organisers for £5.

"Please come early to avoid disappointment",

said Steve Johnson.

"Beat the Recession and get a bargain of a lifetime",

said Steve Johnson.

"Definitely no gimmicks, no tricks—just good value . . . We give 100 per cent. value—Not promises . . . Guarantee on all goods".

All that was pure fiction.

On the leaflets that were circulated in Barnoldswick there was nothing to say who was responsible for the sale, nothing like the imprint that one would expect on political leaflets to be circulated in a general or local election; they were anonymous.

Steve Johnson knows precisely what he is doing. He is taking good money from innocent people who believe they are getting a bargain that is literally fantastic. People look at the platform piled high with goods, and willingly suspend their disbelief. They think that they will get a bargain. Johnson preys upon those people; like Beach before him, he is an evil calculating cheat and con man.

At the one-day sale at Barnoldswick on 23 January about 80 people turned up, and they left hundreds of pounds lighter in their pockets and purses. They say that they were sold cheap shoddy goods, and that misrepresentation was rife. The quality brands mentioned in the leaflet, such as Panasonic, JVC and Sony, were not there—or if they were they were not sold. They were stage props. If such goods are ever sold, they are sold only to stooges in the audience.

Johnson targeted an area of Barnoldswick for his phoney "star bargains" and "no gimmicks" sale. For obvious reasons, he did not advertise in the local press. That would have given the game away and alerted people to what was happening. Instead, 24 hours before the sale, he distributed a blizzard of leaflets with no imprint, and people duly turned up, wondering what to expect.

The caretaker of the hall, Mr. Lou Farr, told me what happened. About eight people turned up in a clapped-out van. He said that they had southern accents—but that is not a hanging offence; I do not hold that against them. While 80 people clamoured to get in, Steve Johnson and his friends put plastic bin liners over the windows so that people could not look in and see what was happening.

The goods were brought in by the back door and piled high, and at half-past seven the sale started. There were a few sweeteners. Video tapes and cassettes were sold for £1 or 50p. Torches in blister packs that would ordinarily retail for a tenner were sold for £1. After about 15 minutes, the doors to the hall were closed, a couple of heavies were stationed outside and latecomers were told that the sale had started and were turned away.

At that point, Johnson and his team of rogues moved into top gear. He started piling boxes of goods into plastic bin liners, saying that ghetto blasters, toasters and other goods worth £300 were there for the asking, and that he would take only £60 for them. Twenty-seven people fell for it. They bought goods that were not top of the range merchandise but inferior shoddy rubbish manufactured in China, Taiwan and other such places.

The con did not stop there. People who bought goods were told that they could not open their purchases during the sale—only afterwards. They were asked to leave a

blank space for the payee when writing cheques. One victim, my constituent Mrs. Yvonne Farrelly, said that Johnson agreed to take cheques only up to a limit of £100 and if they were backed by a cheque guarantee card, so she wrote four cheques totalling £320 for her purchases. She told my local paper, the excellent, campaigning *Barnoldswick and Earby Times*:

"Don't be ripped off like I was . . . The hi-fi cost £60 and I am sure in my own mind that the organisers said that it was a CD player. However, when we opened up the box, it only plays cassettes and you can buy the same thing from Argos for just £34 . . . There are no guarantees in the box or nothing".

Johnson claimed that the goods had guarantees. Mrs. Farrelly added:

"I consider it to be a complete rip-off."

She also bought a camera for £60 and told me that it was worth £10. Twenty-seven people bought a cheap clock radio for £10 and were promised that they would get something three times as valuable at the end of the evening. They never did.

Given the fuss that I created in October by drawing the matter to the attention of the House and contacting my local council, I was furious when I discovered what had happened on 23 January. On Sunday, I got in my car and drove from Pendle on the Lancashire side of the Lancashire-Yorkshire border to Blackpool to beard the lion in his den—I was going to have it out with Mr. Steve Johnson—but the shutters of his shop were down and he was not about. I took photographs of his shop, which I have distributed among the local papers, and I tried to telephone him, but the contact number that he gave the council when booking the hall was unobtainable. I suspect that he has not paid his telephone bill and BT has cut him off. The sign outside the seedy, crumbling corner shop off the front in Blackpool from where Mr. Steve Johnson operates says that fancy goods and gifts are for sale and that there is also an adult section.

I want a very bright spotlight to be shone on the swindler Johnson, and I do not want him or his friends ever to be within 30 miles of my constituency. One-day sales always end in tears. People who cannot afford to shell out money, who live on council estates and in poorer areas are targeted and find themselves paying out good money for rubbish.

The problem is not confined to my constituency or Lancashire; it occurs elsewhere and it is growing. Last year, the *Financial Times* estimated that about 90 such crooks were operating in the United Kingdom. Last year's annual conference of the Institute of Trading Standards Administration was told that fly-by-night operators were of increasing concern, especially in seaside towns.

There is protection at the moment, but it is inadequate and limited. The Trade Descriptions Act 1968, the Consumer Protection Act 1987, the Sale of Goods (Amendment) Acts 1994 and 1995 and the Sale and Supply of Goods Act 1994 are good but they do not go far enough. It is often virtually impossible to track down people such as Johnson and Beach for the reasons that I have already given.

Commercial leaflets, like political leaflets, should carry an imprint of the name of the person organising the sale and the business address and telephone number of the salesman or saleswoman. By law, a sign should be displayed outside the sale's venue explaining the purpose of the sale—whether it is a liquidation sale or a bankruptcy sale, for example—and again stating the name and address of the sale promoter.

Trading standards officers should be given adequate notice of sales. The North Yorkshire County Council Act 1991 already provides for such notice, but obviously applies only to North Yorkshire, next door to Lancashire. That provision should be extended nationwide. I want local authorities to give Johnson, Beach and other such crooks a very wide birth and not to allow them to hire council premises unless the council is prepared to take out joint liability so that if there were misrepresentation or people were defrauded and the sale promoter could not be tracked down, the council hiring out the hall would be liable.

I am not a single voice crying in the wilderness. The chief trading standards officer of my county council, Mr. J. H. Potts, has been in touch with me. In his letter of yesterday, he says

"In my 25 years experience"—

in trading standards—

"I have to say that the majority of itinerant traders operating 'rostrum' sales of general goods (rather than the specialist suppliers e.g. textiles pottery, paintings etc or who allow consumers to browse and self select goods) generate high numbers of consumer complaints and often mislead customers into buying shoddy goods at high prices. The Mock Auctions Act 1961 is totally ineffective".

I know that that is true. Mr. Potts says that, although the Act controls "free" gifts, restricted bidding and "reduced" bids, they are

"easily evaded by fast-talking salesman."

How true that is. Like me, Mr. Potts wants, at the very least, the introduction of national legislation, and at best, the licensing of all one-day sellers. He reminds me that licensing already operates in the credit industry and for street traders, for example. It must be the right way forward to require one-day wonders to trade fairly.

I hope that I have made it clear that one-day sales are an absolute scourge and that the people responsible for them are loathsome because they target among the poorest people in our communities. I request that the issue not be put to one side as something trivial, but that the concerns of so many people be responded to and that action be taken.

12.47 pm

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor): I certainly do not think that one-day sales are trivial. I congratulate the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on raising the matter again. I have listened to his speech with great interest and I am glad to have the opportunity to set out the Government's views.

A one-day sale is, as the name suggests, a sale held on only one day, although the term is often applied to more permanent sales that use similar sales techniques. Generally, the sales are held in public halls, hotels and other such local venues, which are hired for the purpose. Attention is usually drawn to the events by extensive local advertising, which will often take the form of leaflets delivered door to door, although advertisements also frequently placed in local newspapers.

To make such events attractive, most offer fantastic bargains of some sort. Various reasons are given for the ability to offer such bargains. It may be claimed, for example, that the event is a warehouse clearance, or that the goods are stock clearance lines or bankrupt stock.

[Mr. John M. Taylor]

One-day sales need not, of course, be in any way fraudulent. Some traders offer genuine bargains to the public in this way. Unfortunately, in the past 18 months or so in particular, there have been an increasing number of complaints about one-day sales involving operators who are less scrupulous about the selling methods that they adopt. I am aware that feelings can run high as a result of the way in which many sales are conducted. The practices employed by operators are many and varied.

Essentially, the salesman—who generally conducts the sale from a rostrum like an auctioneer—spends a long time convincing customers of the bargains on offer. A few genuine bargains are usually distributed, although it is alleged that they are often passed to accomplices of the organiser. The salesman builds the atmosphere to a pitch at which customers are persuaded to purchase lots, often consisting of unspecified items, in the belief that they will receive some of the valuable items they were shown or told about earlier. What they receive is generally worth a fraction of what they pay—as was the case with the hon. Gentleman's constituent—and are not the goods that tempted them in the first place.

At a typical sale, the salesman will hook his audience by offering a single item at a modest price—usually around £5. He will suggest that purchase of the item will show that they are genuine bargain hunters. He may even pass disparaging remarks about those not showing what he often calls their good faith in this way. Often, non-buyers will be asked to leave. After seeing piles of expensive electronic goods practically given away, they are asked to pledge a larger sum for unspecified items.

The salesman might say something like, "I want to see all your hands up now. Who will give me £50 for what's on my mind?" All hands usually shoot up at this point. If they do not, he will affect to give away more bargains. As soon as most customers indicate their willingness to buy, the salesman has reached the point he was aiming at. The money is then collected and goods handed out, but not visibly. They are distributed in black plastic dustbin liners.

The customers will be told not to open the bag until they get home, and they are given various reasons for this—perhaps it would cause too much litter in a crowded hall, or it prevents those who have not purchased from satisfying their curiosity. People usually comply. As soon as the salesman judges that he has squeezed the maximum amount out of his audience, he will close the proceedings and everybody will be quickly ushered out by his heavy accomplices. Anybody returning to complain usually receives short shrift.

Many of the one-day sales that are causing problems have similarities to a mock auction. Organisers of one-day sales, however, are now tailoring their techniques so as to fall outside the scope of the Mock Auctions Act 1961. The Act made it an offence to promote, conduct or assist in the conduct of a mock auction. A sale of goods by way of competitive bidding is a mock auction if various conditions are met. These are: a lot is sold to a buyer at a price lower than his highest bid; or part of the price is repaid or credited to him; or the right to bid for any lot is restricted to persons who have agreed to buy other articles; or any articles are given away.

Organisers of new-style one-day sales are now careful to avoid using the actual techniques that would classify the sale as a mock auction, although they may lead unwary participants to react as if the sale were a mock auction. Publicity literature often emphasises that the sale is not an auction. Goods are no longer given away, but are sold at giveaway prices.

While no statement may specifically be made about the right to bid for any lots unless something else is purchased, there is an implication that that is the case. Prospective purchasers are asked, for example, to show their genuineness by making a small standard purchase and are told that they will not be disappointed by subsequent bargains if they do. Quite often, those not taking part are asked to leave. The salesman conducting the sale will not offer any money back, but may suggest that, on top of any purchase that is made, purchasers will be given other items of great value.

One-day sales are by no means as prevalent as were mock auctions in their heyday. Although one-day sales take place throughout the country, they appear to be attributable to a comparatively small number of operators. Some are quite permanent sales that use similar selling techniques. These are generally situated at places where the organisers can rely on a constant stream of new customers—for example, at seaside resorts or shopping centres of major cities where tourists are found. Many such sales are held at empty shops without the owner's permission. When the organiser is eventually evicted, he will merely move on to a similar unoccupied shop.

There is a considerable body of consumer protection legislation that is relevant to one-day sales and it has already been used by enforcement authorities at various times. The Sale of Goods Act 1979 provides that a buyer can expect goods that he purchases to be as described, and of satisfactory quality. There is also the Trade Descriptions Act 1968, which makes it an offence for a person to give—by whatever means—any false or misleading information on a wide range of characteristics of the goods he supplies or offers to supply.

In addition, the Consumer Protection Act 1987 makes it an offence to give a misleading price indication. Furthermore, if the organiser issues a misleading advertisement and will not withdraw it, the Director General of Fair Trading has powers under the Control of Misleading Advertisements Regulations 1988. Ultimately he can seek an injunction to stop the advertisement.

In the late 1970s, the Director General of Fair Trading considered the question of one-day sales in detail. He concluded that there was insufficient evidence of economic detriment to support a call for new legislation to control such events, but he publicised the dangers of one-day sales that use mock auction techniques. He advised consumers to be on their guard at such sales. Once enticed by the prospect of a bargain, it is only too easy to be caught up in an atmosphere skilfully created and manipulated by the salesman and to part with large sums of money for items of little value. That advice is as valid today as it was then. The director general has also taken action and given warnings in a number of cases where the law was infringed, using his powers under part III of the Fair Trading Act 1973.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: May I bring the Minister forward to 7 February 1996? A report in today's

Daily Express states that Department of Trade and Industry officials are looking at whether legislation might be needed for one-day sales. Can he confirm in the time remaining to him whether that is the case?

Mr. Taylor: I confess that I have not read the *Daily Express* this morning, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that, under my instruction, DTI officials will continue to consider the problem.

Some trading standards departments have suggested, and the hon. Gentleman has today reiterated, that further legislation is necessary to deal with the problem—for example, by amending the Mock Auctions Act 1961 or introducing a nationwide requirement reflecting the provisions of the North Yorkshire County Council Act 1991, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. The Act requires organisers to give 21 days notice of a one-day or occasional sale with a description of the goods for sale and the names and addresses of the organisers, and the name and address of a person appointed to receive and answer complaints about the sale. The organisers must also describe whether the sale is to be held on other days, the extent of the premises to be occupied and an estimate of the number of people who will attend.

One of the deficiencies of public life is that it is impossible to legislate for human nature, particularly when our fellow citizens—acting in good faith and good hope—are being manipulated by the kind of rogues to whom the hon. Gentleman has referred. My officials have periodically discussed the issues raised by one-day sales with trading standards officers, and they will shortly meet the Local Authorities Co-ordinating Body on Trading Standards and other trading standards representatives to review the situation. We shall continue to keep the situation under review.

I hope that that reply confirms to the hon. Gentleman that we are fully aware of the problems that some one-day sales can create. We share his concern, and I believe that the consumer needs to be very wary. I am not at present persuaded, however, that that wariness can be aroused effectively by further legislation.

Burma

12.59 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker for the opportunity to raise a subject as important as Her Majesty's Government's relations with Burma. We had a debate in the House on 19 July last year, in which the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) made some significant points following the release of Aung San Suu Kyi from confinement last July.

I am delighted to see present in the Chamber not only the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), but the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), who takes a great deal of interest in this subject. I was told by my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Sir J. Lester) that he would have been here had his schedule allowed it.

I am not an expert in Burmese affairs, but I recognise a gross human rights violation when I see one. There can be no grosser violation than that of the democratic sovereignty of a country. Burma was turned over in 1990 by the State Law and Order Restoration Council regime. Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy obtained no less than 82 per cent. of the popular vote in an election, but was promptly prevented by military intervention from taking power. That is as gross an invasion of the sovereignty of a country as a territorial invasion would have been.

We all very much admire the courage of Aung San Suu Kyi and her continuing calls for reconciliation, communication and peaceful protest, despite the provocations that she and her supporters have no doubt suffered. We remember, as did the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale in last summer's debate, that Baroness Chalker, the Foreign Office Minister said in a lecture:

"The United Nations charter lays a duty on all of us to promote respect for human rights everywhere."

She merely echoed the slightly more florid tones of President Kennedy when he said:

"The people of the world respect a nation that can see beyond its image".

As we have former colonial responsibilities for Burma, I believe that in that context alone, the British Government should, and does, take human rights in Burma seriously.

As the Minister said in the last debate on Burma, rhetoric in such situations is often easier than practical action. One of my greatest frustrations as vice-chairman of the parliamentary human rights group is the difficulty of the international community in giving practical effect to its condemnation of human rights regimes in other countries. I appreciate that there is always a balance between constructive engagement through aid, trade or diplomatic relations and sufficient pressure in other ways. I equally appreciate, as my right hon. Friend the Minister said in July, that caution should be the watchword in our dealings with Burma. We should concentrate on the practical aspects of our good governance policy. My right hon. Friend said:

"Aid is a valuable tool in exercising international influence in Burma, and we must be careful that it is used to support reform rather than undermine it."—[*Official Report*, 19 July 1995; Vol. 263, c. 1644.]

[Mr. Anthony Coombs]

The cautious optimism that then characterised the position of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not been borne out by events in Burma since last July.

The SLORC Government would no doubt say that the economy has revived in the past year, during which time, I understand, rice production has risen by 15 per cent. The House should not forget that about 30 years ago Burma was the largest exporter of rice. Some additional foreign investment—one may or may not agree with the wisdom of making such investment, given the Burmese Government's human rights record—particularly from Japan, has resumed. Some political prisoners have been released, although many hundreds, if not thousands, remain in gaol. There has been a ceasefire with 15 out of 16 of the rebel movements that litter Burma, which is an intensely multicultural and multi-racial country.

On at least a formal basis, the constitutional convention continues to meet intermittently. It is at least talking about steps towards democracy, although whether that democracy would meet the requirements of most Members of Parliament must be open to doubt. SLORC has maintained its policy of economic diplomacy—as the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale called it—and has attempted to achieve at least some sort of military stability by economic improvements. However, as was said recently in the Asian context:

"No human being should be asked to choose between bread and freedom."

That is the choice that SLORC puts before the Burmese people.

There is definite and continuing evidence of massive human rights abuses in Burma. There is no freedom of assembly or effective political association. Some, including Amnesty International and the Burma Action Group point to the rising number of political prisoners, despite some releases earlier last year. The International Labour Organisation still points to the significant use of forced labour. Some 80,000 labourers have been forced to work, perversely and ironically, on the preparations for the "Visit Myanmar Year 1996". Those people have been displaced from their villages and taken away from their families and are being used to construct roads and other infrastructure for what the regime hopes will be a newly buoyant tourist industry.

The United Nations human rights rapporteur, Mr. Yakato, has itemised summary executions, torture and forced movements, particularly in the east of the country against the Karen people. I find it appalling that the SLORC regime has decided that it wants a reservation on article 37 of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. That article prevents the torture of children. The regime has found it necessary to seek a reservation in order to promote its continued hold on power.

A 20-point resolution was drawn up by the United Nations social, humanitarian and cultural committee in December. It deplored continued violations of human rights in Burma. Sadly, on the political front, it appears that the constitutional convention is increasingly being revealed as a declining farce. It was never likely to get off the ground in a substantive way since 600 out of the 700 delegates are government appointed. It proceeds on the assumption that no one who is married to a foreigner, which includes Aung San Suu Kyi, should ever be able to hold high office. Her appointment as secretary general of the National League for Democracy was specifically not recognised by the SLORC regime.

The constitutional convention also lays down ground rules that most people would regard as profoundly undemocratic for the new constitution. The chairman of its convening commission, General Nyunt, said at its opening session in 1993 that the new constitution would depend upon

"the participation of the Defence Services in the leading role in national politics in the future."

If that is not a recipe for a military regime, I do not know what is.

As the convention appears to have descended into farce, it is not surprising that on 29 November 1995 the National League for Democracy, which is led by Aung San Suu Kyi, should decide that it was no longer appropriate to take part. She, rightly, justified its action by saying:

"If the League is not allowed to represent the views of the people then why was the election held in 1990"—

and what justification, by implication, is there for continuing to take part in the convention? Despite that, and the provocations that she and her supporters—who, after all, have been the legitimate Government of Burma since the overturned 1990 elections—have faced, she continues to promote dialogue with the existing regime and discourage demonstration or anything that might be used by the regime to promote renewed oppression of the people of Burma.

I have four questions for my right hon. Friend the Minister about what Britain can do, given the deteriorating human rights and political situation in Burma. Everything that I am going to ask him to do would bolster the position of the legitimate Government of Burma, which is the National League for Democracy, while encouraging dialogue.

First, there is the tricky question of investment and trade, over which there seems to be some confusion about the stance of the British Government. For instance, in 1993, the then Minister for Trade said:

"The Government's policy is to provide no specific encouragement to British firms to trade or invest in Burma in view of the current political and economic situation there."—[*Official Report*, 8 July 1993; Vol. 228, c. *214*.]

That is quite categorical and was said only two years ago in a political situation similar to the present one. Yet the Department of Trade and Industry actively encouraged, through the south of England exporters association, trade missions that took place in November and a seminar on, "An Introduction to Burma—The latest tiger club", organised by the London chamber of commerce and industry on 5 December. Other trade missions, involving 37 countries, are being supported by the DTI later this year.

I would have thought that such encouragement is not what Aung San Suu Kyi has been urging on the British Government as constructive disengagement from the regime in Burma. It seems to contradict directly the original position of the British Government. It certainly contradicts the position taken by Daw Suu Kyi when she said that future investment, and by implication improved trading links, between western firms and the Burmese Government and Burma in general would have to "jolly well wait" until there had been significant improvements in human rights and democratic freedoms. A clarification of the Government's position on trade and investment in Burma would be useful.

Secondly, will the Government continue to refuse to recognise any constitution proposed by the SLORC regime through its pet convention on the constitution if it is not specifically approved by the National League for Democracy and Aung San Suu Kyi? To do anything else would be to acquiesce in making legitimate the new regime that overturned democracy in 1990.

Thirdly, will my right hon. Friend the Minister work, through the United Nations, to improve human rights monitoring in Burma to ensure that there will be a constant stream of information so that not only will engagement but the trade and aid that will follow depend on human rights being improved?

Fourthly, will he ensure that Britain supports the EU's current position that dialogue with ASEAN, the Association of South-East Asian Nations, would be significantly jeopardised if Burma were allowed entry into the ASEAN group of nations on an unreformed basis?

Finally, it would be right for my right hon. Friend the Minister to say now that Britain would encourage a position whereby any international involvement, particularly on a multilateral basis, with Burma was dependent on the specific agreement, at least in principle, by Aung San Suu Kyi, who is the legitimate leader of Burma. Those steps would bolster democracy in Burma, improve the bargaining power of its democratic forces—which desperately need it—and ensure there was a genuine rather than a symbolic democracy in Burma, symbolic democracy being the sort that the SLORC regime would like to foist on the people. Most of all, those steps would send a signal to the rest of the world that democratic, civilised nations are not prepared to stand by and watch democracy, elections and freedoms being trampled underfoot by regimes such as that in Burma and are prepared to back their rhetoric with substantive, positive action.

1.15 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) for initiating this debate and I recognise fully the interest of my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, in this subject. He has met me on a number of occasions to discuss issues involving Burma. I must say that the presence of four Ministers and other Conservative Members is in stark contrast to the interest shown by the Opposition. There is not a single Labour or Liberal Democrat Member here to discuss what I regard as a most important matter. Burma is an important country and one that we watch—and have to watch—carefully.

Last July year, in the debate secured by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), I told the House that I warmly welcomed the decision of the State Law and Order Restoration Council—SLORC—to release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from her long period of detention without trial. I hoped that that would signal a new dawn for Burmese politics and allow Daw Suu Kyi and her party, the National League for Democracy, or NLD, to participate in the creation of a peaceful, prosperous and democratic Burma.

Those hopes have not yet been fulfilled. The much-needed dialogue between Daw Suu Kyi and SLORC has yet to materialise. Indeed, most recently SLORC appears to be increasing the pressure on Daw Suu Kyi and her supporters. Recent arrests and harassment of NLD personnel are a cause for concern.

Last November, the NLD decided to withdraw its support for the national convention constitutional review process because of SLORC's failure to begin a serious dialogue about national reconciliation, institute genuine multi-party democracy and produce a constitution that could win the support of the people.

The European Union considered it important to reiterate the need for dialogue and to call for a peaceful settlement of differences. We issued the following statement at the time:

"The European Union expresses its concern about the absence of open and meaningful dialogue on constitutional reform involving all sectors of opinion in Burma including the NLD recently being forced to abandon the National Convention.

The European Union firmly believes that dialogue will help prevent confrontation and offers the best hope of national reconciliation. We, therefore, call upon the SLORC to engage in dialogue with all Burma's political and ethnic groups and to increase their efforts to achieve national reconciliation and multi-party democracy. At the same time we urge all parties concerned to proceed with caution and to take all possible steps to avoid a return to violence."

That remains our position. We want SLORC to build on the hopes that have been nurtured by the release of Daw Suu Kyi and for there to be progress towards genuine reform.

We will continue to make those views known. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest is aware, we have long been at the forefront of international action on Burma and initiated the European Union's suspension of official aid in 1988, an arms embargo in 1991 and a ban on all defence links in 1992. We shall not weaken in our commitment to help forward the cause of reform in Burma.

I have heard suggestions that, for commercial reasons, our support for reform in Burma may be weakening. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest did not say that, but I certainly welcome the opportunity to rebut such an insinuation. The question of trade is complex—I shall deal with it later in my speech—but let me be clear: our will to see real change in Burma is undiminished, and our support for the reform process is as strong as ever.

I shall cite the latest evidence of that support. At the recent 50th session of the United Nations General Assembly, in New York, we worked closely with other countries to secure a critical resolution on the political and human rights situations in Burma. The resolution urged SLORC to engage in a substantive dialogue with Daw Suu Kyi and other political leaders, including representatives of ethnic groups, as the best means of promoting national reconciliation and the full and early restoration of democracy. I shall take this opportunity to repeat that call on the members of SLORC to take those steps, which are vital to the future of their country and its place in the international community.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest mentioned the human rights situation in Burma, as did my good friend the hon. Member for Gedling at our meeting. The Government remain deeply concerned about the human rights situation. The UN resolution addressed some of those concerns by urging SLORC

"to release immediately and unconditionally detained political leaders and all political prisoners, to ensure their physical integrity and to permit them to participate in the process of national reconciliation."

[Mr. Jeremy Hanley]

It also expressed grave worries about the attacks on the Karen and encouraged SLORC to create the conditions necessary to ensure an end to the movements of refugees to neighbouring countries. That would be conducive to voluntary return and full reintegration of those people, in conditions of safety and dignity.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest asked us to monitor the human rights situation in Burma closely. We will continue to do so and to take every opportunity to urge SLORC to comply with UN resolutions and to fulfil its basic duties to all the people of Burma. In particular, I call on SLORC to recognise the right of all Burmese people to participate fully in the political process. That will remain a central objective of our policy towards Burma.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest asked about the Government's position on trade with Burma. I said earlier that that is a complex issue. However, the elements of our policy are logical and are not difficult to understand, and I believe that those who are most directly concerned clearly understand it. We do not think that we should cut off trade with Burma. We may be able, through trade, to help to reinforce our pressure for reform. Daw Suu Kyi has not called for a ban on trade to Burma. If there is one thing on which she and SLORC agree, it is that Burma is in desperate need of economic development.

In a recent interview with the BBC, in answer to a question about whether foreign investment and trade will boost growth, Daw Suu Kyi replied:

> "It depends on how investments are put to use. Those that bring prosperity to the country and the people are one thing. But investments that widen the gap between the rich and poor will never benefit the country".

I cannot but agree with that.

We do not see trade with Burma intrinsically as a bad thing. Furthermore, we believe that, with the exception of defence exports—which are, of course, subject to the European Union's embargo—we have a responsibility to ensure that British companies are kept informed of developments in Burma and are aware of potential opportunities. British firms are anxious to explore the market and to match their competitors. They have requested the support of Her Majesty's Government, and we should provide it. However, we draw the line at any suggestion of funding for projects that have been commissioned by the ruling SLORC. That is why we do not even consider support for major investment projects.

It is worth taking a few moments to clear up some facts about British investment in Burma. Investment is notoriously difficult to measure. Figures that quote Britain as the largest investor in Burma include investments from other countries that are channelled through some of our dependent territories as well as investment from Britain. Because of our history, it is natural that British business should have invested in Burma over the years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest obliquely referred to history. One should beware of figures that may not be representative of current British investment in Burma. The Department of Trade and Industry seminar that was held last December, to which my hon. Friend referred, and the first trade mission, which will be made later this month, are modest contributions to the process of keeping companies informed. Those events provide us with an opportunity to ensure that British companies that have expressed an interest in Burma are made aware of the realities of doing business there and informed of the situation there. Ultimately, it is for the companies to weigh up whether they wish to operate in Burma in the current circumstances.

In view of the political and economic conditions that prevail in Burma, we firmly remain of the view that it is still premature for the Government to provide any bilateral aid that might directly benefit SLORC. That does not mean that we will provide no humanitarian aid to Burma; we are still willing to consider projects that are identified and implemented by non-governmental organisations. As I have said, aid can be a valuable tool in exercising international influence in Burma. We shall continue to discuss the way ahead with our European Union partners.

The European Union agrees that we should reward reform in Burma by providing aid, as long as it is targeted at the grass-roots level and to the people who are most in need. We think that it is vital that SLORC should allow the UN and other non-governmental organisations to operate in Burma. Only in that way will the Burmese people be able to benefit from the help that we all wish to provide.

We must make full use of the weight of our common European Union policy. The European Union has a "critical dialogue" with SLORC that makes it clear that the resumption of normal relations will be conditional on progress in key areas, including human rights, and political and economic reform. We must use the dialogue to accelerate liberalisation and political change to create a prosperous and democratic Burma.

Last July, in the debate to which my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest and I earlier referred, I summarised our current attitude to Burma as cautiously optimistic. Developments since then may have tipped the balance further towards caution. Burma still desperately needs meaningful reform, which will require that courage and common sense prevail. We know that the people of Burma have those qualities, and I believe that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is perhaps the embodiment of courage.

I have tried to explain what we are doing to advance the process of reform. I continue to hope that the efforts of all those who are working for successful change in Burma will bear fruit. As long as there is an interest in the House about reform in Burma and we continue to remember that, in time the democratic process must prevail and the United Kingdom, the European Union and the United Nations will be able to encourage Burma to return to what it should be: a beautiful country with a great future.

Building (Education Sector)

1.29 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to discuss the important subject of the condition of buildings in the education sector. I thank the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), for having agreed to consider very seriously the issues and specific examples to which I shall draw attention.

In the past few days, the media have paid much attention to the Office for Standards in Education annual report. Among many other things, the report highlighted a worrying problem in our schools. Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools said that 2,700 primary schools, which is one in seven of the total, and 800 secondary schools, or one in five of the total, had poor accommodation. He said in his report:

"Teachers who lack proper resources or who work in poor buildings experience problems which at best frustrate and at worst defeat their best efforts to do a decent job."

Buildings are in disrepair not only in our schools, but throughout the further and higher education sectors. That affects teachers' and lecturers' ability to deliver education for pupils and students to learn; it also raises vital health and safety issues.

In this brief debate, I shall draw attention to the buildings crisis in the education sector and the Government's persistent cuts in capital allocations and I shall call on the Minister to recognise that there is a growing problem throughout the sector which requires investment rather than cuts. In my opinion, it is somewhat hypocritical of the Government to speak constantly of plans to improve educational achievement while neglecting the fabric of the buildings in which the education is delivered.

The Secretary of State admitted in a letter to the School Teachers' Review Body on 30 November 1995:

"Further pressure arises from the continuing needs for essential repairs and maintenance to the school building stock".

Yet this year, on average, English local education authorities received only a fifth of their bid for capital allocation—for urgently needed new buildings and for essential repairs and maintenance work.

In 1990-91, 74 per cent. of Derbyshire's capital bid was approved. That percentage has decreased steadily and this year only 8 per cent. of the LEA's capital bid was approved. Capital spending in real terms on schools is now roughly half its value 20 years ago, and for much of the 1980s was one-third of 1974-75 spending.

In a recent survey that I conducted, it was revealed that £1.1 billion is needed by LEAs in England and Wales simply to make their schools safe for children. Nearly a third of LEAs questioned required more than £10 million each to make their schools safe, and four local education authorities needed more than £45 million to ensure safety in their schools.

One LEA questioned in the survey commented:

"£10-15 million would only provide a safe working environment—not necessarily an environment appropriate to the delivery of the curriculum in 1995 and beyond . . . we estimate the cost of bringing all schools' premises to an acceptable standard for curriculum delivery to be at least £250 million and possibly more."

A survey by the Campaign for the Advancement of State Education, in October 1995, revealed that more than 20 per cent. of English and Welsh LEAs that replied had one or more primary schools with only outside loos.

A survey carried out by the National Association of School Masters and Union of Women Teachers in Haringey found that 55 per cent. of schools in Haringey have problems with leaking drainpipes, drains and roofs, 74 per cent. of schools have uneven or potholed playgrounds and 64 per cent. have visible cracks in walls—though not so bad as the cracks at Oliver Goldsmith school in Brent, where the west wing is detaching itself from the rest of the school, yet despite the problems at that school Brent council's bid for capital allocation for the necessary repairs was turned down.

The problem confronting many schools may best be illustrated by a copy of a letter sent to the Secretary of State that I received from a Mr. Horner, whose daughter attends the Southowram Withinfields junior and infant school in Halifax. It is worth quoting a large extract from that letter:

"Only 3 classrooms out of nine are taught in the main building . . . the other six being housed in temporary classrooms which have been placed in the playground leaving virtually nowhere for children to play in. All the temporary classrooms have damaged walls, two have rotten window frames, one has no toilet facilities at all . . . the oldest 'temporary classroom' is now 30 years old . . . is held up with metal props and a central wooden joist has to be fixed across the centre of both classrooms to secure the buildings. This is the classroom my four year old daughter will spend her formative years in in your state education system next year . . . In the main building . . . 55 children share 2 urinals and 2 toilets, the window frames are rotten and leak when it rains, the walls suffer from rising damp which ruins displays of children's work, mould grows on the walls and paint and plaster crumbles and falls from the walls. A recent visit from Calderdale Council, who came to see if the building could be redecorated, commented that it would be a total waste of time and money because the building was so 'sick'."

How did the Secretary of State respond? In a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) on 18 December 1995, the Minister said that the bid for the school to be rebuilt had been unsuccessful because the cost of repair would be cheaper than the cost of replacement. That and numerous other examples show how children are at risk in the classroom because of persistent capital underfunding by the Government.

In and around my constituency—in the area of the new Bath and north-east Somerset unitary authority—the local authority's surveyors have identified those repair and maintenance works required in local schools in the immediate future. I have in my hand a 27-page document listing them all. Those immediate repair and maintenance needs total a staggering £7 million.

Some of the most urgent work includes the need for rewiring at Culverhay school, Hayesfield school, Weston primary school and St. Gregory's school. Heating systems need to be improved at Weston All Saints junior school and St. Mary's Roman Catholic voluntary-aided school. Re-roofing is needed at Southdown junior school and Culverhay school and windows need replacing at Twerton Church of England junior school.

All the schools that I have mentioned have numerous other problems that require immediate attention. I have listed only a few; yet this year the new unitary authority received only one third of its capital allocation bid—only £1.5 million compared with the need for repair and

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maintenance alone of more than £7 million. It is hardly surprising that one senior officer told me this morning that local government is

"not really even scratching the surface".

In Lambeth, a survey carried out three years ago revealed that £26 million needed to be spent on education buildings in the next 10 years. Since then, however, it has been possible to spend only between £2 million and £3 million and the annual capital grant from the Department for Education and Employment this year allocates Lambeth a derisory £363,000. That position needs redressing and, sadly, it recurs throughout the country.

I hope that the three education spokespeople from the three political parties represented on Lambeth council who are to visit the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), this afternoon will be able to persuade him of the need to tackle the problems of education buildings in their area.

Leaking roofs, overcrowded classrooms and outside loos are, in part, a health and safety problem, but a more widespread and equally disturbing problem is that of schools not even equipped to teach the national curriculum. To teach the national curriculum successfully, very many existing buildings need adapting. Given the current tight restrictions, such changes are rarely possible.

The Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Hornchurch, admitted:

"I acknowledge . . . that in recent years tight public expenditure survey settlements have meant that allocations available for improvement or replacement work have not been as high as some local authorities might have wished."—[*Official Report*, 23 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 872.]

How right he was.

It is therefore perhaps not surprising that the Department seems unwilling to repeat its 1986-87 survey of the school building stock in order to establish the current facts. There was a £2 billion backlog of repair and maintenance work at that time and some suggest that today it is more like £4 billion. According to the 1991 National Audit Office report entitled "Repair and Maintenance of School Buildings", the cost of maintenance is set to rise each year until 2000. Nothing that the Government have done since 1991 suggests that that prediction was wrong.

Instead of spending money to bring schools up to standard, the Government seem intent on deregulating area requirements for teaching accommodation. That could remove a statutory barrier to overcrowded classrooms—perhaps that is what some in the education world understand by a "crammer". A letter from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to the Campaign for the Advancement of State Education also revealed that health and safety regulations on minimum space requirements—which came into force in January this year—do not apply to pupils or to classrooms in schools. So children face larger classes in shabby buildings.

The Minister might also like to consider the situation in further education and explain to students at FE colleges and universities why they, too, face larger classes, fewer books, aging equipment and shabby buildings. This year's Budget hit the further education sector particularly hard. Last year's plans for capital funding have been reduced by £49 million or 31 per cent. in 1996-97 and the reduction will increase to £100 million or 63 per cent. in 1998-99.

That is a blow to those further education colleges that need to attract students in order to get funding. For example, at the Henry Thornton community education centre in Lambeth the roof is leaking and the matching Further Education Funding Council funds for community education courses are in jeopardy unless the roof is repaired. The 1993 Hunter survey of buildings in the FE sector revealed that expenditure of about £839 million is needed for the first five years of incorporation. It found that many colleges had inherited a legacy of previous underinvestment, with building stock in poor condition and ill-suited to the learning needs of the 1990s.

However, in August 1995 the Association of Colleges for Further and Higher Education assessed the need for capital investment in the FE sector and found that annual investment of about £40 million will be required to provide just the additional capacity and refurbish existing accommodation for the expanded student numbers. Colleges with increased student numbers also face the acute need to expand. Many have particular difficulties because they are old Victorian buildings on cramped town-centre sites, which increases the cost of providing the expansion.

Yet by 1998 the Further Education Funding Council will no longer be able to maintain the equipment allocation at its present level, let alone provide the separate allocation to support building work. Mr. Chris Pratt, principal of Airedale and Wharfedale college in Leeds, said:

"There is no doubt we will be forced to severely restrict growth. This . . . may kill off expansion altogether".

That is just one of the many examples that I could present to the House.

Capital funding in the higher education sector this year has also been severely cut from £347 million to £243 million—a decrease of 30 per cent. That has occurred despite massive rises in student numbers in recent years. The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals made a submission to the public expenditure survey in May 1995 drawing attention to the pressing need for extra funds for buildings and other capital expenditure, including a backlog of maintenance work totalling a mammoth £1.269 billion across the university system as a result of Government underfunding. Some £840 million extra is needed over three years to pay for badly needed spaces in lecture theatres, laboratories and libraries and £133 million is needed to cover the cost of complying with new health and safety regulations. One institution summed up the sentiments of the higher education sector by saying:

"The 1995 Budget cuts have come at the end of a long and debilitating process and will have a significant impact on the longer term initiatives that are being pursued".

In its recent letter to the Higher Education Funding Council, the Department simply states:

"indicative provision for capital expenditure . . . has been reduced in the light of Government policy that capital goods and projects should, wherever possible, be financed through private sector schemes in line with the private finance initiative".

In both the further and higher education sectors, the Government's PFI is no shortcut to better educational buildings for all: it is merely a commercial arrangement

which will not appeal to many businesses. As Peter Reader, head of public affairs at Southampton university, said:

"PFI firms seem only to be interested in developing leisure facilities, but that's just a small part of what needs funding. PFI is an answer only for a limited area".

That view is confirmed by Sir Christopher Bland, chairman of the private finance panel, who acknowledged that the PFI might be ill suited to non-commercial academic projects. He stated:

"An income stream will continue to determine whether it can be a PFI project: the rules do not change".

I was pleased to hear that during a meeting with the CVCP yesterday the Secretary of State agreed to look at the concerns that it has expressed about the PFI. I understand that there may be some developments on that front and they are very welcome.

The Government's new initiative for schools—the school renewal challenge fund, which aims to involve private finance in educational buildings—will not help a great deal. The relatively small-scale school projects that are needed are unlikely to attract private developers. As with higher education, it seems likely that developers will be most interested in projects, such as sports complexes, with an obvious source of outside income. Proposals to use private sector cash are totally inadequate. Children's and students' safety should not depend on the good will of the private sector.

The Government are introducing gimmick after gimmick into the education system, but they will not provide enough money to make schools safe for children. In the age of the information super-highway, school children have to use outside loos and students work in overcrowded, and at times unsafe, lecture halls. Decent buildings are vital if we are to meet high quality educational objectives. Buildings in a poor state of repair have a direct impact on the quality of learning, and failure to provide adequate maintenance eventually results in crisis management. Buildings that are in good repair encourage learning, helping to keep down truancy levels and boost morale. Badly maintained buildings encourage vandalism which, as well as reducing the quality of the teaching environment, increases cost.

I urge the Government to invest in the building stock throughout the education sector. Schools, colleges and universities should be safe and fit places for teachers and lecturers to teach and pupils and students to learn. Safe, adequate buildings are an entitlement and not a luxury. Yet as time passes and underfunding persists, the decay of buildings in the education sector continues. It is time for the Government to halt that decay.

1.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Cheryl Gillan): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on obtaining this Adjournment debate on an extremely important issue. It was useful to hear the points that the hon. Gentleman made. I am only sad that there are not more hon. Members on the Opposition Benches—I always thought that education was at the top of their agenda.

The hon. Member for Bath made a number of different points in his characteristically direct way. The common theme that ran through them was that problems are the Government's responsibility—local authorities, schools, colleges and universities have been starved of the resources that they have sought to put matters right; the world would be rosy if only more money were available; and the taxpayer's pocket has, yet again, to be the source of that money.

I shall respond to the hon. Gentleman with a few plain facts. It might be hard for him to admit this, but the truth is that, during this decade, substantial sums have been directed towards improving and renewing educational buildings. For 1996-97, we have announced record levels of support for capital programmes—just short of £700 million. Add to that the substantial support that we announced for the previous two years and one arrives at centrally available support totalling just short of £2 billion over the three-year period.

The hon. Member for Bath should note that allocations for basic and exceptional basic need are much higher for 1996-97 than they have been in recent years—£6.6 million compared with £2.5 million in 1995-96. That central support is not, as the hon. Gentleman knows, a limit of any kind on spending on school buildings. Local education authorities can, and do, add substantially to the sums available through grants and borrowing approvals by investing capital receipts and funds from their revenue budgets.

We have made it easier for LEAs to do that in a number of ways. For example, for the two years from April 1996, they will be required to set aside only 25 per cent. of proceeds from the sale of surplus assets for debt redemption, as opposed to 50 per cent. as at present. That will mean that more money still will be available for new capital projects. As a result, we estimate that, since 1990, more than £5 billion has been spent on county, voluntary-aided and grant-maintained school buildings.

The hon. Gentleman quoted some historic figures on capital spending. I say "historic" because he had to go back 20 years to find figures that came remotely near to meeting his case. Of course capital spending was higher in 1974. At that time, pupil numbers were much greater and were rising so rapidly that new buildings were needed to accommodate them. A closer look would reveal that history tells a rather different story about what happened next.

Between 1974 and 1979, capital spending on schools fell to less than half the present figure in real terms—and we all remember who were sitting on this side of the Chamber between 1974 and 1979. By contrast, since the Conservatives came to office in 1979, capital spending on schools has increased by some 15 per cent. over and above inflation.

The hon. Gentleman quoted from the annual report of Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools. I scarcely need to add, "selectively". It is perfectly true that the report notes that a minority of secondary schools and a rather smaller minority of primary schools suffer from "some shortfall in accommodation", but it notes also the efforts that have been made—they will continue to be made—to deal with the more serious problems. As the chief inspector states,

"common sense would suggest, that effective teaching depends on more than the physical context in which the teacher works".

It is, yet again, the same message—making the best possible use of the available resources is what counts.

[Mrs. Cheryl Gillan]

In the further education sector, capital funding has risen from £151.8 million in 1993-94 to £159 million in 1995-96. Capital spending, moreover, has shot up since incorporation. Many further education colleges, using their own initiative, have taken advantage of their new independence to raise private finance. To date, FE institutions have raised more than £100 million.

Higher education has, quite rightly, been one of the fastest-growing programmes in recent years. Universities have invested significant sums in their capital assets. The present aggregate level of borrowing amounts to more than £1.5 billion.

The hon. Member for Bath expressed some anxiety about outside lavatories in some of our oldest school buildings. I remind him of something that I am sure he already knows—that it is for local authorities and school governors to set their priorities for capital work on the school buildings for which they are responsible. I do not decide which work proceeds and which does not in local authority schools—LEAs and governors do. The hon. Gentleman should not ask me or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment about why some work has been done while other work has not. If the hon. Gentleman wants to know why there are still schools where children have no choice but to use outside toilets, he should speak to his friends in local education authorities. They should be able to give him an answer.

In the case of county or controlled schools, it is up to the LEA that maintains them to decide how high a priority to give such work. If the schools are voluntary aided, such work would be classed as minor, to be paid for from the formula allocation administered by the local education authority. I see that that comes as a great surprise to the Liberal Democrat education spokesman. Minor works and improvement/replacement formulae, and other funding sources—including receipts—have been available to LEAs for some years and it has been open to them to use those sources to meet their priorities. The hon. Member for Bath should ask his friends in local authorities what scope they have for efficiency savings. The hon. Gentleman should ask also what efforts have been made to address the efficiency savings identified by the Audit Commission.

The Government want to encourage a more imaginative approach to capital funding in schools. That is one reason for my announcement in December that we shall set up the schools renewal challenge fund; we want to encourage better and more prudent use of capital assets. The fund, which will operate for the financial year 1996-97, will assign resources on a competitive basis for the renewal, repair, replacement or improvement of school capital stock. Account will be taken of the urgency of the project, which should provide value for money while levering in an additional element of resources from non-Government sources, particularly through the private finance initiative—which the hon. Gentleman chose to rubbish, without having a great depth of knowledge of the initiative's extent and of its potential for our schools.

Once again, the hon. Member was scaremongering. I want to put this on the record, in plain language that the hon. Gentleman will understand: health and safety is the responsibility of LEAs and governors. Will the hon. Gentleman please understand that our revised premises regulations will maintain each and every standard that bears on the health and safety of our children?

The picture is far from the study in grey that the hon. Member painted. I believe that the hon. Gentleman, behind the rhetoric, knows what we know—that the Government have an excellent record on education spending. He might laugh, but our record contrasts with the policy that the Liberal Democrats promise. To what does that promise amount? We know now. I refer to the education section of a widely circulated document that has the words, "very limited circulation" on the front. It is spelt out as a point of weakness. Liberal Democrats

"just want to throw money at education."

I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman's speech confirmed that that document is alive and kicking, and is living in the Liberal Democrat policy unit.

It being two minutes to Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Maastricht Treaty (Convergence Criteria)

1. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent talks he has had with his EU counterparts on the convergence criteria under the Maastricht treaty. [12343]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): I have regular contacts with my counterparts from other member states, during which we discuss a wide range of European Union issues, including economic and monetary union.

Mr. Griffiths: Does the Secretary of State have regular contact with the Home Secretary, who wrote the foreword to a pamphlet from the Centre for Policy Studies which was published on Monday and which opposes monetary union? Does the Secretary of State agree that economic convergence will cause heavy unemployment and heavy new taxes?

Mr. Rifkind: I have not yet had the pleasure of reading the pamphlet, but I have no doubt that the Home Secretary's comments will be very much in line with the Government's view on that important issue. The whole question of convergence depends on whether there is a real and sustainable convergence of the countries involved. Clearly, such an important issue ought to be determined on the basis of confidence that such a policy would succeed with the objectives that have been laid down.

Mr. Renton: Following that reply, does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the convergence criteria were drafted by central bankers, but their implementation will depend on politicians who are elected by ordinary citizens? In that context, has he noticed in any recent discussions that his French, German or Italian counterparts think that the criteria should be revised?

Mr. Rifkind: Different views have been offered by different people, but I have noted that the German Government in particular have made it clear that they attach supreme importance to the convergence criteria being satisfied. They have said that they have no intention of seeing any weakening in the convergence criteria, and I think that that is a responsible approach.

Mr. Shore: Are not those convergence criteria just an arbitrary package of deflationary measures designed to achieve an unwanted, federalist objective of a single currency? Is it not time that the Government made plain to our partners in the European Community that we have no intention whatever of burying the pound sterling in a Euro-currency, either in 1999 or on any other occasion?

Mr. Rifkind: The existence of the convergence criteria is a recognition that it is crucially important that the question of a single currency should be determined on sound economic considerations, and not as a result of any political doctrine.

Mr. Budgen: Will my right hon. and learned Friend explain whether it is his understanding that the third criterion—that we should have been in the exchange rate mechanism for two years before we can move any further towards a single currency—still applies?

Mr. Rifkind: I have heard the view widely expressed that the changes in the exchange rate mechanism since that condition was laid down, and the fact that there is now a wide band between the various members of the ERM, mean that much less value can be attached to that condition than was the case in the past.

Middle East Peace Process

2. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the prospects for peace in the middle east following the Palestinian elections. [12344]

6. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the middle east peace process. [12348]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): The elections which were held on 20 January were a very welcome development. We look forward to the final status talks between Israel and the Palestinians, which are due to begin in May; and hope for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the middle east.

Mr. Burden: I join the Minister in welcoming the January elections. Will he join me in congratulating President Arafat on his victory, and in looking forward to the final status negotiations? Will he also join me in urging all parties to show flexibility on all the issues that must be the subject of the negotiations, including the question of Jerusalem?

Mr. Hanley: I am happy to agree with the hon. Gentleman. I pay tribute to those who carried out the recent elections. The very high turnout rebuffed those who rejected both the elections and the peace process. There was a clear and strong desire for democracy among the Palestinian people. While paying tribute to them and to President Arafat's role in the elections, I pay tribute also to Members of all parties in this House and another place who, with great dedication, helped to monitor the elections and reported back to me yesterday on their success.

Mr. Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if the Palestine Liberation Organisation failed to deliver the promises that it made in respect of the Palestinian national covenant, that would rightly be perceived as a breach of faith that could destabilise the peace process?

Mr. Hanley: I certainly recognise the difficulties that the Palestinians will face in trying to achieve those commitments, but Chairman Arafat has said that he strongly believes that there is a need to amend the

covenant. My right hon. and learned Friend and I know full well from our recent direct discussions with the Israeli Prime Minister that altering the covenant would probably represent the highest confidence-boosting measure that could be achieved.

Last week, Prime Minister Peres said that he would do all that he could to enable the Palestine National Council to meet. That will probably involve great security risks, and courage will have to be shown by the people of Israel to achieve what I think will be one of the greatest steps towards engendering more confidence in the peace process.

Mr. Janner: The Minister met Prime Minister Shimon Peres last week. Will he now express the view—I am sure that it is shared by us all—that Mr. Peres is a man of great wisdom, courage and persistence who is to be congratulated on all that he has done? Did the Prime Minister tell him that it is his view, as well as that of all parties in Israel, that there can be no question of Jerusalem being anything other than the capital of the state of Israel? In those circumstances, why have the Government decided, apparently to save money, to close the British Council library in Jerusalem? That appears to me a stupid act, particularly at this time.

Mr. Hanley: I whole-heartedly agree with the hon. and learned Gentleman's first point, about the courage and wisdom of Prime Minister Peres. I was most impressed on meeting him—his sincerity shines through.

Our position on Jerusalem has not changed: it is a matter to be determined in the final status talks. It is in the interests of all parties that neither side should do anything to pre-empt their outcome; there the hon. and learned Gentleman and I may part company.

Mr. Batiste: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the peace process should now be bolstered by encouraging economical development in the region? In that context, will he build on the success that the British Government have had in encouraging trade agreements between the European Union and Israel, by taking action to ensure that the Arab trade boycott of Israel withers on the vine as fast as can possibly be managed?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend has it right. The boycott is withering on the vine; I hope that it will be lifted completely. After all, Britain is Israel's third biggest trading partner. I am assured by the Israeli Trade Minister that British business men are no longer put off trading with Israel by the Arab boycott. The guidance given by the Department of Trade and Industry accurately reflects the facts, and we are actively encouraging business men to ignore the boycott.

Mr. Fatchett: May I associate the Labour party with all the comments that have been made about the nature of the Palestinian elections, and the competence and honesty with which they were conducted? We look forward to the continuing development of the peace process through the final-status discussions.

I am sure that the Minister agrees that the key to a comprehensive peace agreement in the middle east is an Israeli-Syrian peace accord. What steps are the Government taking—either individually, or collectively with other European Union countries—to ensure that the peace negotiations continue and there is a prospect of real peace between the two countries in the next few months?

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman is right: unless the Syrian track starts again, there can be no lasting peace in the middle east. I was very pleased when, despite the tragedy of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary took the opportunity to visit Damascus immediately after the funeral, and to encourage the restarting of the Syrian track. It seems that progress is now being made. We welcome the resumption of talks, and will encourage our European Union partners to provide economic underpinning for the peace process.

White Paper on Europe

3. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs from which organisations he will invite representations in advance of the publication of Her Majesty's Government's White Paper on Europe. [12345]

Mr. Rifkind: We welcome representations on the inter governmental conference from any organisation with an interest in it.

Mr. Sheerman: Will the Foreign Secretary listen to more views than those of the Euro-sceptic right wing? Does he realise that many hon. Members on both sides of the House are broadly pro-Europe, although we see many faults that must be rectified and many improvements that must be made to the European Union? We are all sick of the increasingly vulgar and dangerous nationalism that emanates from members of the Foreign Secretary's party, both inside and outside Government.

Mr. Rifkind: That would have been more convincing if it had not come from a member of a party that fought several general elections on the basis that it was trying to take us out of the European Union.

Mr. David Howell: The proposal to publish a White Paper is welcome and robust. I fully understand that my right hon. and learned Friend will not wish to give details about the negotiating position, but may I ask him not to hesitate in setting out a strong anti-centralist, anti-collectivist approach to the European Union in the IGC? In particular, will he focus critically and practically—I am sure that he will—on such nebulous concepts as a common foreign and security policy for Europe, and other ideas that those who are less critical of Brussels are all too ready to accept?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree that, on matters such as a common foreign and security policy, it is crucial for Europe—if it wishes to speak in the name of Europe—to do so because of a genuine identity of view, rather than, through artificial means, seeking to impose a consensus against the vital interests of individual member states. If there is genuine agreement on important issues, we can advance British interests by allowing the European Union to speak for the proposals involved; but, when British interests—or the interests of other countries—are at

variance with those of the majority, that must be respected if the European Union is to be true to its basic democratic values.

Mr. Robin Cook: Will the Foreign Secretary consider inviting representations for the White Paper from GKN, which has just implemented the social chapter for its British work force by setting up a works council? Is he aware that its current newsletter describes that as a positive approach? If the Government cannot carry with them even such a generous supporter of Tory funds as GKN, why do they not drop their lonely opposition to the social chapter? *Will they never recognise that it is* impossible to build up competitiveness by keeping the work force in the dark, and that British citizens are entitled to the same right to know about the future of their companies as citizens of the continent?

Mr. Rifkind: There is an important difference between my position and that of the hon. Gentleman. In my view, the question is not whether it is desirable for GKN to introduce a works council; the question is whether that decision should be made by employers and employees in the company, or imposed by the Government or the European Union. The hon. Gentleman represents a party that wishes to ignore the views of employers and employees in British companies, and seeks to impose a rigid structure throughout Europe, regardless of the damage that that would do to British jobs and prosperity. He cannot escape responsibility for that view.

Mr. Forman: As well as welcoming representations on those important matters, is my right hon. and learned Friend prepared to look again at the need for fuller public information on such questions? These are complicated issues and many of us on the Conservative Benches feel that there is a need for the British Government to take more of a lead in that respect.

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, and that is one reason why we were happy to respond to the views of three Select Committees, both of this House and of another place, and have agreed to publish a White Paper setting out the Government's approach to the intergovernmental conference, which I believe will respond to the reasonable point raised by my hon. Friend.

Special Export Licensing Procedures

4. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria his Department has for recommending countries for inclusion on the list of countries for which special export licensing procedures are required; and what plans his Department has to review these criteria. [12346]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): The list is drawn up in accordance with foreign policy objectives, international understandings or embargoes to which we are party, the non-proliferation credentials of the country concerned and the effectiveness of its export controls. A revised list was published on 19 July 1995 and is printed in the *Official Report*. The list is kept under constant review.

Mr. Cousins: I have the list of countries with me. It is necessary to stop countries being used as a staging post to pass on the means of war to unacceptable regimes. Therefore, can the Minister explain why Israel, which we have just been discussing, is included on the list, but well-known and well-established staging posts such as Jordan, Singapore, Portugal and Cyprus are not? Is it that the Foreign Office is still happy to be the kind of mouse that knows that there is a black market in weapons and is not willing to do enough to stop it?

Mr. Davis: The answer is straightforward. I suspect that I shall disappoint the hon. Gentleman. The list covers countries which are of concern across the full range of dual-use goods or are subject to specific embargoes. Other countries may be of concern in a limited fashion and they are dealt with in a specific way related to that limited fashion. If there are particular countries that the hon. Gentleman thinks should be on the list, he should write to me about it.

European Institutions (Accountability)

5. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the accountability of European Community institutions to national Parliaments; and if he will make a statement. [12347]

Mr. David Davis: Within the Council of Ministers, which is the primary decision-making institution in the European Union, national Ministers are accountable to their respective national Parliaments.

Mr. Whittingdale: Does my hon. Friend accept that the existing accountability of European institutions is inadequate and does he agree that that problem is best addressed by enhancing the scrutiny role of national Parliaments rather than by giving any more powers to the European Parliament?

Mr. Davis: I have a great deal of sympathy with my hon. Friend. We must look as a priority at means of improving the democratic accountability of the European Community. The primary focus of democratic legitimacy in the Union is national Parliaments, not the European Parliament. Let me quote the German Federal constitutional court on that point, because it was pretty informative. It said:

> "The European Union...is a union of democratic states. Where it assumes sovereign tasks...it is first and foremost for the national peoples of the Member States democratically to legitimise this via their national parliaments."

We are actively considering options for enhancing the role of national Parliaments.

Mr. Spearing: The Minister mentioned the importance of national Parliaments and Ministers, but does he agree that accountability of Ministers to the House was not strengthened when, against the unanimous view of the Select Committee on European Legislation, the Government supported automatic referral of any EC document to a Committee Upstairs? Does he further agree that that would not have been so bad but for the fact that several requests from that Select Committee for debates on the Floor of the House have been declined by Her Majesty's Government? Would it not be more in keeping with the protocol to the treaty, which the Government

have supported and signed, if the Government were to pay more attention to the views of the Select Committee, which comprises hon. Members of all views, and if their actions became more consistent with their words?

Mr. Davis: As someone who has appeared before the Select Committee, I think that, from time to time, its scrutiny is pretty ferocious. With regard to paying attention to the Select Committee's views, the hon. Gentleman will remember that I and the Government generally have supported, for example, its recommendation that we incorporate declaration 13 into the treaty, or make it legally binding. That will add enormously to the scrutiny capacity of the House.

Mr. Garnier: Does my hon. Friend accept that the institutions of the European Union would receive greater sympathy, not only in the House but in the country more widely, if they did less but did it better?

Mr. Davis: My hon. and learned Friend quotes almost exactly the motto of the current President of the Commission, Mr. Santer, and we agree with him entirely. The Union does much better, in the eyes of the people of Europe, when it does not meddle in the nooks and crannies of the nation states; when it pays proper respect to the sovereignty of those nation states; and when it carries out legislation to a better quality than has been the case.

Kashmir

7. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps he has taken to help the Governments of Pakistan and India resolve the conflict in Kashmir. [12349]

Mr. Hanley: We have consistently encouraged both sides to resolve their differences over Kashmir through bilateral negotiation. It is not for us to prescribe a solution, but we are ready to help if both sides ask us.

Mr. Prentice: I thank the Minister for that reply, but can he shed any light on the missile attack on Kahuta, a border town in Azad Kashmir, which took place at the end of January, where the missile landed on a mosque, killing 18 people? Will the Minister also comment on attacks on leaders of the Hurriyet conference? Surely he agrees that it will be impossible to move forward to a peaceful resolution of the continuing conflict in Kashmir unless the perpetrators of those outrages are identified and brought to book.

Mr. Hanley: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's horror at the incident concerned. We regret very much the loss of life and continue to urge restraint on both sides. We would expect the United Nations military observer group in India and Pakistan to report to the Secretary-General in the normal manner on the exact circumstances. It may help the House if I repeat briefly what we believe the best way forward on Kashmir should involve. There should be simultaneous progress on dialogue between India and Pakistan, as provided for under the 1972 Simla agreement; an improvement in human rights in Kashmir and a genuine political process there; and a clear cessation of external support for violence in Kashmir.

Mr. Colvin: Bearing in mind what my right hon. Friend said about the Simla agreement and his earlier remarks about Britain's willingness to help, if both parties—India and Kashmir—requested it, would Britain be prepared to chair and mediate such talks under the Simla agreement umbrella? As Pakistan is once more a member of the British Commonwealth, does he feel that the Commonwealth has a role to play in trying to find a solution to this on-going problem?

Mr. Hanley: I know that our wish for a solution to the dispute is shared by all members of the Commonwealth. As I said before, it is not for us to say what the solution should be, but we are—I confirm this to my hon. Friend—ready to consider any help that is asked for, as long as both sides do the demanding.

Mr. Watson: The Minister betrayed, in his response to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), the narrowness of the Government's approach when he talked of "both sides". He then said, in answer to the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), that it was not for his Government to decide what the outcome might be. Does he accept that there is not simply a choice between the Governments of Pakistan and of India, and that approximately 12 million Kashmiri people may decide that independence is the appropriate road? Will he ensure, when he discusses with the Governments of India and of Pakistan, that independence is included in the discussions, and that, should there be a referendum, independence is one of the options?

Mr. Hanley: Of course we recognise that finding a solution will not be easy, but we shall continue to urge both countries to try to resolve their differences through peaceful negotiation. I add that, unless both countries agree with any solution, there will be no peace.

Mr. John Carlisle: Apart from advice on how to win their matches, has my right hon. Friend offered any advice to the England cricket XI who are now in India for the world cup competition on their security, bearing in mind the fact that the Australian and West Indian sides have already said that they are not prepared to play in Sri Lanka? Is he worried about the situation, or are they safe?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend's love of cricket is the highest in the land. We are not aware of any specific threats to England's cricketers or supporters, but our high commission in Islamabad and our deputy high commission in Karachi are in close contact with the England team and the world cup organisers. In cricket terms, I think that the threat is to the Pakistani cricketers.

Iraq (Sanctions)

8. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his latest assessment of the consequences of UN sanctions on Iraq. [12350]

Mr. Hanley: UN sanctions are designed to ensure that Iraq fulfils the Gulf war ceasefire terms. The strategy appears to be working. Iraq has recognised Kuwait and the UN-demarcated border and agreed to participate in discussions with the UN, which we hope will result in

Iraqi acceptance of UN Security Council resolution 986. That would greatly help to alleviate the suffering of the Iraqi people.

Mr. Dalyell: On sanctions, how is it right that Ministers criticised by Sir Richard Scott should have seven days' notice, and that civil servants apparently criticised by Sir Richard Scott should have no days' notice? Sauce for the goose should be sauce for the gander.

Mr. Hanley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for showing his normal courtesy in giving notice of his supplementary question. Unfortunately, that was not it. I therefore suggest that he waits for the statement next week and that, if he has any further questions, he waits for his Adjournment debate tonight.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of the unsatisfactory nature of that reply, I shall raise the matter on the Adjournment this evening at 10.15 pm.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as long as Saddam Hussein and his military junta are in control in Iraq, the middle east peace will always be fragile, and that that is why we must continue to take whatever action is deemed necessary to contain that instability?

Madam Speaker: I am sorry; it was remiss of me. The notice given by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) brings this question to an end. I therefore cannot ask the Minister to respond.

Bosnia

9. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his United States and European counterparts over the discovery of mass graves of victims of mass murder in Bosnia. [12351]

Mr. Rifkind: I am in regular contact with my United States and European counterparts about implementation of the peace agreement, which obliges the parties to co-operate fully with the international war crimes tribunal, including by giving it unrestricted access to all sites and persons. We strongly support its work.

Mr. Winnick: Is it not clear that some of the mass graves so far discovered in Bosnia are only one sign of the appalling crimes and atrocities carried out, in the main, on the instructions of the Serbian warlords and, in particular, following the capture of Srebrenica last July? Is the Foreign Secretary aware that the international community and IFOR have an obligation to ensure that all the people held responsible for war crimes in former Yugoslavia—yes, including the parts not controlled by the Serbs, although most people would agree that the bulk of the crimes and atrocities were carried out on the Serbian side—are brought before the international war crimes tribunal? What efforts will be made to ensure that that happens?

Mr. Rifkind: So far, 45 Serbs and seven Croats have been indicted as alleged war criminals. IFOR has clear instructions to detain any individuals indicted by the tribunal should they be encountered during operations and, if they are apprehended, to transfer them to the tribunal.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it would be a grotesque paradox if octogenarians were prosecuted for war crimes in this country and the people responsible for the appalling atrocity just mentioned were not?

Mr. Rifkind: I do not find it necessary to make a comparison. I would simply say that the people who have been indicted as war criminals should, if it is physically possible, be brought to trial on the charges that they face.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Does the Foreign Secretary recognise that public support for NATO forces' presence in former Yugoslavia is largely based on the natural revulsion of this country's people at ethnic cleansing? If that support is to be maintained, should not NATO be giving the utmost active support to the people investigating war crimes, including securing evidence and taking steps to apprehend war criminals?

Mr. Rifkind: NATO is indeed giving active co-operation. IFOR will conduct aerial reconnaissance over the region as well as foot patrols. It will seek to assist the war crimes tribunal with regard to any evidence of, for example, war graves that might be linked to prosecutions that are being brought by the tribunal.

Lady Olga Maitland: What consultations has my right hon. and learned Friend had with NATO representatives regarding the protection of the mass graves as they come to light? Is he aware that unless the graves are protected, evidence may be covered up, and the perpetrators of those atrocities may never be brought to justice?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree with my hon. Friend. Although on occasions it will be difficult, every effort needs to be made by those in Bosnia-Herzegovina to ensure that any graves discovered are kept in a condition that will enable them to be properly investigated, so that any further evidence of war crimes can be properly established.

Mr. Robin Cook: The Foreign Secretary will be aware that the Red Cross has today confirmed that more than 3,000 people were killed following the fall of Srebrenica. I am sure that he will agree that such appalling atrocities underline the fact that there can be no prospect of reconciliation in Bosnia until those responsible for such slaughter are brought to justice. Will he therefore consider whether there could be a more proactive role for IFOR in apprehending suspected war criminals? In particular, does he agree that it would be unsatisfactory if only the lower ranks of the Bosnian Serb army were charged, while the high command such as General Mladic escaped arrest?

Mr. Rifkind: I have no reason to believe that any such distinction is made by the war crimes tribunal. As the subject of co-operation by IFOR has been raised, I should mention the fact that Judge Goldstone, who is in charge of the war crimes tribunal, has said that he is satisfied with IFOR's response to his request for co-operation. Clearly if he were not satisfied and had specific proposals, we would

be very sensitive to any request of his. But he is satisfied that he is receiving all the co-operation that he requires from IFOR at present.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend will have noted that, judging by the comments from both sides, the House believes that war criminals should be prosecuted. Does he agree that international law has been so abused and flouted in this case that we must send a clear message that in any future conflict such behaviour will not be tolerated by the world community, that action will be taken, and that war crimes will not simply be brushed under the carpet in the interests of bringing people back to peace?

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, it is salutary to realise that although we all appreciate the horrors of war, sometimes in war actions are performed which go even beyond the normal atrocities that are expected in wartime. Where that happens, and where there is evidence pointing to the guilt of certain persons, it is right and proper that the international community should have a structure for apprehending such persons and bringing them to justice.

UN Peacekeeping Operations

10. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the financing of United Nations peacekeeping operations. [12352]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Nicholas Bonsor): United Nations peacekeeping operations are financed by contributions from all UN member states, levied according to a scale of assessments. We attach importance to prompt and full payment of assessed contributions by all member states.

Mr. O'Hara: Does the Minister think that the United Nations has a peacekeeping role to play in the sovereignty dispute between Greece and Turkey over the island of Imia, in the Aegean sea? Or does he accept, as has the Government of France this week, that sovereignty over the group of islands was clearly determined by the agreement between Italy and Turkey in 1932, and by the Paris peace agreement of 1947, whereby sovereignty was transferred to Greece? Does he agree that it is neither lawful nor helpful for any one state unilaterally to abrogate such agreements and that, in the words of the time-honoured diplomatic dictum, pacta sunt servanda?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his supplementary question, and even more grateful that he stuck to it. I am especially grateful because I must confess that I had to get help in translating the Latin tag, which apparently means that treaties should be honoured. I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman in that sentiment. However, in the dispute between Greece and Turkey over the small and uninhabitable island of Imia, the question of sovereignty has not been resolved. It is for the parties to the dispute to resolve it peacefully between themselves. I am deeply concerned by the actions that have been taken so far, and I believe that today there is a threat of more military action. It is very important, not least to NATO, to which both those countries belong, that the problem be solved peacefully. In due course the United Nations may have to play a part, but at the moment I hope that the two parties can sort things out themselves.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Does my hon. Friend agree that one way to reduce Britain's £27 million a year contribution to the peacekeeping force in Cyprus, which would also, more importantly, work towards reunifying the island, is to adopt a demilitarisation proposal? Is he aware that such a proposal has recently received the support of the United States Senate? Does he agree that that would go a long way to solving some of the problems between the two communities?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: It is extremely important that a solution for Cyprus is found. I am not sure whether demilitarisation will prove to be the panacea for something that has taken us so long to try to resolve, but it is certainly worthy of our close consideration.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Will the Minister confirm that, even as this House is sitting, the United Nations is in a state of financial crisis, the peacekeeping budget is being raided to fund the UN's general operations and the entire organisation is virtually on the point of collapse? What pressure will the Government bring to bear on Governments such as the United States whose outstanding UN bill is enormous? Will the Government specifically support Boutros Boutros-Ghali's call for an extraordinary emergency meeting of the General Assembly to discuss the reform of UN finances?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that the state of the United Nations finances is disastrous and must be sorted out. At the moment, the UN is owed about £1.7 billion of its peacekeeping budget, of which £816 million is owed by the United States of America. A further £580 million or so of the UN's general budget is owed. That is an intolerable burden and must be sorted out. Under the European Union, Great Britain and France have put forward four proposals to try to solve the problems. They are: first, to tighten penalties on non-payers; secondly, to accelerate repayment of arrears; thirdly, to reform the scales of assessment; and, fourthly, to tighten control of UN expenditure. If the EU initiative succeeds, it will not be necessary to hold an extraordinary general meeting. Unless some action is taken in the next few months, the United Nations will face a financial crisis, which could threaten its future.

Dr. Twinn: Does my hon. Friend accept that the dispute in the Aegean is not only about a single uninhabited island but is a wide-ranging dispute, which if allowed to get out of hand would have grave consequences for peace in the region? Does he further agree that Turkey has given no good reason for abrogating its international agreements, which have held for more than half a century, and that it should return to honouring what it has honoured in practice for 50 years?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend that the dispute in the Aegean threatens world peace. The prospect of two NATO nations on the eastern flank of NATO coming so close to major conflict must cause us all grave concern. I do not share my hon. Friend's view of the merits of the case. It is far from

clear whether Turkey or Greece is responsible. Indeed, we should be concentrating not on that, but on the need to find a peaceful solution to the settlement. We should get involved not in the merits of one side's action or the other's, but urge them to negotiate a peaceful solution and not fight each other over that ridiculously small island.

United Nations (Reform)

11. **Ms Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's proposals for reform of the United Nations. [12353]

Mr. Rifkind: Britain has been at the forefront of recent efforts to reform the United Nations, producing initiatives on restructuring and improvement in many areas and on tackling the organisation's serious financial crisis.

Ms Corston: What are the Government doing to improve and extend the capacity for preventative diplomacy in the United Nations? Does the Foreign Secretary agree that swift action must be taken immediately to prevent the escalation of killings in Burundi and ensure that those responsible for violence and massacre are brought to account?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree with the hon. Lady that preventive diplomacy must become a more frequent aspect of the UN's activities. With regard to Burundi, the United Kingdom is at present chairing the Security Council and we have invited the Secretary-General to develop further his ideas for anticipating problems that might arise, so that any steps that could responsibly be taken at this stage to minimise the risk of collapse within that country can be taken now, rather than allowing the UN simply to react to events as they occur.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that Britain's initiative a few years ago in calling a special meeting of the Security Council to examine the reform of the UN was one of the best things that had happened for some time in the area? Is he also aware that the planning of peacekeeping operations is remarkably amateurish and inefficient? What new proposals is Britain putting forward on that front? Does my right hon. and learned Friend support the Canadian proposal for a small standby force to be available to the Secretary-General?

Mr. Rifkind: The United Kingdom has been at the forefront in making practical suggestions for improving the UN's ability to deal with the huge increase in peacekeeping activities that has occurred since the end of the cold war. I am not persuaded by the Canadian proposal, or by proposals from other quarters, for a permanent standing force, because one never knows in advance what particular military skills are appropriate to an emergency. In Angola and Rwanda, for example, the logistical, engineering and military capabilities of the United Kingdom were required, while an infantry or combat role may be required in other areas. It is better for countries to advise the Secretary-General of the kind of help that they are prepared to give and then to respond quickly if the Secretary-General requires their assistance.

Russian Federation

12. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Russian Foreign Minister to discuss security problems within the Russian Federation. [12354]

Mr. Rifkind: I last met the Russian Foreign Minister at the peace implementation conference in London on 8 and 9 December.

Mr. Jones: Would the Secretary of State care to define what constitutes the legitimate use of force in order to retain the integrity of the Russian empire? Does the indiscriminate bombing of cities and villages form a part of that legitimate use of force?

Mr. Rifkind: The United Kingdom certainly does not support that use of force, and we hope that the Russian Government will seek to resolve their internal problems by a peaceful dialogue and that those concerned with political reform will bring the conflict to an end. That would be far more likely to achieve a lasting solution than a purely military approach.

International Economy

13. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's responsibilities for improving Britain's position in the international economy. [12355]

Mr. Hanley: It is a key Foreign and Commonwealth Office long-term objective to promote and protect British economic interests overseas.

Mr. Michie: Does the Minister agree that the proposed Helms-Burton legislation in the United States Congress is totally unacceptable? Will it not have an adverse effect on the British economy on a world scale? Will it not also be an unjustifiable attack on free trade if British companies which want to trade with Cuba are penalised? If the boot were on the other foot, the United States would never tolerate such interference. What are the Government doing about it?

Mr. Hanley: The Government encourage free trade, but there are certain circumstances in which it is right that it should be restricted to encourage reform. The hon. Gentleman's comments will, I am sure, be heard by the Americans.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important that we strengthen our business ties not only with EU countries, but with Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States? Does he agree that that is important because we have not only a common language, but common business practices and a common English legal heritage?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Of course we concentrate on our key markets, but not exclusively so. Commercial work by the FCO now involves some 35 per cent. of all our front-line overseas staff. There are 218 commercial posts in 140 markets, and

14 new commercial posts were opened last year, with an extra 100 staff slots for commercial work overseas. I might add that the United Kingdom is succeeding so well that it now attracts 40 per cent. of all inward investment from the United States and Japan. We must be doing something very right.

Ms Quin: Has not the Foreign Office dismally failed to protect the most useful parts of its budget in the recent budgetary settlement? The valuable work in boosting Britain abroad is being undermined by savage cuts in the British Council and the BBC World Service and we have even seen the withdrawal of funding from the Council of Europe's Youth Foundation. Was the failure of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to protect all that valuable work the result of right-wing dogma or simply incompetence?

Mr. Hanley: No Government are exempt from their duty to make sure that the national economy of the United Kingdom is improving and ever improving.

Middle East Peace Process

14. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Prime Minister of Israel to discuss the middle east peace process; and if he will make a statement. [12356]

Mr. Rifkind: I met Shimon Peres on 1 February. We discussed the excellent state of our relations with Israel, the welcome continuation of progress towards peace in the middle east, the on-going talks between Israel and Syria and the implementation of the interim agreement.

Mr. Luff: When my right hon. and learned Friend met the Prime Minister, did he discuss with him the excellent state of relations between Israel and Jordan? Does he agree that Syria needs to learn from the experience of Israel that peace is about more than merely the absence of war?

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, I think that is, indeed, the case. Part of the negotiations that are taking place between Israel and Syria are about what the future relations, including economic relations, between Syria and Israel might be in the event of a comprehensive peace in the region. That would offer great prospects for developing the economies of both countries.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Is not one of the most encouraging prospects that of using in other parts of the middle east Israeli expertise in matters such as greening the desert? Will the Foreign Secretary do all that he can to ensure that doors are opened for the interchange of such expertise across the region?

Mr. Rifkind: I believe that that objective is already fully understood and agreed between Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians. That is one of the most encouraging developments of recent times. Clearly, if the same principles could apply to the other countries in the region with regard to their relationship with Israel, the economic prospects for the region as a whole would be substantially enhanced.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The Minister will be aware that some of us heard a memorable address by Mr. Peres in the Palace last week, in which he was positive about the developments? He reaffirmed that Jerusalem was an open city for all faiths, but he also reaffirmed that Jerusalem was the capital of Israel. Will the Foreign Secretary respond to the earlier question asked by the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner)? Why has the British Council closed its facility in Jerusalem?

Mr. Rifkind: The future of the library in Jerusalem is an internal matter for the British Council. It is not a ministerial decision, nor should it have been. The Government's policy on Jerusalem is that we are entering a sensitive phase with regard to the negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The British Government, along with many other western Governments, are not considering any change of their policy with regard to Jerusalem because we believe that changes in whatever direction would be unhelpful when these most difficult negotiations are about to begin.

Entry Clearance Procedures

15. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to improve the entry clearance procedures for the issue by United Kingdom embassies abroad of visas to foreign visitors. [12357]

Mr. Hanley: Our entry clearance operations overseas are constantly under review to ensure that a high standard of service at all posts is maintained and to make improvements whenever and wherever possible.

Mr. Rendel: The embassy in Moscow asks visa applicants to stay in the street or courtyard outside sometimes for up to a week in sub-zero temperatures. Does the Minister agree that that compares unfavourably with some of our European neighbours, who run an appointment system, which seems a much more civilised way of running a visa application system?

Mr. Hanley: I am aware of the problems at our embassy in Moscow. The week before Christmas I went to Moscow specifically to see the visa operation and authorise alterations which are currently taking place to accommodate people who previously had to wait in the open air. I hope that they will now be under cover. A new visa section, possibly five years down the line, will provide much better accommodation for them.

The main problem in Moscow is the extremely high demand. It has increased by some 300 per cent. in the past three years alone. I understand what the hon. Gentleman says. The conditions in all our embassies should be acceptable to our customers. We believe that they deserve the very best service and that we are achieving that.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend accept that while everyone understands the difficult nature of the work of the immigration authorities he should take note of the difficulties that some people in many parts of the world who may travel hundreds, or even thousands, of miles to present their cases for visas only to fail to get past the door because they are told there that their case

does not stand up and it is no good even putting it to the authorities properly? Could some written procedure be established to overcome that sort of misery?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend is right that people often have to make long journeys to have interviews, but we accept written applications and give general guidance, which is not binding but merely tries to be helpful, so that people can decide whether they should take the sort of journey that he mentioned. To put into context the scale of the operation, in the last year for which we have figures, 1994, there were some 20.6 million visits to the United Kingdom. There were 1.32 million applications for visas. Just under 1 million short-term visas were granted. The refusal rate is small compared with the number of visitors who come to our shores. We must ensure that people do not spend time or money, or suffer inconvenience or severe trouble, in getting to a particular post. We must try to ensure that we reduce that problem. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his suggestion.

Mr. Gerrard: Surely the Minister will accept the point that has just been raised that it is not right for people to be told unofficially that their applications will be refused? Those people do not turn up in the refusal statistics. There is no mechanism for appeal now and the only way that such cases come to light is if those people have relatives in this country who contact hon. Members. People ought to have the right to apply and not to be put off by an official from so doing.

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman is saying that we should not give guidance to try to help people to reduce the cost and time that they might otherwise experience. He gave the impression that visas are issued only if people contact hon. Members. There were 6,000 contacts with Members of the House last year. We take all the evidence into account before deciding whether a person's visa application is accepted or rejected. It is not right to say that we should not give general guidance, which is a most helpful procedure and welcomed by the majority of people who ask for it.

Mr. Congdon: Does my right hon. Friend agree that many of my constituents suffer disappointment when visa applications for their relatives or parents to visit this country, when they come from Africa or Asia, are turned down? Does he agree that people who get visitor's visas to come to this country and overstay their welcome or disappear do a grave disservice to their fellow countrymen and women because they make the decision-making process that much more difficult for Foreign Office staff?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The entry clearance officers, who do a superb job in posts abroad, are trained to a level to which they have never been trained before. They take on their tasks often in difficult circumstances and uncomfortable surroundings very willingly and they try to be as honourable and accurate as they possibly can. Of course there will be certain people who are disappointed, but I can assure my hon. Friend that entry clearance officers use the very best judgment. The entry clearance manager checks all rejections and Dame Elizabeth Anson then considers a scientifically selected random number of rejections to make sure that they are properly carried out.

Middle East Peace Process

16. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received concerning the middle east peace process. [12358]

19. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the middle east peace process. [12361]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Lady to the answers that I and my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary gave earlier.

Mrs. Prentice: I appreciate the answers that the Foreign Secretary has given already, but does he agree that both Shimon Peres and Yasser Arafat deserve great praise for the continuation of the peace process? Does he share our concern about the shootings of Palestinian children by an Israeli settler at the weekend and will he do all that he can to urge both sides to do what they can to prevent any continuation of such violence?

Mr. Hanley: I thank the hon. Lady for joining in the tributes to Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres. They have been not only honourable but courageous. I would add into that group Yasser Arafat, whose courage is certainly there for all to see. Of course we condemn utterly the violence to which the hon. Lady referred. She is right to be concerned about any continuing violence. Of course it does not help the peace process and, in individual cases, it is a tragedy.

Mr. Ross: Does the Minister share Labour Members' concern about the progress of the Syrian-Israeli and the Lebanese-Israeli peace talks? Will he remind all the parties to those peace talks that the Madrid initiative was called on a land-for-peace basis, which was the platform on which the Israeli Government stood in the elections? In relation to land for peace, will he remind all parties that they should not seek to make any security, geographical or economical gains at the expense of other parties?

Mr. Hanley: I can do no better than refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary gave earlier about the Syrian track. Of course negotiations will have to take place, and compromises may well be necessary which are uncomfortable for one side or the other. However, I believe that good will on both sides can achieve a lasting peace in the middle east.

International War Crimes Tribunal

17. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of the work of the international war crimes tribunal for the former Republic of Yugoslavia. [12359]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has told the House, 45 Serbs and seven Croats have been indicted so far. The first trial

of the war crimes tribunal will take place against Dusko Tadic, a guard in the Omarska prisoner of war camp, and has been set for 18 March.

Dr. Godman: Will the Minister confirm that under the terms of the Dayton agreement, all parties will have to co-operate with the tribunal? What if the parties refuse to honour those obligations? Can the Minister say, for example, that sanctions will be imposed against states that give refuge to criminals who have been indicted for crimes in the former republic?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, all states have a duty to co-operate fully with the war crimes tribunal and to deliver to it the people whom it has indicted. I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman what sanctions, if any, the international community will impose should states refuse to do so; that would have to be extremely carefully considered. It is of great importance that the war crimes tribunal is properly supported by all countries.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: What are the prospects that the really big fish—Mladic and Karadzic—will be brought before the tribunal?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: It is extremely important that everybody concerned is prepared to honour the duty that each state must deliver to justice those indicted by the war crimes tribunal. Those gentlemen have been so indicted, and they must be delivered for trial.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Does the Minister agree that the Dayton peace conference seems to have failed to address properly the problem of war crimes in Bosnia? Does he agree that those who sponsored the peace conference specifically excluded the Bosnian Serb paramilitaries and their elected spokesmen? Will he confirm that Her Majesty's Government supported that exclusion? Will he also confirm that the exclusion was also agreed by European Union Foreign Ministers, who met in co-operation, and that one of the Ministers who supported the exclusion of the paramilitaries and their elected spokesmen was Mr. Richard Spring, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Ireland?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am not aware that anybody was excluded under the Dayton agreement who should have been indicted by the war crimes tribunal. If what the hon. Gentleman says is true, I think that the exclusion should be reviewed. However, I am not aware that that is the case. As I said to the House earlier, those who have committed war crimes and those who have been indicted by the tribunal must be brought to justice.

Sudan

18. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions Her Majesty's Government have taken in relation to reconvening the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development peace talks on Sudan. [12360]

Mr. Hanley: Britain has joined the friends of IGADD, who are working to support its peace initiative. The friends of IGADD—composed of the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, Italy and Norway—have offered various forms of support, including financial support.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister recognise that the two main factors that have failed to ensure that peace is achieved in Sudan are the overwhelming poverty in southern Sudan and the allegations of human rights atrocities by the northern Sudanese? Will we do everything to ensure that progress can be made on those two fronts so that we can see genuine peace and democracy in Sudan?

Mr. Hanley: I am aware of the facts to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. We continue to be deeply concerned about the appalling human rights record in Sudan and, with our partners in IGADD, we will continue to do whatever we can to help.

Sierra Leone

21. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effects on the civilian population of Sierra Leone of recent events; and if he will make a statement. [12363]

Mr. Hanley: We welcome the new head of state's assurance that he intends to maintain the election timetable. We remain convinced that a civilian democratic rule offers the best prospect of peace and prosperity, and we will continue to support the democratic transition and efforts to resolve the internal conflict which has caused so much suffering.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful for that answer, which I am sure will be appreciated both here and in Sierra Leone. More Sierra Leoneans live in Britain than anywhere else in Europe. Can the Minister make further inquiries of the Sudanese Government about whether they have stopped the appalling atrocities that are occurring, not in Freetown, which is relatively safe, but in rural parts of the country? According to recent information, mutilation, rape and killing is occurring in great severity on a daily basis, and has so far been unreported.

Mr. Hanley: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that thousands of civilians have been killed and that there is evidence of appalling atrocities being committed. Half a million people, between 10 and 20 per cent. of the population, have been displaced internally or are refugees in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Liberia. Military expenditure has increased while revenue from taxes, agriculture and mining has dried up. That is a terrible waste and, frankly, no way in which to repair what could be a beautiful country. In the interests of not only right hon. and hon. Members but of the Sierra Leoneans who happen to be in the United Kingdom, we must try to help the country to reach a solution.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance because one of the responsibilities of the House is to hold the Executive to account, but I believe that the House will soon be faced by a situation in which the rights of the official Opposition and of all Back Benchers may be diminished because of the way in which the Government are approaching a certain issue.

I am referring to the report of Lord Justice Scott—a report of more than 1,800 pages, which has taken three years to prepare. We have been told that that report will be published on 15 February. We now learn, however, that the Government have amassed a vast machinery to interpret the report in the way that Ministers wish, at public expense, of course.

The Ministers involved have received copies of the report and they have eight days to find ways of shifting the blame. I understand that the civil servants involved will have just six hours' sight of the report, despite the fact that it affects their careers. Moreover, Ministers have failed to respond to a request from Her Majesty's official Opposition for sight of a copy of the report on Privy Council terms. I ask you, Madam Speaker, what you can do to ensure that Members of the House, and in particular the official Opposition, are not deliberately disadvantaged by the procedures being adopted by the Government.

Madam Speaker: I have listened with great care to what the hon. Lady has said, which I am sure will have been heard, or at least should have been heard with interest and concern in all quarters of the House.

I understand that the Scott report will be presented to the House by the President of the Board of Trade. It is entirely for the President to decide what arrangements, if any, should be made to allow various interested parties to see embargoed copies of the report before it is published, and before any related statement is made in the House.

All I would say is that, in my experience, the questioning on any statement is much better focused when some steps have been taken to enable Opposition spokesmen and minority party spokesmen to have access some time in advance to the text of complicated reports, provided steps are taken to maintain confidentiality. In addition, I think it is helpful for such reports to be made available in the Vote Office for a short period before any statement is made, so that Members generally have a chance to read at least the summary of recommendations or conclusions. But as I have already indicated, this is a matter for the Minister and I have no power to intervene.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: No. There can be no further point of order. I have given a very clear ruling of my opinion on that issue, and we must now leave it at that. I will take no further points of order on that matter. I have dealt with it more than adequately and I have expressed my point of view on it.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: No.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): This is a genuinely completely different point of order—on the same subject, but a different point of order, Madam Speaker. It relates to the rights of citizens who are civil servants, who, according to all the reports that we have had this morning, find themselves in a fundamentally different position if they are named in the report—

Madam Speaker: I can answer that point of order right away. I have no responsibility for anybody outside this House. I understand what the position may be in relation to others, but I have no authority to intervene. I wish to safeguard the interests of the House and I shall do so, and have done so, to the best of my ability.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): On a different point of order, Madam Speaker. Will you confirm that, in matters such as this, it is essential that you as Speaker receive an advance copy of any documents, so that you can ensure that there is orderly procedure in the House? You will be aware that when in the past Ministers have misled the House, personal statements were arranged. Will you confirm that you will have seen a copy and you will be able to arrange for personal statements to be made at the earliest opportunity?

Madam Speaker: Order. I cannot confirm anything of the kind. I have not at this stage seen a copy.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On an unrelated point of order, Madam Speaker. Further to my point of order yesterday, would you tell us whether further inquiries have been carried out into the issuing of a pass to Mr. Barry Joseph?

Madam Speaker: Yes. I have carried out further inquiries. I repeat what I said yesterday—that the staff member in question has had a pass, to my knowledge, for some 10 years from the Member concerned. There is nothing untoward in him having a pass from a Member of this House, provided the relevant interests have been declared in the appropriate place. There are no rules, there are no regulations, there are no procedures to prohibit this. It is up to the Member concerned to determine whom he employs as a staff member.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. On 18 January 1983, a predecessor of yours condemned the Government for the selective leaking of, and briefing of the press on, the Franks report before publication. I think that it would be your view that that would apply equally in relation to the Scott report, because there is an indication that there is selective leaking and briefing, to try to brainwash the media in advance of the publication—

Madam Speaker: That is a similar point of order. If the hon. Gentleman will look carefully at my statement, he will see that it is covered there by the word "embargoed".

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): On a different point of order, Madam Speaker. I notice that we

[Mr. Michael Fabricant]

reached Question 21 today. Is that the first time in your memory that advice you gave the previous day—that there should be short answers and short questions—has actually been taken?

Madam Speaker: No. That is not quite the point. I expected to get to Question 21 today—it was marked on my Order Paper—because the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is particularly good and speedy at answering questions. It is a very good Department in that respect and I am delighted with its Ministers because we always move down the Order Paper very rapidly and very briskly when they are at the Dispatch Box. Is there another point of order? No. What a pity.

Cold Climate Allowance

3.39 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for more equitable heating allowances to reflect the increased cost of domestic heating in colder climates; and for purposes connected therewith.

When I curled up in a sleeping bag in one of the rooms in the House of Commons some three weeks ago, I did not expect to be introducing this measure in adverse weather conditions. I neither anticipated nor asked for such weather, although many people will have noticed that the Government's response to this month's cold climatic conditions was much speedier than during the festive season. I refer to the states of emergency that have been declared in Dumfries and in Galloway and to the fact that Ministers have been sent by helicopter—albeit unsuccessfully—to try to deal with the problems there.

Hon. Members will recall that when I first entered Parliament in the 1970s, I argued for the eradication of fuel poverty. When I said that deaths could occur from hypothermia or cold-related illnesses, I was accused of scaremongering and probably shroud waving—as my secretary remarked this morning. We are no longer in that position. The issue cannot be relegated to the category of scaremongering: the hard facts are there for all to see.

Last year 239 Scots died of hypothermia during a relatively mild winter. I note from today's Order Paper that the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) has tabled early-day motion 348, which points out that, according to the Government's own statistics, hypothermia was recorded as the cause of death of more than 300 United Kingdom pensioners in 1994. Each death certificate that attributes death to hypothermia is a blot on the social conscience of all legislators.

The Bill that I am proposing is endorsed by Members of Parliament from all over the United Kingdom. We live in an energy-rich country and no one should die as a result of fuel poverty. The Government will claim that severe weather payments have been triggered this winter and that substantial sums have been paid. That is true, but payment is a lottery. The requirement for seven consecutive days of sub-zero temperatures is ludicrous. A pensioner or a handicapped child living in any part of the United Kingdom may suffer from six days of severe weather, but if the thaw comes on day seven, there will be no payment. Furthermore, the trigger stations that record temperatures often bear no geographical relationship to the areas for which they are responsible.

Severe weather payments are welcome, but they are an imperfect mechanism for dealing with reality. They should remain in place, but I believe that they should be revised and honed into a better system for dealing with exceptional weather conditions. My Bill does not aim at replacing severe weather payments. Instead, it seeks to ensure that there are automatic and continual payments for 17 weeks between December and March, for which those on basic benefits—such as state pensions, income support, family credit and housing benefit—would be eligible.

Opponents of the Bill will say that that would be far too expensive. However, I ask hon. Members what value we place on the lives of our fellow citizens. I believe that we are denying the value of life if we do not address those problems. It is important to take account of the weather

conditions in various parts of the United Kingdom. It is interesting to note that weather forecasters now predict not only the temperature but the wind-chill factor, which is more significant in many cases. I speak with some authority, living as I do in Lossiemouth. Anyone who has visited that beautiful part of my constituency knows that the wind-chill factor can be exceptional, even in non-winter months.

My Bill divides the United Kingdom into four specific zones. Zone 4 covers northern Scotland and would require an automatic payment of £11.15 per week. Zone 3 covers central Scotland, Northern Ireland and northern England—which are suffering just as much as the Borders—and produces a payment of £7.40 per week. Zone 2 covers central England and Wales, and would entail an automatic payment of £3.70 per week. Zone 1 covers the remainder of the United Kingdom. It would not produce an automatic payment—but that would not deny the severe weather payment, which is critical during cold snaps.

I shall explain the reason for zoning. In December 1994, after I had made many attempts to pin the Government down on heating cost allowances throughout the UK, the then Under-Secretary of State for Social Security said in a written reply to me that heating costs varied considerably throughout the United Kingdom. He stated that 23 per cent. extra fuel was required in Glasgow, compared with the southern English comparator, to heat a typical semi-detached house with gas central heating. In Edinburgh, 28 per cent. extra fuel was required. In Dundee, the figure was 32 per cent.; in Aberdeen it was 41 per cent.; in Lerwick it was 53 per cent.; and in Braemar it was 66 per cent. In terms of zoning, those statistics speak for themselves.

My proposals would present the Exchequer with an annual bill in the region of £700 million. The Scottish proportion would be £170 million—a cost that we have included in the dynamic Scottish National party budget. That sum represents less than 6 per cent. of the £3,000 million that is expected to accrue to the Exchequer from North sea energy resources this year alone.

The proposed payments are based on the service charge for fuel that is included in housing benefit. On a weekly basis, the allowances represent 20 per cent. in central and southern Scotland and 30 per cent. in northern Scotland, including the island communities. The Exchequer could make substantial savings because the national health service would gain if people were unafraid of cold weather. An article in *The Independent on Sunday* on 14 January clearly stated that

"one third of elderly patients admitted to Stepping Hill Hospital in Stockport had reduced the heating in their homes because of fears about the extra costs created by the addition of VAT to gas and electricity bills."

A study conducted in Scotland found that two thirds of elderly people admitted to hospital suffering from hypothermia had heating at home, but did not turn it on. A team of seven senior doctors who undertook research in the west of Scotland estimated that hypothermia results in 4,000 hospital admissions per year. That cost could be eradicated if people felt happy about heating their homes.

The reality is fear—the fear that people cannot heat and eat, that a warm home denies a decent diet, and that people cannot afford a warm home and a decent independent life style. Our fellow citizens should never be subjected to such fears. Phrases such as "social justice" and "care in the community" are more than buzzwords or soundbites—they are commandments.

I greatly appreciate the advice offered by statutory and voluntary organisations to the vulnerable.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Ms Roseanna Cunningham, Mr. Robert Hicks, Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, Mrs. Diana Maddock, Mr. Eddie McGrady, Sir James Molyneaux, Mr. Alex Salmond, Mr. Alan Simpson, Mr. Andrew Welsh and Mr. Dafydd Wigley.

Cold Climate Allowance

Mrs. Margaret Ewing accordingly presented a Bill to provide for more equitable heating allowances to reflect the increased cost of domestic heating in colder climates; and for purposes connected therewith: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 1 March and to be printed. [Bill 56.]

Opposition Day

[4TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Rail Privatisation

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.49 pm

Ms Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): I beg to move,

That this House notes with grave concern the very serious allegations of fraud against the management team which has been awarded the franchise to operate the London, Tilbury and Southend rail line; is concerned that this fraud was discovered by British Rail staff only days before the franchise was handed over and would not have been subject to British Rail audit thereafter; believes that this development reveals flaws in the franchising system and the effectiveness of the franchise director; calls on the Government to acknowledge that the process of rail privatisation is costing the taxpayer more for a lesser service, has led to a slump in investment, and is undermining through-ticketing and connections between services; and therefore calls on the Government to halt the process of rail privatisation which is driven by dogma rather than the transport needs of the nation.

It is clear to anyone who has studied the detail of rail privatisation that it is a project driven by right-wing ideology and not by the transport needs of Britain. The Government are willing, at enormous cost to the public purse, to wreak great damage on our rail system and to sell it off for a tiny proportion of its value. The whole process is a madness, driven by dogma and ideological zeal.

Any serious person considering the future transport needs of Britain knows that the country cannot accommodate the projected increase in car use. We must therefore enhance public transport use, and that means that we must improve the quality and reliability of bus and rail. We must get more passengers and freight on to rail.

The nation's needs therefore dictate that we must preserve our national rail network, but achieve considerably higher levels of investment than we have had in the past. The privatisation of rail is producing the opposite. It has caused a slump in investment, and thus we have the disgraceful deterioration of the west coast main line, which is close to my heart because it takes me between London and Birmingham. That line serves a major corridor in the country and it is deteriorating greatly.

Investment in rolling stock has slumped, which means, tragically, that the Asea Brown Boveri carriage works in York will close. That will make hundreds of skilled workers redundant, and there will be further redundancies at ABB in Derby. Jobs will be lost and Britain's manufacturing capacity will be reduced. One hundred trains, worth nearly £500,000, which have already been purchased, are lying idle because the new bureaucracy set up by the Government has not cleared them for use. Of course we agree that proper health and safety standards must apply, but it is madness that new trains cannot be used and that older, less safe trains remain in use. That is another example of the madness of the structures established by the Government.

On top of those facts, Railtrack's published investment plans for the next 10 years promise less investment than British Rail's previous record, yet we all know that we must achieve higher levels of investment. Despite the Government's rhetoric in defence of privatisation on the grounds that it will produce more investment, the reality is that the opposite is the truth.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton) *rose—*

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet) *rose—*

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East) *rose—*

Ms Short: I give way to the hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey).

Mr. Tracey: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, although I am afraid I do not intend to be helpful to her. She talks about dogma, but I suggest that what she has been saying about investment is socialist dogma which is not backed up by reason. In my constituency, Stagecoach has just taken over South West Trains. The company is promising considerable investment in services to help commuters and business travellers and to improve the facilities at stations. That follows the total failure of BR to provide any investment in the service these past many years.

Ms Short: That was just a lot of bluster. The figures that I have quoted are the truth, even if Conservative Members do not like it. The Government always say that privatisation is about more investment, but the fact is that there is a slump in investment at the moment.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Stagecoach's most recent foray into this area was, as my hon. Friends will recall, on the north-west coast line—from which the company subsequently withdrew when it could not make the line pay.

Ms Short: I am grateful to my hon. Friend; I intend to come to South West Trains later in my speech.

Mr. Gale: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Short: No, I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I do intend to give way to the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) in a few moments.

It is clear that this privatisation has been designed by zealots. The privatised service is costing the taxpayer more for a lesser service: £1 billion of taxpayers' money is being spent on the one-off costs of preparing for the privatisation and, according to the Red Book, it is costing taxpayers £850 million a year more in public subsidies to run the same services under the privatised structure.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Short: Certainly not. One would have thought, after yesterday, that the hon. Gentleman would not dare rise from his seat.

The system that the Government have designed breaks British Rail into 100 separate profit-seeking organisations. The taxpayer is being made to pour £2 billion into the top

of this system so that it can trickle through, giving a profit to all 100 companies on its way down—profit at the expense of the taxpayer.

The public have no control over the way their money is spent.

Mr. Arnold *rose—*

Ms Short: This is an outrage. I have made it clear, Madam Speaker, that I am not giving way to the hon. Gentleman. I would be grateful for your protection.

There are also many questions to be asked about the franchising system for the train operating companies. With the allegations of deliberately organised fraud on a major scale on the London, Tilbury and Southend line, we can see the consequences of scrapping a public service ethos and replacing it with a profit-maximising ethos.

Sir Teddy Taylor: The residents of Southend have suffered from a lack of investment and unreliable trains for all of the 15 years I have represented the constituency. I accept the hon. Lady's point that we must thoroughly root out dishonesty, but will she accept that it would be in the best interests of the people of Southend to sort out the matter and get privatisation going? The privatised company has signed a contract agreeing to bring in new trains in three years' time. That is more than just a pledge. We are going to have more services.

Instead of engaging in a political battle—understandably perhaps—should we ask ourselves what is best for the travelling public? The fact is that privatisation can provide the cash which British Rail, under Conservative and Labour Governments, has been unable to provide.

Ms Short: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there is a need for better rolling stock and services on his line. I also agree absolutely that we do not need political arguments: we need a commitment to a better quality railway and to higher investment. We in the Labour party have for a long time advocated leasing rolling stock.

If the hon. Gentleman has visited rail manufacturing companies, he will know that they are interested in putting lots of private sector investment into our rail network to improve the quality of our rolling stock. That could be done under existing arrangements. Instead, because of dogma and the waste of time and money of this privatisation, all that new rolling stock has not come on stream—which is a tragedy for the hon. Gentleman's constituents and for people in other parts of the country.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the allegations of fraud must be dealt with thoroughly, and that his constituents deserve an end to doubt and an enhanced service; but I think that that would be better achieved in the public sector than in a profit-maximising ethos.

Inquiries into the allegations continue, and a number of questions will continue to be asked. I am told that there were plans to embark on a similar ticket-selling fraud at Barking. There is the serious question of when the fraud was planned. Did the management team allow for the proceeds of that fraud in presenting its bid for the franchise? All those questions will have to be answered.

The South West Trains bid was so low that those who work in the service expect staff terms and conditions to be decimated. We shall pay close attention to future developments. The high-quality railways that Britain needs require good working conditions for staff so that they feel that they are stakeholders—if I may use that word—take pride in the service that they provide, and help to bring about high standards and productivity.

When the Secretary of State claimed that the new system would guarantee minimum service levels and control increases in ticket prices, he could have been said to be misleading the public. The contracts being let for franchises provide for the operator to negotiate lower conditions or higher subsidy than those laid down, and the minimum conditions laid down are in turn much lower than those relating to existing services. Moreover, only 50 per cent. of tickets are covered by promises not to allow large price increases. To suggest to the public that their services and tickets will be protected is to mislead them.

The Government's repeated claim that private operators will run services more cheaply than British Rail is also not completely true. The Secretary of State is comparing figures from bidders with inflated figures allowing for high access charges and a notional profit on top of British Rail's real operating costs. If franchising will result in such great savings, can the Secretary of State explain why taxpayers are putting an extra £850 million a year of subsidy into the system?

Why has British Rail not been allowed to bid for the franchises? The Bill that became the Railways Act 1993 was defeated in the other place—on that very point—and was then amended in the House of Commons to allow British Rail to bid; yet it has been excluded from all the bids that have been considered so far. Why? It could have provided a benchmark for decent public service standards. Any other bidder would at least have had to provide a better service than British Rail. Its exclusion breaches promises made to Parliament, and demonstrates again that the process is driven by dogma rather than by the search for a quality rail service.

The Government's proposed sale of Railtrack involves another major scandal. When their rail privatisation Bill went through the House of Commons, the Government repeatedly said that Railtrack would be a public sector company.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I agree with much that the hon. Lady has said, but my party and, I think, the House would like to know the answer to a question. If she believes that Railtrack should be under public control and regulation, how is that to be achieved? It is important for us to know what will be in the prospectus for Railtrack in a few weeks' time. Will the Labour party be making a commitment to that effect?

Ms Short: I have answered the hon. Gentleman's question personally in the last couple of days, but I am coming to his point. I shall be deeply critical of his party's position, for reasons that I have already explained to him.

The proposed sale of Railtrack is another major scandal. During the passage of the Railways Bill, the Government promised the House over and over again that Railtrack would be a public sector company. Rail privatisation with Railtrack in the public sector and rail privatisation with Railtrack in the private sector are two utterly different propositions. The change of course means that the House passed legislation on one basis but is being given something entirely different. It is totally

[Ms Short]

dishonourable for the Government not to seek the permission of the House of Commons for such a major change in policy.

We know from the survey conducted by Save Our Railways that 20 per cent. of Tory Members of Parliament say in private, when asked, that they do not support rail privatisation. There must be a vote. In honour, it should be arranged by the Government. If they fail, it will be arranged by the Labour party. If Conservative Members vote for what they know is in the national interest, the sale of Railtrack will be stopped. We shall see what they are made of, or whether they say one thing to Save Our Railways, another to their constituents and another in the House of Commons.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Railtrack has said that in the first 10 years after privatisation, it intends to spend £1 billion a year on upgrading track, signalling and so on. If, after the general election, we had a Labour Government, would the hon. Lady be able to match that investment or would she leave Railtrack in the private sector?

Ms Short: Conservative Members seem to read handouts from central office rather than listen to the debate. I have already dealt with that point. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] So few Conservative Members seem to listen. They are simply here to barrack, which the public do not like.

I have already dealt with the point that Railtrack's 10-year investment plan promises a lower level of investment than British Rail's record, and we all know that previous levels of investment were too low, so that is nothing for Conservative Members to boast about.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: The hon. Lady should check her facts.

Ms Short: I have checked my facts, unlike many Conservative Members.

Railtrack has been valued at £6.5 billion in modern replacement value for the purposes of setting the costs of access to the track. City experts believe that it will sell for about £1.5 billion. This is a valuable public asset, but it is to be sold off cheaply—£5 billion of taxpayers' investment is to be thrown away.

The scandal goes on because £1.5 billion worth of debts are to be written off in order to help the sale—another £1.5 billion of taxpayers' money thrown away. Most recently, £80 million owed by Railtrack to the train operating company for its failure to meet its contracts is to be paid not by Railtrack but, to fatten it up for the sale, by the taxpayer—another £80 million of taxpayers' money thrown away on this dogma-driven scheme.

The net result is that City experts expect Railtrack to sell for about £1.5 billion and to continue to receive £2 billion each year from the taxpayer with no public accountability. That is an outrageous proposition.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): What does my hon. Friend think would be the reaction if, for example, a Government decided to purchase assets worth £6.5 billion that were privately held for £1.5 billion? What would the newspapers say about such a Government? Would not they say that that was theft, expropriation or robbery? Are not the Government proposing precisely the same thing now for publicly owned assets?

Ms Short: I agree. This is a disgraceful scandal. It is an ideologically driven project which is throwing away massive public investments and resources in return for a less good rail service. It is an outrage and every Conservative Member should be deeply ashamed.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Short: No, I must get on. I am sorry.

There is a further scandal which concerns the land and property owned by Railtrack.

Dr. Spink *rose—*

Ms Short: I have made it clear that I do not want to give way to the hon. Gentleman. Will he please resume his seat? I must get on. *[Interruption.]* I am simply referring the hon. Gentleman to the rules of the House. If I do not wish to give way, he must resume his seat. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not persist. The hon. Lady has made it clear that she is not giving way.

Ms Short: I shall press on, if I may.

There is, I am afraid, beyond the scandals that I have listed, a further scandal. It concerns the land and property owned by Railtrack. I can best summarise the situation by quoting from a couple of newspaper stories. On 14 January, in the business section of *The Observer*, Anthony Barnet wrote:

"Property companies are queuing up for a slice of the lucrative development pie expected when Railtrack is privatised in May . . . On Friday"—

the Friday before Sunday 14 January—

"property consultants submitted tenders for the lucrative contracts to manage Railtrack's retail portfolio . . . One of the property consultants who bid, but refused to be named because of the sensitivity of the deal, said: 'In retailing terms, Railtrack is one of the biggest shopping centre owners in the country. But it has been wasting its potential. It has some plans which will be controversial, but could be immensely profitable'."

And we thought that this was all about running our railways.

In *The Independent* on 20 January, after the regulator had decided that 25 per cent. of the proceeds of windfall profits from property would go to the train operating companies and 75 per cent. would go to Railtrack, Christian Wolmer said:

"The decision to allow the company to keep the lion's share of a property portfolio that some analysts estimate could be worth £2bn"—

taxpayers' money—

"follows a fierce lobbying campaign by Bob Horton, Railtrack's chairman . . . Sir George Young, the transport secretary, also backed the idea of putting what Railtrack's advisers call a 'property kicker'

into the sale, so that the company can be marketed as a high-yielding utility with the added spice of potential property development profits."

There we have it. That is how the Government view valuable land currently owned by the public in the centre of every town and city across the land—added spice to assist the privatisation process.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Short: No, I must get on.

What is to be done about this terrible scandal? I say to people such as John Humphreys, Christian Wolmar, Keith Harper—journalists whom I like and respect, who think that Labour can wave a magic wand and stop all of this—that the problem is that, as yet, we are still in opposition and do not have the votes to prevent the privatisation unless, as I have made clear, some Tory Members of Parliament have the integrity to vote with us to prevent the sale of Railtrack.

Those journalists who constantly ask what Labour will do are letting the Government off the hook and asking a question that cannot be answered by a serious political party preparing for government. The Government have not yet said whether they will sell 51 per cent. or 100 per cent. of Railtrack. We do not know the timing of the sale or the price. No serious party can say precisely what it will do in conditions of such uncertainty.

What the leader of the Liberal Democrats and his spokesperson on transport claim is simply not true. If Labour said that it will buy all the shares in Railtrack, that would not halt the sale. On the contrary, it would mean that there would be no risk in buying Railtrack's shares. They could be sold cheaply, thus wasting taxpayers' money—again—and bought back expensively, wasting further taxpayers' money. Those who think that Labour can somehow stop this flotation by such an open-ended commitment are simply wrong. It is all right for the Liberals, who are not expecting to take power, to make such promises, but it is not all right for the Labour party, which is preparing for power.

How dare the Secretary of State and Tory Members ask what Labour will do after they have done their best to damage and break up our rail network and waste vast sums of public money? Perhaps the Government are so driven by zealotry that they cannot see the reality. Perhaps a simile might help them to understand what is proposed: the Government and Tory Members are behaving like a bunch of thugs who come marauding into a town and threaten to burn down all the civic buildings before an election and then ask someone such as me, who is standing for election in the town, what I would do, if I won, with all the burnt civic buildings. My answer is that I will do all in my power to stop them burning down the civic buildings now and that, if I fail, unlike the thugs, I will do in all my power to restore and protect the civic treasures. Perhaps Tory Members will now understand what their proposals for our rail network really are.

Labour's view is that a crucial public service that receives a large annual injection of public money—that fact makes this unlike any previous privatisation—should be publicly owned and publicly accountable. That is why we vehemently oppose privatisation. We believe that we need higher, not lower, levels of rail investment. That is why we have for a long time supported the leasing of rolling stock and public-private partnerships to mobilise higher investment levels from the private sector.

It is because we know that it is morally wrong and deeply destructive that we will try to halt the sale of Railtrack. We ask the public to help us by putting pressure on Tory Members to vote to halt the sale. If that fails, we will make our position clear before the sale so that anyone who contemplates buying shares knows Labour's view. We will set out our view when the time is right but, meanwhile, for the benefit of anyone contemplating buying Railtrack, I will list our concerns.

First, there must be public accountability and a return to the public in relation to an annual subsidy of £2 billion to a company that may sell for as little as £1.5 billion. Secondly, 100 per cent. of the proceeds from property development should go into rail investment. Thirdly, health and safety cannot be left in the hands of a company driven by commercial considerations.

Fourthly, we are concerned that track access charges are so high that they make the marginal cost of enhancing rail use prohibitive. We are attracted by the Dutch and Swedish models that direct subsidy into the infrastructure, thus creating profitable train operating companies and allowing rail to compete on an equal basis with roads. Fifthly, we are concerned that the separation of the signalling operation from train operators is inefficient and dangerous and must be reviewed. Sixthly, we are aware that a high-quality rail service requires decent employment conditions for staff. We will oppose savings driven by cuts in pay and conditions.

Labour will use its powers to legislate and to regulate, and the power of the subsidy to create a nationally integrated, high-investment, high-quality rail network that is better used by passengers and freight than the existing system. No one should doubt our seriousness, but, unlike the Government, we will not spend public money irresponsibly on dogma-driven schemes. So much needs doing in this poor old country of ours and so much spending is needed on reducing unemployment and improving the health and education services, housing and much else, that every penny must be spent wisely.

I advise anyone who is thinking of investing in Railtrack not to do so because the structures being created by the Government cannot be left in place. With the help of the electorate, Labour will form a better Government and create a better rail system. That is our promise.

4.17 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Sir George Young): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"congratulates the Government on the progress that it is making with privatisation, particularly with the start of private passenger services on the South West and Great Western lines, offering the prospects of better services and higher investment at less cost to the taxpayer; recognises that this demonstrates that the Opposition's attempt to halt privatisation has failed; and looks forward to the flotation of Railtrack in May as an opportunity for the railways to access private finance for investment.".

I welcome this opportunity to set out our plans for a better railway, to report on the progress that we have made towards achieving that and to contrast it with the policy vacuum offered by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short). Anyone listening to

[Sir George Young]

her speech and hoping for some glimmer of intelligence on how the Labour party conference resolution on a publicly owned railway would be achieved would have been disappointed. It was an excuse of a speech, offering no clarity from a party that hopes to be elected. It is, I think, the first time in my life that I have been called a right-wing ideologue, a zealot and a thug. I hardly recognise her description.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: No. I should like to exit the terminus and gather up a bit of speed before the first signal turns red.

Our White Paper, published in July 1992, set out a clear coherent programme for revitalising the railways by transferring them to the private sector. The policy has been pursued steadily over the past few years and is now coming to fruition, much to the frustration of the Labour party, which has been running to catch up. The speech by the hon. Member for Ladywood was evidence that Labour has now run out of steam.

I shall set out the progress that we have made towards achieving that better railway, but first let me deal with what the hon. Lady said about the LTS franchise, comment about which forms the main component of the motion before the House.

I reported to the House on Monday that, pending investigation of ticket irregularities, the franchising director had decided not to proceed with the transfer of the LTS franchise to Enterprise Rail. Since then, British Rail has sent audit teams to all the stations where the allocation of revenue between London Underground Ltd. and the train operating company could be manipulated to the advantage of the train operating company.

The checks picked up only one irregularity, involving about 30 tickets and a sum of £250, at Walthamstow Central, where the chief clerk has been suspended from duty. Checks of the newly franchised companies have revealed no irregularities at their stations.

The House should be in no doubt that we take the allegations seriously. As I said on Monday, financial irregularities, in the public or the private sector, have no place in a modern railway. The incidents are being fully investigated by British Rail and the Rail Regulator, and the franchising director has assured me that until he, the Rail Regulator and British Rail are completely satisfied that the allegations have been fully investigated, there can be no question of the transfer of the LTS franchise going ahead. The franchising director will not take any decision about the future of that franchise until he has had the chance to consider the outcome of the investigations.

The hon. Member for Ladywood alleged—

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Sir George Young: I shall finish the next paragraph in my speech and then give way.

The hon. Member for Ladywood alleged that the irregularities would not have been uncovered had the LTS franchise already been transferred to the private sector. There is no basis for that assertion. The irregularities were picked up as a result of new audit arrangements put in place for privatisation through the Association of Train Operating Companies.

After privatisation, ATOC will continue to carry out regular audits of ticketing transactions involving British Rail and the franchise operators. The audit arrangements have worked well and quickly; the irregularities were picked up within weeks. Nevertheless, the Rail Regulator will examine the robustness of the audit and check systems to find out whether any changes are required to improve the detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Ms Jackson: I am grateful to the Secretary of State—*[Interruption.]*—and to quell any anxiety on the Conservative Benches, I of course declare an interest, as I am sponsored by the train drivers' union, ASLEF. It is my understanding that the franchise for LTS was awarded on 19 and 20 December. How could that happen if the franchising director had gone through the five stages necessary before a franchise is offered? Had he made the relevant inquiries into the managerial and economic competence of the franchisee, and had he really exercised his powers of diligent examination of the background of the would-be franchisees?

Sir George Young: Yes, clearly he had, because the franchise was awarded to LTS. The crucial factor is that the audit picked up the irregularities almost at once. I hope that the hon. Lady will await the outcome of the investigations undertaken by ATOC, the Rail Regulator and the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising before coming to any premature conclusions.

Mr. Wilson *rose—*

Sir George Young: I shall give way once more, and then I shall make progress.

Mr. Wilson: For the benefit of the House and of potential investors in any of the companies, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that if the incident had occurred after privatisation, it would have been exactly the kind of offence and breach of contractual conditions that would have justified the removal of the franchise there and then?

Sir George Young: It is, indeed, true that the regulator and OPRAF have a wide range of powers at their disposal, including, in the case of the former, the power to revoke the licence. The point that I want to make at this stage, however, is that the prompt response to the incident by ATOC, British Rail and the Rail Regulator sound a clear warning to everyone in the industry that sharp practices will not be tolerated, but will be uncovered and dealt with.

I hope that the House will join me in expressing the hope that other public bodies, especially local authorities confronted by worse problems than those that I have mentioned, would respond as promptly.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): Does my right hon. Friend agree that what he has just said shows which party is tough on fraud and tough on the causes of fraud?

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Indeed, earlier today I read the Appleby report into Lambeth council, which said:

"In 1993, it seemed there could have been as many as 400 to 500 council officers receiving fraudulent benefits. I could see no justification for Lambeth's failure to take strong action in this matter."

Dr. Spink: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it ill behoves the House to prejudice and prejudge matters that

are under investigation and that we should not address the detail of matters until inquiries have been completed and we have the facts before us? Is he aware that column 20 of *Hansard* of 5 February 1996 shows most clearly that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) said that the management team was "corrupt" and added the qualification "if" only after I had shouted "Withdraw"?

Ms Short: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) raised that matter on a point of order yesterday, and it was dealt with fully by Madam Speaker. The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) misquoted *Hansard*. It is out of order to raise the point again in such a misleading way. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Hon. Members must settle down and get on with the debate.

Sir George Young *rose—*

Sir Teddy Taylor: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir George Young: I will give way in a moment after I have got slightly further down the track.

Of course I regret that, as a result of what I have just referred to, users of the London-Tilbury-Southend line, including the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), will have to wait a little longer before enjoying the benefits of privatisation, which are already starting to emerge for passengers on the Great Western and South West Trains' lines, as my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) mentioned a moment ago.

We have combined robust safeguards to protect the benefits that passengers want from the railway with opportunities for franchisees to introduce better services and deals for their passengers. It has always been my view—I suspect that it has been shared by most hon. Members—that people will judge policies not on rhetoric but on performance: on what happens on the railways under the new regime.

I should like to outline some of the safeguards. For the first time, key fares are to be pegged to inflation for three years and at 1 per cent. below inflation for four years thereafter. In simple terms, I can guarantee that for every journey to every station in the country, there will be at least one regulated fare—a safeguard that passengers have never had before, laying the foundation for a revival in rail travel. Secondly, for the first time, service levels are guaranteed by contractually binding passenger service requirements—a guarantee not provided by British Rail. National through-ticketing schemes and discounts for disabled, elderly and young people are all protected.

In addition, franchisees are offering additional services above the PSRs, such as improved passenger charters—South West Trains is setting punctuality and reliability targets 2 per cent. higher than at present—improved information for passengers and bus feeder services for local stations. South West Trains introduced such services to Winchester and Liphook the day after it took over the franchise.

Moreover, the franchisees are demonstrating their enthusiasm for marketing their services through plans for improved facilities for business travellers, special offers for SWT's frequent travellers and £1 travel days for senior citizens.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose—*

Sir George Young: As I know that the hon. Gentleman wants to welcome that, I shall give way.

Mr. Banks: Which other country in Europe is pursuing such a model of rail privatisation? If it is so wonderful, why is everyone not leaping in to embrace it?

Sir George Young: Five or six European countries have done the same as us and have separated the provision of infrastructure from the provision of services—a policy recommended in one of the European Commission's directives.

Mr. Banks: Which countries?

Sir George Young: It is important to separate the provision of infrastructure from the provision of services.

Mr. Banks: Answer the question.

Sir George Young: That is the answer that I give to the hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There is no point in asking the Minister a question if he is not allowed to answer it.

Sir George Young: I am grateful for your protection from one of the more boisterous Chelsea fans, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am grateful for the strong and determined action that the Secretary of State has taken on LTS. He knows that the long-suffering passengers of Southend have had many problems for many years. Will the matter be resolved soon? Will it be a matter of days, weeks or months?

Sir George Young: I said on Monday that the inquiry will not be rushed, as it is important that it is full and complete. We must, however, complete it as soon as is reasonably practicable, and I will ensure that my hon. Friend is kept in the picture.

I say to my hon. Friends whose constituency lines have not yet been franchised and who, no doubt, want to get the benefits that are emerging that the Government want to see those benefits extended promptly to other parts of the country.

The hon. Member for Ladywood referred to investment. I have been particularly impressed by the willingness of the franchisees to invest in the future of the railways. Great Western Trains plans to refurbish and modernise its rolling stock ahead of current plans to enable it to provide additional and flexible services, while South West Trains is embarking on a £3 million programme of improvements to stations and passenger facilities such as security, lighting, waiting rooms and information services. That is

[Sir George Young]

clear evidence of a long-term commitment to the railway by those who won the franchises, and that sense of commitment will drive forward the improvements in the railway that all hon. Members want to see.

A few months ago, the hon. Lady was trying to pretend that privatisation would not happen. Her plan was to stop privatisation, but it has failed. The first franchisees are operating, and nine franchises have either been awarded or are on the market. These alone comprise more than 50 per cent. of the existing railway by revenue.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Sir George Young: I shall make some progress, if the hon. Lady will allow me.

Pre-qualification has started for a further two franchises—South West and Wales, and the Cardiff Railway. The franchising director is making excellent progress. There is great market interest and serious bidders are coming forward with serious bids. Rolling stock companies, heavy maintenance depots, seven design offices, British Rail Telecommunications, on-board catering and a range of smaller businesses have all passed into the private sector. We have invited bids for 13 British Rail infrastructure support businesses, and I look forward to announcing the first sales very soon.

In all, more than 30 businesses have been sold or franchised, bringing proceeds of more than £2 billion. More than half the former British Rail by turnover has either been sold or is on the market. I am pleased that there is no evidence that bidders have been deterred by the attitude and the empty threats of the Labour party.

Mrs. Mahon: Will the Minister confirm that in 1993 the House was promised that British Rail would be allowed to bid for franchises? Why has British Rail been excluded? Is it not an example of the Government saying one thing and doing another?

Sir George Young: That is not the position. The matter is clearly set out in the legislation. The duties of the franchising director, Roger Salmon, are clearly set out, and there are certain conditions under which he can allow British Rail to bid. Those conditions have not so far been met. As the franchising director has been satisfied by the level of interest shown by the market as a whole, it has not been necessary to allow British Rail to bid. He is keeping the position under review.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Sir George Young: I will, out of respect for the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Dalyell: On infrastructure—this is not a frivolous question—it may be within the recollection of those at the Department that, because of bad fencing, some cattle strayed on to the Edinburgh to Glasgow line near Polmont, causing a very bad accident in which fatalities occurred. One gathers that the responsibility for fencing and protection against cattle and other animals straying on to the line is far from clear. Before the Secretary of State leaves the subject of infrastructure—I do not expect an answer from off the top of his head—will he undertake that the Department will at least look at the matter because, as far as the Edinburgh to Glasgow line is concerned, it is serious?

Sir George Young: Of course no one wants cattle on the Edinburgh to Glasgow line. Normally, it would be Railtrack's responsibility permanently to safeguard the infrastructure. I will make some inquiries and write to the hon. Gentleman.

We have announced that Railtrack will be floated on the stock exchange in May. I firmly believe that its privatisation offers the best future for Railtrack, for passengers and for freight.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Sir George Young: No. I want to make some progress.

Privatisation will allow greater use of private sector skills in managing the network and will provide greater scope for private capital to be invested in improving the network. Railtrack recently published the first long-term plan for managing the rail network, detailing its intention to spend more than £1 billion a year over the next decade. That is a substantial sum and good news for all rail users.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Secretary of State give way on that point?

Sir George Young: No. I want to make some progress and deal with the hon. Member for Ladywood's argument that we have no mandate for the sale of Railtrack.

On the contrary, the sale of Railtrack was clearly foreseen when the White Paper was published three and a half years ago. We said then:

"In the longer term the Government would like to see the private sector owning as much as possible of the railway. Powers will therefore be taken to allow the future privatisation of all BR track and operations."

All the necessary powers were taken in the Railways Act 1993 and the Government made it clear at the time that the powers would be used in due course to privatise Railtrack. For example, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) said:

"ultimately we wish to see Railtrack move into the private sector".—[*Official Report*, 1 November 1993; Vol. 231, c. 43.]

My noble Friend the Earl of Caithness said:

"Railtrack's existence as a Government-owned company will last only until it is feasible to transfer it to the private sector".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 15 July 1993; Vol. 548, c. 354.]

Ms Short: I have here sheaves of quotations in which Ministers say the opposite. In Committee, the junior Minister, in exasperation, said:

"We have been round the issue several times. Railtrack will be in the public sector for the foreseeable future".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 23 February 1993; c. 400.]

Sir George Young: I have made it clear that the Government also explained that Railtrack would move

into the private sector. I have given three quotations in which it was made clear that that was our ambition. That is the goal that we want to secure.

The hon. Member for Ladywood claimed that privatisation was a bad deal for the taxpayer. The early signs are that privatisation will be better value for money. Let me quote the figures. British Rail was budgeted to receive £83.4 million in 1995-96 to operate South West Trains' services. Stagecoach will receive, on average over the seven years of the franchise, £49 million per annum—an average saving of £34.4 million per annum. British Rail was budgeted to receive £61.7 million in 1995-96 for running Great Western Trains' services. Great Western Holdings will receive an average of £44.8 million—an average saving of £17 million per annum. Those are substantial figures on two franchises which, if replicated across the network, will significantly reduce the grant required by the railway. On top of those savings come the proceeds from the sales of other BR businesses, which already amount to more than £2 billion before Railtrack is sold.

The picture that I have painted of our policies and plans for the railway represents a promising vision for the future.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Sir George Young: I want to make some progress. It is a short debate and it is clear that many other hon. Members want to speak.

Our vision is increasingly being shared by others—by bidders for franchises and for other parts of the railway, by commentators and, I hope, by passengers, especially those whose services are now being provided by private operators.

What about the Labour party? It has said that it will not buy back the rolling stock that we sold before Christmas. It has said that it will not break the franchise contracts, which run from seven to 10 years. As we have just heard, there is no commitment to buy back Railtrack. When the hon. Member for Ladywood and I first debated the railways together in October she asked whether someone as intelligent as me could possibly support the Government's policy. It now looks as though someone as intelligent as herself is doing exactly that. We are left with the conclusion that Labour is in favour of privatisation, but it cannot say so for fear of its trade union paymasters.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Sir George Young: No. The end of the track is in sight.

As the flotation of Railtrack is drawing ever closer, the Labour party is sitting on its hands, refusing to say whether it is sticking to its commitment to buy back the railways. However, the hon. Lady made her views on buying shares in Railtrack very clear on Sunday. Speaking without restraint, she said that it would be immoral for people to buy shares in Railtrack. What does her comment about immorality mean for the millions of people who are shareholders in other companies that used to be nationalised industries—for the stakeholders in British Telecom, British Airways or the BAA? Is she accusing them of immorality for buying a stake in a former nationalised industry?

What do her remarks tell us about the RMT, which has a large shareholding in Thames Water? What about the Labour Members who are sponsored by RMT and other unions, such as the GMB, which have shares in privatised companies? Is she claiming that they are all living off immoral earnings?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: No.

There are many questions to be asked of the Opposition. I will ask just a few. Given their commitments to public ownership, how would they pay to buy back the railways? Would it be through higher fares, higher taxes or higher borrowing? Can they match our guarantee on fares? If they cannot, passengers will know that their fares will not be safe under Labour. Could they match our guarantees on services? Can they give a commitment, as we have done, that the Rail Regulator will continue to reduce access charges by 2 per cent. per annum in real terms?

At 7 o'clock, the House must decide which strategy for the railways is the right one: Labour's muddled policy, which is uncosted and unconvincing; or our strategy, which is clear, confident, forward-looking and determined to roll back decades of decline under the dead hand of state ownership and usher in a new era for the railways. I have no doubt how the House will decide.

4.40 pm

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): In the vote at 7 o'clock, the House should consider carefully the national opinion poll that was conducted on this single issue last year which showed that 69 per cent. of people are totally opposed to rail privatisation. An even more interesting statistic is that one in five Conservative voters—of those who were open and honest about the fact that that is how they voted in the general election in 1992—will reconsider casting their votes for the Conservative party on that issue alone. Conservative Members with comparatively small majorities should consider seriously the deep opposition, which has always existed and continues, to this benighted policy.

The late, much lamented Robert Adley called the Government's proposals the poll tax on wheels. We can compare the cost to the taxpayer of this privatisation with the cost of that other benighted legislation. It has been estimated that the poll tax cost taxpayers more than £4 billion. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) succinctly described the costs to the British taxpayer of the Government's policy, which attempts not to give the travelling public a better service but to destroy an integrated rail network system. Of the £1 billion that has been already spent, not one penny piece has gone into improving the track, buying new rolling stock, manning stations or improving signalling equipment.

After the first full year of franchising, the taxpayer will have had to fork out an additional £1.8 billion, the equivalent of 1p off the basic rate of tax. If we divide that by the number of taxpayers, that is an additional £72 per taxpayer. Regionally—I must admit a preferential interest as I represent a seat in the south-east of England—every taxpayer in the south-east will have to pay an additional £93.

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

My hon. Friend the Member for Ladywood spoke of the amount that Railtrack would be worth if we had to replace it today, which is £6.5 billion. The Government have said that they will sell it for £1.5 billion. That is another £5 billion; we are now up to £7.8 billion.

Sir George Young: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Jackson: If I may first finish my mathematics. That means that rail privatisation has already exceeded the cost to the taxpayer of the poll tax.

Sir George Young: The hon. Lady has stated a figure of £1.5 billion and said that the Government had volunteered that figure. What is her reference?

Ms Jackson: Could the Secretary of State repeat his question; I did not hear it.

Sir George Young: The hon. Lady attributed a figure in relation to proceeds from the privatisation of Railtrack to Ministers. I should be interested to know the reference.

Ms Jackson: I apologise to the Secretary of State; it was a slip of the tongue. The figure came from City experts. However, as we know, City experts and Ministers work so closely together on so many occasions that it is sometimes difficult to separate them and decide who has made a decision.

Mr. Tony Banks: City experts are more honest than Ministers.

Ms Jackson: Certainly.

Dr. Spink: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Jackson: Let me finish my point.

If one examines how much we, as taxpayers, have paid to the City experts whom the Department of Transport has employed over the years to help it bring about privatisation—which, as Labour Members know, means the destruction of our railway system—it is, according to the Government's figures, more than £12 million. I think therefore that I could be allowed a little leeway in sometimes confusing the grey suits.

Dr. Spink: I have been listening carefully to the hon. Lady. She seemed to say that my constituents are against privatisation. Is she aware that my constituents are served by the LTS line, which, along with British Rail, has failed my constituents during the past 15 years, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) earlier? Does she accept that my constituents wanted some change to take place, and that doing nothing was simply not an answer for them? Will she tell me what she suggests should be done instead of privatisation? Where would she find the investment to pay for the necessary changes?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. My comment does not relate directly only to the hon. Gentleman, but long interventions do not help in short debates.

Ms Jackson: I have every sympathy for the constituents of the hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink)—I know that they have been forced to travel on the "misery" line. However, I should point out to him that it is his party and his Government who have failed, during the past 16 years, to find the necessary investment to improve that line. Far from doing nothing—*[Interruption.]* Allow me to answer the hon. Gentleman's intervention.

Far from doing nothing, the hon. Gentleman's Government have wilfully wasted his constituents' taxes, not only by not investing in the line, not finding new rolling stock and not improving signalling, but by attempting to destroy the line. If the hon. Gentleman had listened to what my hon. Friend the Member for Ladywood had said, he would know what we would do to provide a railway system for this country that is fit not only for the people who travel on it now but for the 21st century.

The Secretary of State referred to Great Western Trains, which was one of the first two franchises, and spoke of the improved rolling stock that it is committed to introducing on its line. The two franchises that have managed to deliver a service have received quite a lot of coverage, and it seemed that one of the ways in which Great Western improved its rolling stock was to paint a new colour down the side of a comparatively old train. As we know, the first services that South West Trains and Great Western Trains provided were not by trains but buses.

I draw the Secretary of State's attention to a written answer from his Department which states that, out of the franchised companies, Great Western Trains has the most speed restrictions imposed on it because of a failure to invest in maintaining the track on which it is attempting to run its services. Sixteen speed restrictions are being imposed on lengths of track that vary from 200 yd to two to three miles. The Secretary of State may speak about the franchise operators' additional investment and improvement of services to the travelling public. If that investment is a pot of paint—as opposed to the necessary millions of pounds to maintain track so that trains may run at speed and passengers arrive at their destination at times that they find acceptable—the right hon. Gentleman is being extremely ingenuous.

I find it very surprising that the Government are holding the commitments made in the contracts between the franchising director and the franchisees so close to their chest, but I understand that, as no additional money has been put into our railway system by the franchise operators, it would be possible for a franchisee to meet the franchising director at the end of the first year of attempting to run services and say, "I am sorry, but I cannot run services for the amount of subsidy that you give me. Would it be possible for me to examine fare structures not once a year, as is the case at the moment, but three times a year?"

That shows that when the Government claim, as they have done, that they have given guarantees to the travelling public about services and about the freezing of fares, they say one thing and do unto others something quite other.

The Government's protestations that fares would be frozen gave the travelling public and all the people of the country to believe that that meant that all fares would be frozen. Closer examination shows that fewer than half of fares—47 per cent.—will be frozen, and I understand that,

on InterCity, only 21 per cent will be. We were also told that fares would not increase by more than the rate of inflation. The Government did not choose to freeze fares at the inflation rate of January 1996—the month when fares always increase—but of June 1995, when inflation was infinitely greater than it was in January. There, yet again, the travelling public and the people of the country have been deceived about what the Government intend when they speak about presenting progressively wider and better services for the people of Britain.

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): Does her brief from ASLEF tell the hon. Lady how long it takes for all the fare manuals to be revised? Will she suggest how fast they might have been revised, and consequently her opinion on the latest month for which an automatic retail prices index figure could be used to base the fares limitation from January?

Ms Jackson: Regrettably, I am not briefed by ASLEF so I cannot answer the Minister's question, but I can tell him that the fares that I mentioned in the main came from his Department. If he wishes me to obtain a brief for him from ASLEF, I will be happy to advise because, if we need expertise in running railways, I have a strong suspicion that there is greater work experience among the members of ASLEF than there is among the Ministers facing me.

I realise that many hon. Members wish to speak and I notice that I have spoken for a comparatively long time. I end where I began, by urging Conservative Members to take the opportunity—positively rare in their parliamentary lives—to place the interests of their constituents first. The Government's plans for privatisations will lead only to progressively greater hardship for the people of the country, who desperately wish to use their trains for environmental reasons alone. People are desperate to be able to get out of private transport because of the damage that they know that it does to themselves, their children and their communities. They would dearly love to be able to make additional journeys on a properly integrated public transport system.

I urge Conservative Members to acknowledge that a properly integrated public transport system can never be visited on the country while a Conservative Government are in office, and that the present Government's plans to privatise the railways are a disaster. They should exercise their responsibilities to their constituents and vote with Labour Members in the Lobby tonight.

4.53 pm

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): I am grateful for the opportunity to follow the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson). When she speaks on transport matters, she is always careful to acknowledge that she is sponsored by ASLEF, and she did so earlier. It might be to the benefit of the House if I read out from the entry in the Register of Members' Interests the extent of that sponsorship. On page 72 of the current Register, the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate says that she is

> "Sponsored as a parliamentary candidate by ASLEF, who pay 80 per cent. of general election expenses and in the year 1994-95 gave £5,500 to Hampstead and Highgate Labour Party for its constituency work."

It is obvious from the speeches by Labour Members that there is two-tier opposition. I challenge the hon. Lady to consider the following: is she speaking in the debate today for the people whom she represents, or is she taking one step to the left and speaking for the union that sponsors her? In order to make the position absolutely clear, I challenge her to resign her sponsorship from ASLEF so that when she speaks in the House and in the community she can say—without fear of contradiction from someone such as me—that she speaks out of philosophical conviction, not because she is sponsored by a trade union.

Ms Glenda Jackson *rose—*

Mr. Dunn: I have not yet finished my attack. The hon. Lady is an interesting character in many ways and I have enjoyed her past experiences enormously. However, as one of the more extreme left-wing Members in this place, she must make her position clear. I shall give way on that point.

Ms Jackson: I point out to the House and to the nation at large that the hon. Gentleman has never been part of my past experiences, and he certainly will not be part of my future experiences. My constituents have a particular interest in the future of our railways. Three of the main railway termini—King's Cross, Euston and St. Pancras—are situated just to the south of my constituency and the lines that those termini serve run at the bottom of my constituents' gardens. Therefore, the future of the railways is of particular interest to them.

Mr. Dunn: When I said that I enjoyed the hon. Lady's past experiences, I meant that I watched her films when I was very young. The Labour party has a major problem.

Ms Jackson *rose—*

Mr. Dunn: It was not a silent film in which I first saw her.

Ms Jackson: If the hon. Gentleman was very young, he would not have seen any of my films because they were not allowed to be shown to people under the age of 16.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is very interesting, but we should get down to a serious debate on the motion before the House.

Mr. Dunn: It is not true that the first films that I saw were silent. More than 200 Labour Members of Parliament are sponsored by trade unions. That is the way in which the Labour party has evolved and I have no quarrel with that. However, when I speak on behalf of my constituents, I speak for them—I am not sponsored, controlled or got at, and unions are not represented on my association executive council as is the case with Labour Members.

Mr. Wilson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dunn: No, I will not give way again; I resent being interrupted when I make a point that Labour Members do not like. Two hundred Labour Members of Parliament are sponsored by trade unions, and we know the result of that. The hon. Lady did not answer my

[Mr. Dunn]

question as to whether she will resign her sponsorship. I dare say that she will write to me with an answer when she has one.

We listened with great interest to the speech by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short). I am not certain—and my constituents need to know—whether a Labour Government would renationalise the railway system. If the Labour party were to renationalise the railway system, what levels of compensation would be paid to shareholders of Railtrack? How would passenger services be brought back under state control, bearing in mind the legal obligations that have been entered into recently and those that will be entered into in the future?

How would the Labour party fulfil its commitment to encourage more passengers and freight on to the railways? Finally, would the hon. Member for Ladywood—who is not in the Chamber—commit her party to greater investment in the railways? If so, to what extent?

It is quite clear that the Government have a good record of support for our national rail system. Since nationalisation, £54 billion has been invested in the railways. Every Conservative Government since the war have increased investment in the railways. Since 1979, this Conservative Government have demonstrated their overwhelming commitment to the railways by investing more than £15 billion in British Rail, including £6.5 billion in the past five years.

Since 1979, £4 billion has been invested in new rolling stock. There has been massive investment in the Dartford loop line in recent years, leading to modern new rolling stock for the people of Dartford. The number of complaints that I receive about the quality of service on the Dartford loop line has fallen to almost none.

I expected to hear something about where Labour stands on rail privatisation. The truth is that Labour opposes rail privatisation, just as it opposed that of British Telecom; the water, gas and electricity boards; British Airways and so on. Nationalisation has been a disaster since it first came into being in the late 1940s under the Attlee Government. What is Labour's policy now? I hope that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) will make it clear—in the way that the hon. Member for Ladywood did not—that Labour will renationalise the rail system. He owes that declaration to the intellectual honesty that I have always associated with the Labour party in the past.

Mr. Tony Banks: Come on.

Mr. Dunn: There is no intellectual honesty to be found in the Labour party, according to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks)—the former chairman of the Greater London council. We know where that hon. Gentleman is coming from. What is more, we know where he is going—back to that side of the House.

Labour must decide for the sake of its own soul whether it speaks for the people or for the trade unions that sponsor Labour and control its local parties. I know the answer, and so do my right hon. and hon. Friends. I look forward to rail privatisation. It will mean accountability, efficiency, investment and a far better service. Then we might see an improvement in the number of rail passengers. I have no doubt how I will vote tonight. I shall vote in the Lobby with the Government.

5.2 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I probably have full agreement that the motion and the debate so far emphasise how far removed the rail privatisation process has become from serving the national and public interest—hon. Members have no doubt enjoyed themselves immensely over the past hour or so. I will make a few points briefly, because I know that other hon. Members wish to contribute.

I remind the House of the recent scandal of the misuse of ticket revenue on the LTS line, the disposal of rail assets at a fraction of their value, creating large profits for the purchasers at the taxpayer's expense, and the lack of regulation to ensure investment to modernise our rail system and achieve growth in passenger and freight loadings, which should be the key objectives of the rail system. The argument surrounding the fraudulent misuse of LTS ticket income is another illustration of the flaws in the privatisation process.

An integrated public transport system has been a vital component in the success of our capital city in every respect—commerce, tourism and culture. The interchangeability of public transport was a key factor in that success, made possible by the successful travelcard scheme. Under the umbrella of public ownership, there was no problem or concern about operators diverting income to maximise their profits. The formula for distributing travelcard income was based on passenger surveys. It was a tried and trusted system. The events of recent weeks on the LTS line have destroyed the trust of operators in what until now has been a well-proven system. Rail, underground and bus operators have been unnerved by those events. Without an effective ticket interchangeability system, there could be chaos at ticket offices at all purchase points. There could be bitter in-fighting between operators to attract passengers. London's integrated public transport system, in which we should be able to continue to take great pride, is threatened with collapse.

I was saddened to hear in the House today arguments about whether the LTS irregularities were discovered by auditors at some stage. The key issue is that trust in a system that has been working extremely well has been undermined.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calderdale): The hon. Gentleman must have travelled by air from airports such as Heathrow, and swapped tickets and destinations between British Midland, British Airways, Air France and other airlines with no trouble. That is private enterprise at its best. The same facilities will continue on the railways, and must continue.

Mr. Chidgey: I am a veteran air traveller, but the hon. Gentleman should remember that the frequency of air travel is nothing compared with that of public transport in a city such as London. If one were to introduce the same systems in the capital, there would be chaos.

Mr. Wilson: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but the hon. Member for Calderdale (Sir D. Thompson) scored such a good own goal that I cannot miss the opportunity to point out that different airlines might be involved in a multi-part journey, each part of which is separately priced at the full rate. One can get discounted through air tickets, which one certainly cannot get on the railways now.

Mr. Chidgey: That is a good example of why we should call into question the Government's obsessive criticism of the so-called inefficiency and non-competitiveness of the public sector—which, from what we heard today, has a hollow ring.

Mr. Tony Banks: The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) said that he regularly travels by air. Has he ever been on a flight that departed or arrived at its destination at the scheduled time? If British Rail or any rail service was so inefficient in its punctuality, there would be riots. Hon. Members know that that is true.

Mr. Chidgey: My experience of air travel is wide and varied. In some cases, it has been more a question of which day the aircraft would arrive. I hope that we never find ourselves in that situation with rail.

We should be striving for an effectively regulated, well-funded and well-managed public and private partnership, capable of delivering an efficient and responsive rail service. A case in point is the rail company that reported its

"best-ever overall performance levels and ended the year with not a single route triggering season ticket discounts . . . The 92 per cent. target set by the government for punctuality of services overall was met . . . These improvements in operations were matched by a continuing rise in customer satisfaction, measured by independent research."

The rail company's overall service levels were raised by the introduction of new trains, which

"were ordered following a successful bid for £150 million leasing finance".

Another £84 million was invested in resignalling and overall efficiency gains exceeded 10 per cent. The company

"increased its operating profit . . . from £5 million to £71 million"

in one year.

Mr. Dunn: Where is it?

Mr. Chidgey: Indeed, where is it? That company's operating profit reached £71 million and it received no grant, and it reinvested £432 million. That company was not an Asian tiger but British Rail's Network SouthEast in 1993-94—its last year of operation. That report shows the benefits that can be achieved by managers given the freedom to use their talents, as they did under the organising-for-quality system. I hope that the Minister, in his response tonight, will give us some comfort.

Dr. Spink: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Chidgey: I am sorry, but I must make progress.

I hope that the Minister will allow British Rail managers the opportunity to bid for some of those franchises. The managers have shown what they can do and they should have that opportunity.

I now come to the subject of the privatisation of Railtrack. We must have a nationally planned, nationally controlled, integrated rail network. That is essential to the community and to our economy. The Government, as we have heard today, now plan to sell off assets worth at least £6 billion, with an 8 per cent. rate of return, for a fraction of their value. To make the deal even more juicy, the Government are currently allowing Railtrack to accumulate the revenue from track access charges.

What is happening to the money collected from track access charges? At present, I understand that the money is being held under the heading "Asset Maintenance Plan". In the six months to March 1995, the total amassed in track access charges was some £483 million, and £253 million in the six months to September 1995. That revenue was retained on the balance sheet. It gives the appearance of very healthy revenue, but it also disguises the impoverished state of Railtrack's assets. Why is Railtrack refusing to spend that money, when the organisation knows that it needs to be spent urgently on the maintenance and renewal of the rail network? Why are the Government allowing Railtrack to charge for track access when it continues to allow the rail network to fall into disrepair? Is that yet another example of creative accounting on the real costs of privatisation to the taxpayer?

Last year, we saw the Government's willingness to sell off the rolling stock companies for a minimum return. It is astounding that such an important component of the rail service could be sold for such a knock-down price. Rolling stock valued at some £3 billion was sold for about £1.8 billion. It is scandalous that the new companies are under no obligation to purchase new rolling stock. They have merely to maintain existing stock, while they are guaranteed an annual rate of return of approximately £700 million a year. That is not bad on a £1.8 billion investment. Predatory companies have been given an opportunity to run down the rolling stock, maximise their profits and, at the end of the contracts, hand back a derelict railway.

Government subsidies are clearly being used to induce private sector companies to take the opportunity to operate rail companies under franchise. Stagecoach, as we have heard, will receive a subsidy of some £53 million a year to operate South West Trains. I have been told that when British Rail last ran that sector of the rail network, it made a profit of £15 million and required no passenger service obligation subsidy. Why does Stagecoach need a subsidy? Because it must pay the hugely inflated rail access charges.

Mr. Watts: British Rail last ran those services for the year up to Saturday night, and it received a subsidy of £83 million a year.

Mr. Chidgey: I am referring to the time before the South West Trains region was set up. In any case, the subsidy was being paid so that British Rail could pay the track access charges.

In spite of improvements and investment by British Rail, South West Trains has done nothing to improve the railway. Too many elderly coaches trundle up and down the region. They are fitted with the notorious slam doors, which have an appalling passenger safety record. That point strikes home for me because, for several years, a door-lock system has been available which was developed in the railway works in my constituency. The system has been tested and found to work, but South West Trains has placed no orders and Stagecoach has given no commitment to make those trains safer.

If the confusion and disarray that have been caused to rail operations was not enough, the chaos that has been caused by through ticketing is inexcusable. Hon. Members

[Mr. Chidgey]

will be aware of the report by the Consumers Association that discovered that 90 per cent. of ticket inquiries resulted in incorrect information about the cheapest tickets available, despite the regulator's insistence that information on the cheapest fares for a journey should be available from all ticket offices. The train operating companies, on average, over-priced tickets by £24, which is scandalous. In many cases, the charges quoted were double the cheapest fare.

We have heard today some glowing accounts of the first week of operation of the new franchises for Great Western Trains and South West Trains. Let us return to reality. Passengers who used to travel into London on one line and wished to travel home on another could do so on one return ticket. Now, if the lines are run by separate companies, passengers can travel to Paddington on one line, but they cannot use a return ticket to travel out of Waterloo later on the same day. They have to buy separate tickets. That is not only ridiculous, but bizarre.

I had a call to my office late yesterday afternoon from a young lady called Sally Lloyd-Jacob, who has allowed me to use her name today. She travels every day from Sutton to Horsham on a line now run by South Central Trains. She catches the 8.25 from Sutton, which arrives in Horsham at 9.10. That is a 45-minute journey, but yesterday it took five hours. Why? The brakes had caught fire. That tells us much about the level of maintenance we may now expect. However, the five-hour delay was not due to lack of repairs or maintenance. There was another train immediately behind to which the passengers could easily have transferred. However, the train behind was not owned by South Central Trains; it was owned by South West Trains. The five-hour delay was caused while the two companies haggled over the price that would be paid for the transfer of passengers from one train to the other. Passengers, possibly including the elderly and children, were left freezing while rival companies argued over profit. That is a measure of the new train service that the Government have given us.

We need a commitment to return to the sensible operation and development of our railways in the national interest. The Liberal Democrats are pledged to reacquire a controlling interest in Railtrack, to create a national rail system that is responsive to national, integrated transport planning, with a private and public partnership. I must tell Opposition Members, who often sing from the same song sheet as I do, that it is not acceptable to hide behind the internal rules of share transfer in the stock exchange. Those rules apply to companies trading with each other, not to Governments. There should be a commitment in the Railtrack prospectus to exchange 51 per cent. of Railtrack shares for Government bonds, at the issue or market price—whichever is the lower—using primary legislation if necessary. Labour's position is untenable. Leading City analysts claim that the Railtrack sell-off would collapse tomorrow if Labour made a commitment to reacquire 51 per cent.

The Liberal Democrats have pledged to establish a national rail authority to regulate properly, with a partnership between the public and private sectors. We would renegotiate the franchises to recognise the long-term investment needs of railways, and the operators of the new companies would welcome that. They know how ridiculous the franchises are. We would set targets for increased passenger and freight loadings, instead of maximising profits at the taxpayer's expense, which is what the Government have done. We shall vote in favour of the motion tonight, because we believe that the Government's wholesale destruction of our integrated national rail system must be opposed and must be reversed.

The Labour party has been found wanting. It must now show some resolve, commitment and leadership, if it is to be taken seriously on rail privatisation in the House and in the country.

5.18 pm

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on his apparent promotion to the Front Bench. That has happened so often before and he has returned to the Back Benches. Let us hope that this time his promotion is permanent, but only to the Opposition Front Bench.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) did not welcome rail privatisation. I must congratulate the councillors on Liberal Democrat-controlled Isle of Wight council. They have welcomed the fact that their rail service is to be one of the first put out to franchise—but as we know, Liberal Democrats say different things to different audiences.

Mr. Chidgey: I hope that I have made it clear—I may have been speaking rather fast to save time—that we are not against privatisation: we are against the way in which it is being handled by the Government, which is appalling. We want a partnership between the private and public sectors to run the railways of this country.

Mr. Riddick: This has been an extremely useful exchange. The Liberal Democrats have now said on the record that they are in favour of privatisation. That is to be welcomed. I am not quite sure, however, how Liberal Democrat researchers will be able to respond to the apparently contradictory approaches to privatisation in their party.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): I rather doubt whether my hon. Friend will be able to shed any light on this—I am certainly confused. A few moments ago the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) seemed to be urging the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who is temporarily occupying the Labour Front Bench, to renationalise Railtrack. There seems to be total confusion; there has certainly been a volte-face in the space of three minutes.

Mr. Riddick: My hon. Friend makes a telling point. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Eastleigh would like to reply to it—

Mr. Chidgey: I am delighted to do so. I do not want to turn this debate into a seminar on our policies, but I should be delighted to send hon. Members copies of our transport policy, in which all will be revealed. We have made it clear that Railtrack should stay in public control, through a 51 per cent. shareholding. We have also made it perfectly clear that we encourage the acquisition of

private finance in the running of our railways. We simply want it done more effectively than the Government have managed.

Mr. Riddick: I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for his contributions; they will be most helpful to both main parties.

I want to talk first about the general principle of privatising the railways, and secondly about one narrow aspect of the railways—that is, charter train operation.

At this stage of a privatisation it is always more difficult to set out the benefits that will accrue, because those benefits have not yet become apparent—there has not been enough time for them to show up. It is easy for the Opposition to criticise and to forecast the demise of the industry, just as they have done with every other privatisation. They have said that prices will rise and services will decline. It was outrageous of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) to say that a private company cannot be trusted to ensure high safety standards.

Dr. Spink: What about British Airways?

Mr. Riddick: That indeed is the obvious riposte. Many of the world's major airlines are privately owned companies with excellent safety records. It is a disgrace that the hon. Member for Ladywood should be putting around those scare stories when they are clearly not accurate.

We need only look at other privatisations to find out what really happens. The Labour party is increasingly desperate and occasionally disingenuous when it makes its attacks on privatisation. There was a classic example of that over the new year. During the cold spell, hundreds of water mains cracked in various parts of the country. Up in the north-east, about 150,000 homes were cut off for a short time as a result of those problems. A local Labour Member of Parliament, I think the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), went on television to say that it was all the fault of privatisation. Yet at the same time 100,000 homes in Northern Ireland were cut off for the same reason, and as far as I know the water industry there is not privatised.

Up in Strathclyde, where the water industry is still in public hands, 500,000 homes were cut off. That shows how Labour sometimes resorts to desperate claims.

Mr. Dalyell: Five hundred thousand homes cannot possibly have been cut off in Strathclyde—this is drivel.

Mr. Riddick: I got the figure from *The Daily Telegraph*, which is certainly more accurate than most in its reporting. I can show the hon. Gentleman the cutting if he wants to see it.

If the Labour party really believes that privatisation will be so disastrous, why do not Opposition Members commit themselves to renationalising Railtrack? Why not commit themselves to reversing the process? Of course, the reason is that they know that privatisation has transformed the economy for the better. Long-distance coaches, British Airways, the British Airports Authority, road haulage and British Gas—those have all been transformed; prices have come down and customer services have improved. Commercial disciplines and incentives have forced the managements of those companies to provide customers with what they actually want.

When British Airways was being privatised back in 1979, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), leading for the Opposition, said that the company would become the "pantomime horse of capitalism". As we know, British Airways is now one of the most successful airlines in the world.

I believe that privatisation will have the same beneficial effect on the railways as it has had on many other industries. The new rail franchises will give new entrepreneurs and new companies the opportunity to come into the rail market. Besides bringing innovative ideas with them, those companies will want to introduce new and different services and to try new pricing arrangements that will benefit the travelling public. It is in their interests to attract more passengers to the railways—that is the point.

The purpose of privatisation, in short, is to halt and reverse the decline in railway use. Since 1948, £54 billion of taxpayers' money has been invested in the railways, but the railways' share of journeys has fallen from 17 per cent. in 1953 to just 5 per cent. now. It is time that we tried to reverse the process.

My local electricity company is an example of what can be achieved under privatisation. Prices have fallen by 19 per cent. since the company was privatised. They were reduced by 3.5 per cent. last April and will be reduced again by a similar amount this coming April. The customers of Yorkshire Electricity have also benefited from a £50 bonus resulting from the flotation of the National Grid. That, too, benefited customers.

British Telecom is another example of privatisation benefiting customers. Inland call charges have been cut by 21.4 per cent. since 1984—a 53 per cent. reduction in real terms in telephone call prices since the company was privatised. That is of major benefit to everyone. There has been an explosion in the number of public pay phones. At the time of privatisation there were 77,000; there are now 130,000. When British Telecom was privatised, the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) said:

"The public telephone box could be threatened with extinction".—[*Official Report*, 18 July 1983; Vol. 46, c. 41.]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It would be helpful if the hon. Gentleman now returned to the subject of the privatisation of the railways.

Mr. Riddick: I think that the point I was making is extremely relevant—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chair has decided that it is not.

Mr. Riddick: I contend, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that it is—but I entirely accept your ruling. I believe that the benefits of privatisation will feed through to rail customers, as they have fed through to electricity and gas consumers.

Exactly a year ago, I made a speech on a similar motion. I congratulate the Labour party on its precision—although I do not suppose that it was deliberate—in choosing to debate this subject on the anniversary of the debate on rail privatisation that took place on

[Mr. Riddick]

7 February last year. At that time, I explained that a company called Days Out Ltd. had been formed and was planning to run 60 steam excursions during the year, some of them on completely new lines. I regarded that as a plus for the new railways.

Railtrack has been very co-operative with charter operators, trying to encourage as many of them as possible to use the tracks. Unfortunately, a number of excursions were cancelled last year as a result of the hot, dry summer: it was feared that fires would break out beside the lines because the ground was so dry. The main problem for charter companies, however, has been the behaviour of Rail Express Systems, which until recently was a wholly owned subsidiary of the old British Rail. It is a great shame that that company has abused its monopoly to make life difficult for charter operators.

RES was recently sold to Wisconsin Railways, but before that it was obstructing charter operators, overcharging and then refusing to provide the details of its invoices. The Huddersfield Green party, which has run a number of charter trains over the years, experienced problems last year because of mismanagement of the trains by RES. I believe that those abuses have taken place as a result of the company's monopoly on licensed steam excursions.

Wisconsin Railways has reacted quite favourably to charter operators. It has been in charge only since December, but I understand that it is negotiating with the charter operators and trying to repair the damage done by RES. There is more to be done, however, and I believe that the Rail Regulator will have a role to play. I have tabled an early-day motion on the subject. Most important of all, we need to ensure that there is more competition in the organisation of charter trains. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will consider that.

I shall be delighted to support the Government in the Lobby. I believe that rail privatisation will bring benefits to passengers. Our only reason for introducing it is our wish to see lower fares and better services. We want rail passengers to gain, and I believe that they will.

5.32 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): The speech of the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) consisted of two parts: an apology for privatisation, and special pleading for charter trains. His discourse on privatisation was composed of some pretty selective statements. For example, he said that the price of electricity had fallen by 19 per cent. since privatisation—in real terms, presumably; but it probably rose by the same amount just before privatisation. He forgot to mention that British Airways' debts were written off. He also tried to make us believe that the privatisation of British Gas had been a success, notwithstanding all the fuss about Mr. Cedric Brown.

Opposition Members are not convinced that the hon. Gentleman is right. I admit that British Telecom has done well, but that might also have something to do with technology. The hon. Gentleman did not mention that. We would have listened to him more attentively if he had tried to be a little more serious, rather than peddle the usual political points. People are not stupid; they realise that there is more to success, or the lack of it, than privatisation.

British Rail is in an entirely different position from other privatised companies, because it does not have a monopoly. There are other means of travel, such as cars, aeroplanes and coaches. More important, it has no obvious means of making a profit. In this country and elsewhere in Europe, because of the way in which cars and petrol are taxed, subsidies must generally be paid for the running of a public transport system. That, too, places British Rail in a completely new category. I do not accept the argument that, because previous privatisations have succeeded—some have; others have not—this privatisation will succeed as well.

The motion mentions the allegation that tickets were taken from a machine at Fenchurch Street station and sold at Upminster, and the Secretary of State referred to another ticket fraud at Walthamstow. I do not believe that such fraud would take place if we had an integrated railways network. It is true that London Underground is run slightly differently from British Rail, but if there were a single system there would be no reason for one part of it to try to cheat the other.

Much more will now have to be spent on auditing. It is not just a question of catching a clerk who has succumbed to temptation. That is bound to happen sometimes—none of us is perfect, and an audit system is always necessary—but audit provision will now have to be increased simply because, owing to commercial considerations, one half of the organisation will be encouraged to engage in sharp practice at the expense of the other half. On occasion, commercial enterprise will become corruption and fraud.

If it is proved that tickets were purchased at Fenchurch Street and sold at Upminster, that will be fraud in anyone's book. I shall not prejudge the issue or blame anyone at this stage, but it is clear that something underhand has gone on. I shall await the findings of the inquiry. I noted on Monday, when the Secretary of State replied to a private notice question, that he is to return to the House to explain the reasons for what happened and to tell us what he proposes to do.

The speech of the hon. Member for Colne Valley revealed that privatisation has much to do with dogma and ideology. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) used almost the same words, and I am happy to echo them. No real concern is felt for the industry, the travelling public or the country; the Tory party simply wants to divest government of as many functions as possible. That is the real motive for inflicting rail privatisation on the public.

Mr. Devlin: I beg to disagree. Will the hon. Gentleman consider this point—not a dogmatic point, but a practical point relating to the way in which our public services are funded?

At the end of her speech, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) described all the great things that a future Labour Government would do to improve health, social services, hospitals and a variety of other things. The hon. Gentleman must accept that—in the words of the hon. Member for Ladywood—that will necessitate a good many hard decisions. There is no doubt that the railways will be at the back of the queue, because they are not as politically emotive as hospitals. Consequently, when the public pie has to be divided, the railways will get the scraps. The benefit of privatisation is not that it is a dogma, but that it enables the infrastructure to receive resources from elsewhere—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I did not call the hon. Gentleman to make a speech. Many hon. Members still wish to speak in this short debate and long interventions do not help.

Dr. Marek: I appreciate the point made by the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin), but privatisation will increase, not decrease, the subsidy. The additional net subsidy has been calculated to be £850 million a year. There has been some argument about the subsidy for South West Trains. The franchisees will be able to cut the subsidy if they succeed in getting more people to travel and in getting extra revenue, but they can also do it by cutting staffing.

Many stations in the United Kingdom could have no staff at night. That is important, because many women simply will not go on to a station at night which may be all but deserted if it is not staffed and there is no security. The private franchise operators may employ staff if they can obtain extra revenue, but I suspect that the number of staff employed late at night, when few people travel, will be cut and that there will be fewer, not more, services as a result of privatisation.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Is not another reason why the franchise process is bad for the public that the current timetable is politically rather than economically driven, with the result that the sums that are likely to be obtained will be reduced accordingly because the potential purchasers know that the Government are desperately trying to get this operation finished by the next election?

Dr. Marek: My hon. Friend is right. Railtrack was initially valued at about £6.5 billion, but now the Government are talking of getting about £1.5 billion or £2 billion for the sale of that massive estate that is owned by the public. The hon. Member for Colne Valley talked about the £50 reduction in people's electricity bills. We all got £50 off, but we sold the grid, and for ever more, succeeding generations will pay shareholders' profits for that once and for all cut.

Mr. Tony Banks: It is rather like a burglar coming back and offering someone five quid.

Dr. Marek: My hon. Friend is right.

Conservative Members are fond of asking whether the next Labour Government will be able to provide the investment that has hitherto taken place in British Rail. I think that we will. Investment between 1974 and 1979 under the previous Labour Government at constant 1995 prices was just under £1 billion. It was less under the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), when it was perhaps £700 million. Unfortunately, between 1980 and 1984, investment went down, and reached the £600 million mark one year. It is true that, between 1989 and 1993, the figure has been more than £1 billion, but in 1993-94 it went down to £663 million—a catastrophic decline for which the Conservative party is entirely responsible.

Average investment has been about £1 billion. That £1 billion should not all come from the public sector. I agree with the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) that there must be a partnership between the private and public sectors. Preferably, the public sector borrowing requirement rules should be redrawn, especially where there is a clear case of a resulting return on capital investment. If such a return was reasonably certain, whether it was public or private would not matter. I am keen that that should happen.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) I have an interest to declare. I am not sponsored by ASLEF, but I am sponsored by the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers—roughly, according to what the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) said, under the same conditions. I certainly speak for the union members because they want a decent railway system, high motivation and to serve the public. I also speak for my constituency, for my constituents in Wrexham and, in this case, for nearly everyone in the United Kingdom.

Dr. Spink: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the last time the Labour party applied those novel management methods to the PSBR, inflation reached 27 per cent., Britain was bankrupt and my constituents were impoverished?

Dr. Marek: I would not use the word asinine, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will think about what he has said a little more carefully. One can borrow for items on which there is no return and no hope of any return, and for others on which there is a good return—almost a guaranteed return—over the life of the investment, which may be anything from 20 to 40 years. We must be a little more intelligent about this and stop only those investments for which there is no guaranteed return.

I do not believe that, under privatisation, there is any real prospect of a lot of rolling stock. There is certainly no prospect of an early upgrade of the west coast main line. I do not think that trains will run from Euston to Manchester in less than two hours. The regulator will not help. He is not there just for the travelling public; he is also there to enable the franchisees to make profits. Nor will there be cuts in subsidies.

What can be done? The only answer is that Railtrack must be in public ownership. The system can be regulated more toughly, but it cannot be integrated without a publicly owned Railtrack in the major part of the network. That is the crucial part. We can do what we like by way of regulation, but franchisees will still compete against each other and revenue will have to be raised by obtaining more passengers or by being commercially enterprising.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ladywood that it is premature to say exactly what we will do. We should wait for the prospectus to be issued for the flotation of Railtrack. I agree with what is probably most City opinion, and certainly that of the hon. Member for Eastleigh. I am sure that the Labour party will say that it will take Railtrack back into public ownership, whether by taking the voting shares from the company, by demanding equity for subsidy, or simply by taking back the shares—the Government cannot spend the money that quickly if Railtrack is sold in the autumn—but without paying for any of the dealing costs or other associated expenses associated with the share distribution.

If we do that, I am confident that we shall ensure that Railtrack is not sold and that the flotation will not take place. That is a prerequisite. After that, Britain must

[Dr. Marek]

demand a proper, integrated, functioning railway. The debate about the car is now taking place and changes are being made. The Government realise that we cannot build more and more roads because they simply suck in more and more traffic. We need a debate about how we transport our people and goods up and down the land. An integrated publicly owned and publicly accountable railway will be part of the future and part of that debate.

5.48 pm

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a few comments in this interesting debate. I welcome the privatisation of rail services for the reasons on which my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) touched. Like all other privatisations, rail privatisation will improve the service that the public receive, improve the management of the business, lower the cost to the public of using the service and enhance investment in it.

The Opposition say that the Conservative party is driven by dogma in wishing to privatise and franchise rail services, but that is far from the truth. We are driven by a desire for rising investment, better services and more use of the railways. I represent a constituency that is riven by two motorways. I know as well as anyone the damage that cars do to the environment and the pollution that they cause, so the matter is of great concern to my constituents. I deplore the fact that, under nationalisation—despite the £54 billion that has been poured into the industry since 1948—there has been such a dramatic decline in rail use by passengers and for freight.

Nationalisation of the railways has not worked; it has been an unmitigated disaster. It is not dogma that drives Conservatives to want to see the liberalising effects of privatisation, but an urgent desire to see an improvement in the service. If we are looking for dogma, we should look to the Labour party, as its only solution to the problems of the rail network is to renationalise it.

It is one thing to have principles and to believe in state control—I understand that some Labour Members are still prepared openly to admit to that—but it is quite another to offer as the only response to the declining use of rail the very formula that has proved such a disastrous failure in the past.

My constituents want investment. They want the investment that privatisation can harness. They want the £1 billion a year that Railtrack has said that it will invest in renewal and maintenance work in the 10 years following privatisation. Instead of endlessly escalating prices, they want fares pegged to the rate of inflation for the next three years, and to below inflation for the four years after that. They want independent regulation of service standards. They want the statutory protection that privatisation will introduce for the very first time.

The fact that British Rail was accountable to nobody for the service that it provided probably accounts for the fact that, in many cases, that service was famously deplorable. Under nationalisation, British Rail became a national joke, an emblem of British decline—the British disease. People were fed up with being left standing on cold, dark platforms with no information, not knowing when the next train was coming, and not knowing when they would get home or get to work. It was a peculiar hell invented by British Rail. It even reached the stage where Saatchi and Saatchi, I think, launched a campaign, for which the slogan was, "Sorry seems to be the hardest word". It certainly was for British Rail because, instead of sorry, all too often we got a shrug as the member of staff shuffled off to get another cup of tea.

My constituents want an end to the restrictive practice that have flourished under the vast, monolithic structure that was BR. As with so many other nationalised industries, the overriding feeling of the people who used the service was that it was run for the benefit of the employees, not the users. Under privatisation, all that will change. To be successful, the new franchisees will have to make themselves attractive. That means investing more in equipment and people. In the private sector, the old BR shrug simply will not do.

It is extremely sad that, whereas in 1953 24 per cent. of all goods were carried by rail, only 5 per cent. are today. We all want more goods to be carried by rail. The Railways Act 1993 will help substantially and the greater flexibility that is being introduced should encourage more freight on to rail. In that context, I commend the work of the piggyback consortium—

Mr. Wilson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have noticed in the Register of Members' Interests that the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) is a consultant to S. G. Warburg Group plc, which is advising Railtrack on the flotation. Do you think that the hon. Gentleman should have declared an interest?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is purely and simply a matter for the hon. Gentleman concerned. Hon. Members know the rules of the House, including the new rules.

Mr. Ainsworth: I have had no discussions of any kind with S. G. Warburg on the subject of Railtrack. Had I done so, I would of course had made that clear earlier in my remarks.

I return to the subject of the piggyback consortium, which includes 40 freight operators, port and terminal operators and local authorities, who have got together to develop a scheme that will increase dramatically the capacity of the rail network to carry fright at relatively little extra cost. I commend the work that it is doing and I wish it well.

That is more than I can say for the proposal by Central Railways, which involves the construction of 180 miles of new railway between Leicestershire and Calais. There is growing evidence to show that that proposal is technically flawed and economically dubious. In the meantime, it is causing severe blight to my constituents and those of other hon. Members the length of the line. The best thing that I can say about it is that I hope that it reaches an early resolution. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister is listening carefully to these remarks.

In the meantime, I support the Government's proposals. I shall vote with them tonight. I sincerely hope that privatisation of the railways will lead to improved services—I believe that it will—better standards and a better rail system for Britain.

5.56 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) should have declared the fact that he was a parliamentary affairs

consultant to S. G. Warburg, which was employed to give advice on merchant banking; we would have been interested to know about that. A range of hon. Members are listed as working as parliamentary consultants to the merchant bank advisers to the privatisation proposals. It is no wonder that they are so in favour of privatisation—they have done very well out of it already. The hon. Gentleman gave a grotesque view of British Rail's past, showing that he knows little of its history. I do not know what the quality of his advice to Warburg was, but I certainly would not want to pay for it in used railway tickets.

I do not want to be controversial, but rail privatisation is total lunacy. It makes no sense whatever, however it is examined. It is not based on any rational transport or economic arguments, and none of the arguments for it has persuaded the public that it makes any sense. If there is any sanity left on the Conservative Benches, the Government would abandon this proposal, because clearly it is not doing them any electoral favours. No other country in Europe—despite the Secretary of State's comments on the split between the railways and the operators in other countries—is splitting its railway system into all these organisations. No one would follow that crazy example. If any countries were so doing, the Minister would have been able to answer my question.

The procedure is pretty straightforward. The Government scrap British Rail's debt—a debt that is owed to the people of this country because the money was borrowed. We deserve to see it coming back to us, as we would expect if we had lent money to any other concern. Having scrapped the debt, they sell the assets at knock-down prices. Even the lunatics on the Conservative Benches could sell the assets, because they have discounted them heavily. We know that Railtrack was originally valued at about £6.5 billion. The Government are prepared to accept about £1.5 billion. I would like to know what the real figure is. Perhaps the Minister will tell us how much they are prepared to accept for Railtrack. It will not be anything like the £6.5 billion valuation.

Private operators receive subsidy to the tune of an extra £700 million—from taxpayers again. What sort of privatisation is it when the Government sell off an industry cheap and still expect those who have had their assets taken away to continue to subsidise the private operator?

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Would the hon. Gentleman care to remind the House which union he is sponsored by, and does it invest any of its pension fund money in privatised companies?

Mr. Banks: I am sponsored by the Transport and General Workers Union and I have not faintest idea where it puts its income. If the hon. Gentleman wants to find out, he can read its annual report in the Library. Will he then tell me how we can ever find out who puts money into the Tory party, which will not publish its accounts and show which crooks and fascists from abroad invest in it? The hon. Gentleman should not lecture us about honesty and openness in accountancy, either in the unions or the political party. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I feel much better for that.

This is a lunatic proposal. The Government propose to split a unified railway system into dozens of competing units. As I said, no other European country is doing so. I challenge the Minister to tell us which other European country is doing that—I want him to name them specifically.

Mr. Watts: I am happy to do so: Sweden, Germany and Holland, to name but three, are splitting their infrastructure from the operation of services. They have divided services between inter-city, freight and regional railways and they intend to privatise them. No doubt, as they develop the details of their policy, they will want to follow the successful model that we are implementing in this country.

Mr. Banks: That is fanciful nonsense. If that is the Minister's answer to my direct question about which country is breaking up its railways into different, competing parts, as we are doing, he has not answered the question.

Ms Short: It is misleading for the Minister to quote Sweden and Holland in particular, which we have examined as attractive models that seek to reduce track access costs so that road and rail can compete equally and which have two public sector companies. To suggest that that is anything like the Government's proposals is an outrage.

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend again makes the point that the Government have been revealed as being prepared to deceive themselves and the country about this privatisation. The railway system will be disorganised and unco-ordinated if it is ever split up.

I get angry when I hear the argument about the lack of investment in British Rail. Yes, there has been a lack of investment. The hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) complained about the line in his constituency and the lack of investment in the past 15 years. Has it ever occurred to him that, in that time, his party has been in government? Why does he not blame his party for failing to invest in his British Rail line, as he has a right to do?

The Government say that the private sector will invest resources. Where is the logic in that? If private investors can profitably invest in the railways, why cannot the state equally do so? The only reason why it has not done so is that the Government would not permit it. The Government deprive undertakings and nationalised industries of investment possibilities, services become less efficient and the Government then say, "Oh, we must privatise industries because they are inefficient and they have failed to invest properly." The Government are responsible, however, for the failure to invest in British Rail and in all the other sectors that we have discussed. We know that the Government can always borrow money far more cheaply than any private company car. If they had had the will to invest, investment could have been made.

The Government have failed to invest in the railways and public transport generally. I could go on for a long time, but I will not—my few minutes are almost up. I should like to take Ministers around London, not in the armour-plated, plush limousines in which they get chauffeured around London but on the underground, on British Rail—what is left of it—in the south-east or on the clapped-out buses that belch out fumes and poison Londoners 24 hours a day. They might then not be so complacent about travel, railways or privatisation.

[Mr. Banks]

I am not a Front Bencher. I had a moment of glory a few minutes ago when I was left in charge at the Dispatch Box, when I thought that I discharged my duties very responsibly, but I do not have to be cautious and responsible in what I say. I say to my hon. Friends that, if I were in charge of my party, I would tell potential asset strippers of the railways that the buyer should beware and that legalised robbery by the Government of taxpayers' assets would be countered by a Labour Government taking back into public ownership all the assets at a discounted purchase price—assets that have been stripped out of industries that the Government gave to companies at a knockdown price. I would do so—this is a Liberal party suggestion as well, although my proposal is more radical—through interest-bearing bonds that would be redeemed in the future.

Who would be upset by the policy? It would not be the people whom I represent in the east end or, I suspect, the majority of people in this country. It would, however, certainly put off the asset strippers, the fat cats and the City slickers who just stand around waiting to cream off industries at the public's expense.

This is a lunatic set of proposals coming from a Government who have clearly lost all control of time, opportunity, policy and their senses.

6.5 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): I do not know about you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but for me this debate has a strange sense of déjà vu, both in terms of the Opposition's arguments and of the debate on classification between my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) and the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson). There may be a case for another ten-minute Bill to classify the Opposition horror stories that we have been hearing, especially from the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). They would be classified as fiction by any librarian, that is for sure.

Nostalgia, we often hear, ain't what it used to be, but we will be able to look back on today with great nostalgia. This is the last opportunity for Labour to peddle its horror stories with even a semblance of credibility outside this place, because when we next return to the subject the franchise operators will be providing services. Two are already up and running and we do not know what they will do yet, but we will have evidence gained over a sustained period of the improved service quality that they will deliver.

Mr. Wilson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This relates to my previous point of order. Would it be in order for the hon. Gentleman to declare the rail privatisation interest of Lowe Bell Communications?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, hon. Members know full well the rules of the House. It is matter for them what they declare, or otherwise.

Mr. Luff: I am not even aware of the rail privatisation interest to which the hon. Gentleman refers. I advise the Chamber of Shipping through Lowe Bell Communications and no one else.

The current edition of *The Economist* states:

"privatisation . . . is more likely to be a consumer's dream—the start of a new era which will revolutionise Britain's under-invested railway network. Those who jeered that rail privatisation would never get rolling have already had to eat their words.

Even discounting the better management that privatisation should bring, assured levels of subsidy and a stable fare-structure can hardly fail to deliver improved performance."

I say, "Amen to that."

I am already beginning to receive evidence in my constituency of improved service by Great Western Trains. I was delighted to receive a letter on 3 January from its managing director, Brian Scott, who said:

"I am confident you will see a nice balance between continuity and innovation."

That is precisely the point of privatisation. He goes on:

"As far as the Worcester area is concerned we aim to heighten our profile, including the use of local advertising. In order to spearhead this, I am appointing a Cotswolds Business Manager with special responsibility for Worcester, Hereford and the Cotswold Lines."—*[Interruption.]*

Is that not interesting? Labour Front Benchers laugh at attempts to increase rail travel. I thought that that was what they wanted. It is certainly what I want. Their laughter speaks volumes for what they are really up to in this debate.

This morning I received another fax from Mr. Scott. I had asked him about the early experience of rail privatisation. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members can barrack all they want. They do not like the truth—I know that it hurts them. The truth is that privatisation is already bringing benefits. Mr. Scott says of Great Western Trains:

"It . . . faced severe weather problems on its second full weekday of operation. With large sections of motorway and airports in the region closed, Great Western Trains was able to run 99 per cent. of its trains (one Hereford to Paddington cancellation only). Only 5 out of the 133 trains run were over half an hour late despite horrendous weather conditions.

There was excellent co-operation between Railtrack and Great Western Trains who were also able to assist other (BR owned) Train Operating Companies in difficulties by making four additional station calls."

That demolishes the myth that there would be a lack of co-operation between railway companies. We saw co-operation in action yesterday, and it delivered people to their destinations, against the odds.

That myth is but one of a number that I want to demolish. The second myth is the idea of massive fraud. Of course, no part of any nationalised industry has ever suffered any fraud or inefficiency whatever; no constituency Labour party has ever been implicated in any fraud whatever—for the benefit of readers of *Hansard*, I am saying that ironically. In fact, taxpayers have been ripped off by nationalisation.

The third myth is that privatisation will mean a worse service. I heard your ruling earlier, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about not being able to draw too many parallels with other privatisations, but I had personal experience of British Telecom this weekend when my telephone went wrong, and there has been a revolution in the service quality that it delivers. That will happen on the railways, too.

In my constituency even the preparation for privatisation has led to timetables that, for the first time in living memory, give bus connections, to improved timetable displays at stations, to better on-board services on trains and—I say this with no sense of apology—

to guaranteed services between Worcester and London, for the first time ever. The passenger service requirements, much derided by Opposition spokesmen, provide my constituents with a guarantee of express trains to London. Privatisation means better services, not worse.

The fourth myth is rather an odd one. It is that trade unions do not like privatisation. On the contrary, it seems that they do. We have heard a lot of evidence about their investments in privatised utilities, and the investors include even the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers. Will the unions extend that love of the privatised utilities and buy shares in Railtrack? I hope that they will. Then we shall safely be able to say that it will be a case of "do as we do", as well as "do as we say".

The fifth myth, and probably the one that it is most important to demolish, is the Opposition's fanciful claim that nationalised industries are more responsive than the private sector. Of course they are not. I looked back at a debate that took place in the House on 15 December 1952. The Committee stage of the Transport Bill was being taken on the Floor of the House when the then Member for Wolverhampton, South-West, Mr. J. Enoch Powell, quoted from a Fabian Society pamphlet about the railways published two years earlier, in 1950. It said:

"The paramount fact of centralisation"

of the railways

"is the remoteness of those responsible for taking important decisions from those whom they affect . . . The term 'management' indicates, not an organisation of human beings, but an amorphous mass of anonymous individuals with 'no soul to save and no backside to kick'."

Later Mr. Powell said:

"British Railways at present are an organisation employing over 600,000 men and the responsibility for decisions in the whole of the system is substantially centralised. No commercial undertaking of so embracing a character as British Railways would endeavour to conduct that undertaking in the top-heavy fashion of British Railways as organised at present".

That top-heavy organisation endured for 40 years, and only now are we beginning to see the end of that ridiculous situation.

Perhaps most tellingly of all, Mr. Powell quoted a letter from an engine driver living in Wolverhampton, which still rings true 44 years later:

"Railway employees prior to 1948"—

[Interruption.] The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) would do well to listen to this, because it might remove the smile from his face, for once. The letter said:

"Railway employees prior to 1948 were, unfortunately, for the most part adamantly Socialistic. They have now received an effective dose of Socialism in practice, and verily, it has proved a penetrating lesson. They see with scorn an ever-growing superfluity of officials and inspectors, a daily deterioration in efficiency and a relentless intensification of muddle."

That is exactly what nationalisation led to—not to responsiveness but to a lack of responsiveness, and to remoteness.

According to Mr. Powell, the Fabian Society pamphlet concluded that

"some form of de-centralisation of management into smaller regions, each under a manager having overall responsibility for all departments, is preferable to the present centralised administration."—[*Official Report*, 15 December 1952; Vol. 509, c. 1071-76.]

The Fabian Society got it nearly right 40 years ago: Opposition Front Benchers would do well to listen.

The official history of the Great Western Railway makes exactly the same point when it says:

"For the railwaymen at large on the Western, nationalisation meant a remote British Transport Commission, headed by people of whom they had never heard, a Railway Executive manned by people only one of whom they knew, and a Western management who obviously would go on playing the traditional tunes."

There was no increased responsiveness there.

The sixth and final myth is the argument that investment will be jeopardised by privatisation, but is guaranteed by nationalisation. The history of the railways shows that one of the real problems with nationalisation was that it destroyed investment. After nationalisation, southern region could not pursue its electrification programme, as it should have been allowed to do.

The official business history of British Railways, written by Dr. T. R. Gourvish with the sanction of the British Railways Board, said the following about the first 25 years of nationalisation:

"The early years of nationalisation were a bleak period in terms of investment, and many writers have traced some of the railways' enduring problems to this situation."

It then mentions one or two academic experts, one of whom,

"Ken Gwilliam, also a transport economist, emphasised the difficulties caused by the accumulated disinvestment of the war and early post-war years, the result, he thought, of both the inadequacy of the war-time financial arrangements and the attitude of the post-war Labour Government. 'Facing inflationary pressure . . . [the government had] deemed that investment in railways was an expendable item in the short run.'"

That is the dilemma that will always face Governments of any political colour, who must choose between hospitals, schools and railways. It is one of the principal reasons for putting the railways into the private sector. In terms of investment Labour failed the railways in the early crucial days of the nationalised industry. Nationalisation failed the railways.

Labour asks us to believe that everything is different now, and that now it would do as it says, not as it did then. That is not a very plausible argument. I have one simple question to ask the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short). Would Labour invest more in the railways? Yes or no.

Ms Short: Yes.

Mr. Luff: Ah, a pledge. Labour would invest more in the railways. How pleased I am to hear something concrete at last.

Ms Short: Read my speech.

Mr. Luff: How much more? That is the next obvious question to ask.

Mr. Tony Banks: Do not exchange comments with a trainspotter.

Mr. Luff: We hear no more about the amount. Perhaps to expect more would be asking too much—but I am grateful to the hon. Lady for what she did say.

[Mr. Luff]

One very distinguished figure connected with the railways is the Rev. W. Awdry, whose works are well known to the children of this country. He once observed:

"There are two ways of running a railway; the Great Western way and the wrong way".

I am glad that the Great Western now has the chance to do it the right way again.

6.17 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I shall not take any interventions. I am not sponsored by a railway union, but in the abortive legal action that I tried to undertake before Christmas in an attempt to halt the franchising of the London-Tilbury-Southend line the rail unions gave me some assistance with legal expenses.

I am implacably opposed in principle to privatisation of the railways, but, putting that aside, many people who welcome the concept of privatisation still consider the Government's method barmy and foolhardy in the extreme—and that includes some Conservative Members of Parliament. The Conservative-dominated Transport Select Committee has often cautioned the Government about the prudence of the course on which they were embarked, citing especially the problems of inter-ticketing and the transfer of revenues between rail operators.

I am a member of the Transport Select Committee. During hearings, I asked the then Secretary of State for Transport—the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor)—and the chairman of the British Railways Board how there could be transparency and probity when management teams were preparing and marshalling bids at the same time as they were running the railways. That problem is emerging in relation to the LTS line.

The Secretary of State has not given adequate information, to which we are entitled, on when the alleged scam was discovered, by whom, when it began and how widespread it is. It is not sufficient to say that auditors have been called in. He should be able to give us much more information and reassure us that similar problems do not arise—

Mr. Luff: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) said that he was not sponsored. Although I accept that an entry in the Register of Members' Interests may change, the register shows clearly that at least a year ago he was sponsored by the Transport and General Workers Union.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think that this is the fourth time that a similar point of order has been raised. I have ruled on each occasion. Hon. Members know full well that it is their responsibility to declare interests—indeed, it is a rule of the House that they should do so.

Mr. Mackinlay: The hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) will notice in *Hansard* tomorrow that I said with great precision that I was not sponsored by any rail unions. I went on to declare the absolute extent of my involvement with them, which was an attempt to frustrate the decision to franchise LTS in the High Court. The hon. Member really should know the difference. He is a silly Member and I regret that he felt it necessary to interrupt in such a way.

I regret that there have been diversions into people's film careers and into other privatisations and that hon. Members have not addressed the central problems, which is what I will do and why I shall not give way. What reassurance do we have that other similar alleged scams or problems will not arise in interfaces with rail operators such as Thameslink, Network SouthCentral and even down as far as Exeter station? The problems with ticketing and fares could arise again and we want assurances that they will not.

How sure is the Secretary of State that what is clearly an irregularity has not interfered with the tendering process? Can he assure us that it has not given some advantage to Enterprise Rail? If he does not know, he should say so. If he can say that there was no problem, he should do so from the Dispatch Box.

Some Enterprise Rail staff have left the company or been suspended. We are told that Mr. Colin Andrews, the commercial director, has departed. On what terms did he leave? If he resigned, terms must have been established. Has he offered a reason for his resignation? Above all, I want an assurance that no money has been advanced as a sweetener, either for his silence or his swift departure. Mr. Andrews' deputy, the commercial manager, has been suspended. Two area managers, better known as station masters—one at Fenchurch Street and one at Upminster—have also been suspended, as well as two others in the commercial department.

In my experience as a trade union official before I entered the House, it was common place for people to be suspended for two reasons: first, so that they would not be able to influence an inquiry and, secondly, in their own interests to be able to demonstrate that they would not be able to influence an inquiry. Therefore, why has not the managing director, Mr. Kinchin-Smith, been suspended? I do not rush to judge him; I know him. It would be in the interests of everybody, however, including him, if he were not at his desk. Clearly, it is inappropriate for him to stay. Will the Secretary of State tell us why Mr. Kinchin-Smith is still at work?

Mr. Kinchin-Smith was also the architect of the penalty fares scheme. When he was running the LTS line, I told him that many of my constituents considered the scheme foolhardy in the extreme. Legitimate, fare-paying passengers who had wanted to purchase tickets but were unable to do so because ticket machines, even those issuing permits to travel, were not working were embarrassed by the scheme. The scheme was a charter for people who did not wish to pay but who were prepared occasionally without any embarrassment to fork out £10.

It has been discovered that the scheme that Mr. Kinchin-Smith introduced and which he described as the greatest thing since sliced bread has been arbitrarily abandoned. I want to know why. Was London Underground receiving its just receipts? Was it consulted about the abandonment? Were there irregularities in the handling and ending of the penalty fares scheme and, if so, are they the subject of further investigation?

Reference has been made to the franchising director. The Secretary of State has said that he wants the investigation to be conducted thoroughly, and I expect no less of him. When I was spying on the franchising director at Waterloo station on Monday morning, however, he made it abundantly clear to every journalist who was listening that he saw the LTS scandal as a hiccup and

that he hoped—indeed, he was determined—that the LTS franchise would be transferred in three to four weeks' time.

That does not make me confident that the franchising director is not pre-judging the inquiry. Indeed, I regard him as a puppet of the political machine. He is prepared to play the Government's tune, keep his head down and remain determined that the franchise will go through, regardless of what may be discovered. He should resign or be sacked because there is little or no confidence in his stewardship of the LTS franchise and there is little or no confidence in any of the other franchises that have been let.

Unhappily, the South West Trains franchise was wrongly allowed to go ahead on Sunday. The management team, under Mr. Peter Field, marshalled a bid, but it was inconceivable that the Government and the franchising director would let two management bids go ahead. Clearly, room in the garden was guaranteed for Stagecoach and other operators. I am deeply concerned about the way in which the management team at South West Trains was overlooked. It had all the hallmarks of the franchising arrangements for independent television, which resulted in Thames Television's quality bid suffering.

I also noticed on Monday, amid all the trumpeting about two franchises being let, that a Stagecoach bus was parked close to platform 13. I thought that that was a sign of things to come. Inevitably, over time, Stagecoach will reduce its rail services and introduce coaches if it is allowed to get away with it.

For a number of years I had to spend a great deal of time at Surbiton station. I remember it well. The announcement used to go something like this: "The train arriving on platform 3 will call at Esher, Hersham, Walton, Weybridge, West Weybridge, West Byfleet and Woking. Join the front four cars for Brookwood, Ash Vale, Aldershot, Farnham, Bentley and Alton. The other part of the train is for Worplesdon, Guildford, Farncombe, Godalming, Milford, Witley, Haslemere, Liphook, Liss, Petersfield, Rowlands Castle, Havant, Bedhampton, Fratton and Portsmouth and trains to the Isle of Wight."

Trains would also go to Hinchley Wood, Claygate, Oxshott, Cobham, Effingham Junction, Horsley, Clandon, London Road and Guildford, and going the other way they would stop at Berrylands, New Malden, Raynes Park, Wimbledon, Earlsfield, Clapham Junction, Vauxhall and Waterloo.

I cite that list because the areas from which many of those great stations take their names are represented by Conservatives Members of Parliament. It needs to be borne in mind that many of those stations will disappear if the franchises are allowed to endure. Where are the right hon. and hon. Members who represent such constituencies as South-West Surrey, Epsom and Ewell, Kingston upon Thames, Richmond and Barnes, Twickenham, Mole Valley and North-West Surrey to speak up for the maintenance of services that will disappear when South West Trains, under Stagecoach, has been operating for a few months and decides that it is necessary to close intermediate stations and end off-peak services? That is what is threatened—if not promised—by the insistence on Stagecoach being awarded the franchise for South West Trains.

When, in a few years' time, people complain that their services have gone, I will point an accusing finger at Conservative Members who acquiesced and voted for the surrender of our rail services to Stagecoach, a bus company. Tory Members have either boasted about it here today or denied their constituents an opportunity to have their views articulated in the House, because they were not here.

6.29 pm

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) on that virtuoso performance. During his routine involving the lists of stations, I was afraid that he was going to burst into song. If I remember, the next two lines went:

"Never paid my fare, man
had no worries nor cares, man".

Fortunately, I am sure that that was not the case with my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend's speech was in marked contrast to that of the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff), whose speech gave us a fair indication of why the Tories are in such a disastrous position. Frankly, if he had made that arrogant and complacent speech in defence of rail privatisation at virtually any public gathering in the country, he would have been laughed at in derision. Only here could he be heard, in at least half the premises, with relative respect.

Listening to all the Tory Members with vested interests, I thought that it might not be a bad idea if we adopted some football terminology. In the same way as there is the Beazer Homes League, we had visits earlier from the Hill Samuel right hon. Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor), the S. G. Warburg hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Atkinson) and, of course, the Lowe Bell hon. Member for Worcester. The idea that vested interests in the House lie among Members on this side of the Chamber, rather than the Tory side—*[Interruption.]* Of course there are Opposition Members with interests, but I can tell Members where the money is in terms of interests—it is on the Tory side of the Chamber. The Tories are up to their eyes in vested interests in the privatisation of the railways. Perhaps that is why there is such enthusiasm for privatisation among the tiny number of Conservative Members assembled here tonight.

When the Railways Bill was in Committee, I invented a hypothetical private railway company called Spivrail. Tory Members who had sat mute throughout the Committee's proceedings were moved at that point to voluble protest. "What an insult to the ranks of private enterprise," they cried. But in fact, that is exactly what has been put in place—a railway for spivs handed over to them by the Government of sleaze. One more fraud investigation and we may even rename it Sleazerail.

In reality, life has improved upon art. Not even I had anticipated such a series of humiliating fiascos for Ministers in the earliest days of rail privatisation. Let us look at the first three franchises offered. The preferred bidders for Great Western—Resurgence Railways—had to be dropped after we exposed the fact that the managing director had just run a double glazing firm into liquidation, leaving a trail of debt behind it.

The franchising director, who was very accurately portrayed by my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock, employs hundreds of lawyers at £250 an hour and more to drive the measure through. Why did none of them uncover that minor difficulty in the background of

[Mr. Brian Wilson]

Resurgence Railways? Personally, I thought it a reasonable idea to check with Companies House, and there was the information available for anyone who wanted to find it. But the Tories, of course, did not want to find it.

At that point, the South West franchise had to be juggled. Otherwise, Ministers would have ended up with three management buy-outs, which would not have said a lot about the level of private sector interest. So Stagecoach suddenly became the preferred bidder—the company with the worst record of anti-competitive practices in the United Kingdom. I can tell the House that the people of the south and south-west ain't seen nothing yet. In Southampton, for instance, Stagecoach is remembered as the company to which the Tories sold the bus company for less than the value of the local bus station, which the entrepreneurial Stagecoach promptly sold off for development. The result is that, to this day, Southampton does not have a bus station. Let us hope that there is some safeguard in the franchise agreement preventing Stagecoach from selling the railway station.

Then we move on to fiasco No. 3—the London-Tilbury-Southend line—and what a cracker that is. Spivrail does indeed live. I love the names that the companies come up with—Resurgence Rail, Enterprise Rail, Victory Rail, Thatcher Rail. How many more of these names will we have? It really is a case of the louder they talk of their honour, the faster we should count the trains as they disappear.

Let us be clear about what has happened with Spivrail—or rather, the London-Tilbury-Southend line, or Enterprise Rail. There has been an absolutely predictable development following the tearing apart of our national rail network into dozens of fragments, each of which owes loyalty only to itself and its prospective shareholders.

Dr. Spink: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Gentleman to use the word "spiv"? He is tarring the employees and the management team of that railway line, and he is prejudicing the inquiry that is taking place. Shame on the hon. Gentleman—

Madam Speaker: Order. I have heard nothing that was out of order. I often say in this House that Members are responsible for their own comments.

Mr. Wilson: It was nice to hear from the prisoner's friend.

In the case of the LTS line, the alleged victim was London Underground, but when the Consumers Association recently checked up on the fares being offered where more than one operator was involved, it was clear that the victims were undoubtedly—there are no allegations here—the passengers. A fragmented railway is a bad deal for the taxpayer and for the passenger, and every day that passes confirms the basic lesson that we were preaching when the Railways Bill was introduced.

I wish to make a small inquiry about the LTS scandal. Will the Minister confirm that when the consultants who check travel patterns went to Upminster in December to carry out a routine check, they found that the relevant records had been removed to Southend? The consultants, by whose assessments the fare revenue is divided up between the operators, were then dependent on information provided by LTS management, rather than randomly selected information. Does that not suggest a degree of premeditation? Why was no action taken on that by the franchising director?

There is a massive vested interest and conflict of interest involved for management teams in the proposed buy-outs. They have all the time and incentive in the world to put schemes in place for the post-privatisation period at the same time as they are supposedly running a public sector railway. That is the problem with management buy-out teams.

I have two proposals to make today. First, in light of what we have learned over the past few days, the embarrassment that the Government have suffered and the clear evidence that this is not restricted to just one franchising operation or prospective operation, the franchising operation should be suspended in its entirety until the investigations are complete. I do not expect the Tories to yield to that, as they are into the scorched earth phase and are trying to push the measure through.

Secondly, as soon as a management buy-out team has notified its interest as a prospective bidder, it should cease to be the management team for that railway until the franchise has been awarded. If that is not done, conflicts of interest will continue to arise.

I have worked with people from all parties in the past three years who have a common concern for our railways. One of those was the late Robert Adley. Two nights before he died, I met Robert Adley in the Member's Lobby. He patted his inside pocket with immense satisfaction and said, "I have got them here—the amendments signed by six Tory Members." Using a code that most of us here will understand, I asked him, "Including the right to bid?" "Of course," he said, "That is the one that matters—that will kill the whole thing."

Two days later, Robert Adley was dead, and the tragedy of historic proportions was that there was no Tory Member to take his place. If there had been, the subsequent course of events would have been very different. The right of British Rail to bid for franchises was, as Robert Adley rightly identified, crucial. If it had had that right, it would have won the franchises—it is as simple as that. That was also recognised by Lords Peyton and Clinton-Davis, and others from all parties who pursued that amendment in the House of Lords.

Eventually, in what seemed at the time to be a success, the Government were forced to concede the principle—although, as always, the precise wording of the amendment was crucial. In the absence of an Adley to hold out for more, the amendment was written to the advantage of those whose aim was still to destroy British Rail and the national rail network. Nine franchises have now been offered, and in each and every case British Rail has been denied the right to bid. In other words, the will of Parliament was cynically and systematically negated to satisfy the obsession with privatisation at all costs.

I hoped that one or two Tory Members might be loyal to the memory of Robert Adley and might do something about it now that the scale of the affront is apparent. Judging from what we have heard today, however, I probably hoped in vain. The refusal to allow British Rail to bid is an affront to Parliament. Parliament would not

have given the Government their legislation without that apparent concession. The Government should never forget that.

Privatisation is a rotten deal for the taxpayer, who has been forced to pay private operators more than British Rail would have required for the same level of service in order to satisfy Ministers' ideological spite. It is also a tragedy for the people who work for the railways, thousands of whom will pay for the franchising process with their jobs. *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State mutters from a sedentary position. He complained earlier about being called a right-wing ideologue. Give me a real right-wing ideologue any day rather than a bogus liberal without any principles who plays the role of a right-wing ideologue because that is the prevailing mood of the moment.

If the Secretary of State wants to regain his credentials as the bicycling baronet rather than the right-wing ideologue, there is a simple test for him. He should reopen the LTS franchising procedure and give British Rail the right to bid. Does he have the guts to do that? I doubt it very much—but that is how he will be judged, not on his own self-image.

I am grateful to a financial journalist named Michael Walters of the *Daily Mail* for what is undoubtedly the best definition of Railtrack privatisation that I have yet seen. He wrote with disarming honesty:

> "Beneath the financial filigree, Railtrack is a conduit for distributing State moneys to private investors. All being well, the train operating companies collect subsidies and pass them to Railtrack to pay as dividends to shareholders."

There you have it. I particularly like the phrase "all being well".

For anyone deluded enough to believe that rail privatisation has anything to do with quality of service, Mr. Walters was again very helpful in clarifying the position. He wrote:

> "Forget the frustrations which can actually attend travelling by train. The service itself scarcely counts in the flotation of Railtrack. What matters most is the quality of the financial engineering. The bankers understand that the less popular Railtrack appears, the more of a bargain they will have to make it."

On that point at least, the Tories have triumphed. They are the ultimate financial engineers. Through four Secretaries of State, their success in discrediting rail privatisation could scarcely have been improved upon. In those terms, it has worked.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) pointed out, for the purpose of setting access charges the assets of Railtrack were found to be worth £6.5 billion. On that foundation, the whole lunatic system of access charges was based. Now the talk is of selling it off for perhaps a quarter of that. That is financial engineering of the highest quality. It is also part of the reason why Labour cannot and will not acquiesce in the sale of Railtrack.

Let us look at just one example in the most recent piece of financial engineering. The Minister may wish to explain the thinking behind it. Understandably, Railtrack does not want to be liable for compensation to train operators. So, incredibly, the Treasury is to give more money to the train operators so that they can pay it to Railtrack in supplementary access charges, so that Railtrack can pay it back to the train operators as compensation. The net cost to the taxpayer of that one device will be £84 million in the first year and some £250 million over five years. Let the House be absolutely sure of the bottom line: the Government may be privatising, but in the case of the railways it is the taxpayer who is footing the bill. That is the factor which distinguishes rail privatisation from all previous privatisations and it is crucial in relation to Labour's intentions.

Why should the taxpayer fund the profits of a privately owned Railtrack rather than see every penny of his or her contribution to the railways go into the creation of better, more modern services? What conceivable case is there for the proceeds from the property assets of Railtrack to be converted in future into shareholders' dividends and boardroom salaries rather than ploughed back 100 per cent. into railway investment? Let any potential investor note those words: 100 per cent. There is no such justification, moral, financial or political.

Mr. Riddick: The Leader of the Opposition has talked about his desire to create a stakeholder economy under a Labour Government. Can the hon. Gentleman tell me what he envisages stakeholding would represent in the railways if there were a Labour Government?

Mr. Wilson: There are many ways of stakeholding. At the moment, we are all stakeholders in the railways. We all share a stake in the railways and we shall always do so because as taxpayers we shall all subsidise them, no matter who owns and operates them. Another way of being a stakeholder in the railways is to work for the railways. If the hon. Gentleman's idea of stakeholding is for Stagecoach to come in and make 1,000 people redundant or for Wisconsin Railways to come in and make 4,000 people redundant, that is not my idea of stakeholding.

The kind of stakeholders whom I respect are not just those who own and profit, but those who work and those who travel. That is my idea of stakeholding. That is the kind of railway that we shall have—an expanding railway. People will be able to look across to the continent and say, "Yes, let us have some of that." No Government of any country in the world would be prepared to sacrifice their railway network on the altar of lunatic, bigoted, dogmatic privatisation. The British people do not want it either.

I make Conservative Members one final promise. Let them go ahead with this if they wish. Let them do the vandalism. Let them carry out the scorched earth policy. But let none of them be unaware that they will pay a high electoral and historic price as the party which, in the face of all rational advice, set out to destroy our national rail network.

6.46 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): The House always enjoys the wild man of the north act from the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), but much less impressive is his failure to explain clearly his party's position. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short), had a chance to do so when she opened the debate and the hon. Gentleman has had a chance to do so in replying to the debate, but he has failed. Perhaps nothing different should be expected of a party which in all things says one thing and does another.

[Mr. John Watts]

I will give the hon. Gentleman an eleventh hour opportunity to answer three key questions. If so-called new Labour ever forms a Government at some time in the future, will Railtrack be renationalised and, if so, how? The hon. Gentleman's leader, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), said at the 1995 Labour party conference that there would be a publicly owned and publicly accountable railway system under a Labour Government. The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), with the honesty that comes from the Back Benches, said that Railtrack must be in public ownership. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) also made his position crystal clear.

On 8 January the hon. Member for Ladywood said:

"It is for this reason that we are committed to a publicly owned railway. There is no other way to protect the national interest. We will announce our plans for Railtrack if and when the prospectus is issued".

Perhaps she will humour us on this side of the House and accept that the prospectus will be issued.

Ms Short: Read my speech.

Mr. Watts: Perhaps the hon. Lady would like to tell the House now.

Ms Short: The Minister can read my speech—it was all in there.

Mr. Watts: I listened carefully and there was not an answer to that question.

Ms Short: The Minister wrote his speech before the debate.

Mr. Watts: I did not, and I have made copious notes as I have listened to the debate.

Would new Labour breach new contracts with private franchise operators? Opposition Members seem to despise such operators. Will the contracts entered into with the first two franchise companies and those that will be entered into with the next four and in subsequent tranches be honoured or not? If investment of more than £1 billion a year by Railtrack plus investment by rolling stock companies and train operating companies is inadequate, how much should be invested and who will pay?

Ms Short: It is extraordinary that the Government, who are in the process of implementing a policy, should assume that they are going to lose the election to Labour and therefore spend the whole debate asking the Labour party what it will do about the mess that the Government have created.

Mr. Watts: The hon. Lady said that I should have listened to her speech. She should have listened with greater care to what I said. I asked the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North three questions—one, two, three—about what would happen if so-called new Labour were ever to form a Government. I note that we have still not had any answers to those questions.

Mr. Wilson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Watts: No.

Mr. Wilson: The Minister asked for answers.

Mr. Watts: If the hon. Gentleman is going to answer the three questions, I willingly give way.

Mr. Wilson: As my hon. Friend the Member for Ladywood said, it is pathetic for the Minister to be asking questions instead of spelling out a policy for the railways. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer, answer."] If Conservative Members say it three times, I will answer three questions.

First, on Railtrack, we will spell out our precise position on the flotation, which we must. Secondly, on the franchises, we have made our position absolutely clear and specifically answered the question that the Minister asked. Thirdly, on rolling stock it is interesting to note that if the Government had accepted our proposals on leasing railway rolling stock years ago, we would not have lost 8,000 manufacturing jobs in the railway industries, the York carriage works would not be closed and we would have new rolling stock on the London-Tilbury-Southend line. We do not have to take lessons on that because we suggested it to the Government.

Mr. Watts: I noted one answer out of three to the questions that I posed. I am glad to hear from the hon. Gentleman that the contracts with franchise operators will be honoured. It is important to hear that from his mouth, as well as from that of the hon. Member for Ladywood, because sometimes it is not clear who is the principal transport spokesman for the Labour party.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) asked whether Labour spoke for the people or for the trade unions. His question shows why we cannot get a clear answer to my other two queries. It is the fear of its trade union masters that prevents the Labour party from spelling out its policy on the renationalisation of Railtrack and its attitude to investment.

We have often heard allegations that the flexibility allowed in passenger service requirements for a commercial franchise would lead to dramatic cuts in services. It is worth spending a couple of minutes examining how, in practice, the first two private operators have planned their services. Great Western, far from slashing services as was predicted time and time again by the Opposition, is committed to continuing to run at least the current number of services and to reducing journey times. That includes services to Fishguard, which I recall were a central feature of one of our earlier debates. There is a commitment to refurbish rolling stock. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North, said earlier from a sedentary position, "Ah, a coat of paint." He could not be more wrong. I was talking to Brian Scott, the managing director of Great Western Holdings, on Monday evening at Paddington station.

Mr. Wilson: South West.

Mr. Watts: It is Great Western—Brian Scott. My facts are correct.

I asked Brian Scott when he was going to introduce new livery on the trains. He said that he was in no hurry to do that because he wanted his customers to have refurbished interiors and more comfort inside the trains before turning his attention to cosmetic treatment of the exteriors of the trains. I take great comfort from that.

In the case of South West Trains and Stagecoach, the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North will know that Stagecoach is planning to maintain the current levels of service and make significant improvements in the reliability and the punctuality of the services that it runs.

I say to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) that Stagecoach has owned South West Trains, by my calculation, for a little under 65 hours. He should be a little more patient and wait to hear details of its investment plans for improving stations and further plans that it may announce in respect of rolling stock. I am sure that the company will be pleased to share its plans in detail with him and with other hon. Members and their constituents whom it serves as customers.

The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), who clearly wants a job as a station announcer—I am sure that he would do it extremely well—asked what assurance there was that there are not other routes where revenue is shared between British Rail subsidiaries and London Underground and where similar irregularities may be taking place. He will have heard my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State explain that in the past few days British Rail has sent its audit teams to all stations where the allocation of revenue between London Underground and British Rail subsidiaries is significant. The result of the checks on those stations revealed one irregularity—at Walthamstow central, involving 30 tickets worth about £250.

The hon. Member for Thurrock also asked me to speculate about the reasons why other employees of LTS Rail have been suspended. It would be unreasonable for me or for anyone else to speculate on reasons for those suspensions until the investigations have been completed and the facts are known. It is unreasonable for those individuals to be placed under suspicion in that way until their role, if any, in those events has been established and we know the full facts.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Watts: No, I am trying to answer the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members and I have only five minutes left.

The hon. Member for Thurrock also asked about prejudging the decision on the subsequent award of the franchise for that service. He will have heard my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State say that the franchising director has assured my right hon. Friend that until he, the rail regulator and British Rail are satisfied that the allegations have been investigated fully there can be no question of a transfer of the franchise and that no decisions will be taken until the outcome of the investigations is known.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) elicited an interesting view from the hon. Member for Eastleigh, who declared himself within a few breaths both as being in favour of privatisation and as wanting Railtrack to remain nationalised. That is typical of the Liberal party—a policy which allows it to face in both directions at the same time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley also mentioned charter services and praised the co-operation between Railtrack and charter operators. He also referred to the difficulties that some operators have had with Rail Express Systems. I share his confidence that now that that company is in private ownership it will look on charter services as an important market for it to service and an area for growing its businesses.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) reminded the House that nationalisation of British Rail has not worked and said that his support for privatisation was based not on dogma but on a desire for better services for his constituents. He said that they wanted investment, which privatisation will bring, and fares to be controlled in the passenger's interest. He can assure his constituents that they will get it from privatisation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley also referred to advertising slogans. I recall that one used by British Rail was "We're getting there". After nearly 50 years of nationalisation, the best that could be claimed for the nationalised rail system was that it was getting there. The train had still not reached the terminus. My hon. Friend also referred to freight. I am confident that privatisation of British Rail's freight businesses will arrest the decline in the amount of freight carried by rail. Like my hon. Friend, I am enthusiastic about the Piggyback proposals which are being examined as part of the project to upgrade the west coast main line.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh, in common with a host of Opposition Members, confused cost and value, as they so often do. It is true that the replacement cost of Railtrack assets has been estimated at £6.5 billion, but that does not mean that that is what they are worth. The flows of funds through Railtrack from track access charges that will be employed in maintaining and upgrading the system will be what adds value to those assets.

Similarly, in relation to ROSCOs, the hon. Member for Eastleigh said that the price paid was a giveaway—he described it as a knock-down price—at £1.8 billion. It is perhaps coincidental that that is the same amount as the written-down value of the physical assets that were acquired. I should like him to explain sometime how it could be in that company's interest to run down its business.

We have heard no answers, except one, to the key questions that the Labour party must answer. For the fifth time since January last year, the Labour party has taken up the House's time to debate privatisation; yet it is unwilling to spell out its plans. I have no hesitation in expressing my confidence that my right hon. and hon. Friends will defeat the Labour motion and support the amendment in the name of my right hon. Friends.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 262, Noes 298.

Division No. 45] **[6.59 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul

Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough & Sdw)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert *(North Down)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Cummings and Mr. Greg Pope.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael

Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Riffkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin and Mr. Gary Streeter.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MADAM SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates the Government on the progress that it is making with privatisation, particularly with the start of private passenger services on the South West and Great Western lines, offering the prospects of better services and higher investment at less cost to the taxpayer; recognises that this demonstrates that the Opposition's attempt to halt privatisation has failed; and looks forward to the flotation of Railtrack in May as an opportunity for the railways to access private finance for investment.

Post Office Privatisation

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.14 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): I beg to move,

That this House opposes the Prime Minister's stated intention to reopen the question of the privatisation of Royal Mail and Parcelforce; records its concern that such a privatisation by Her Majesty's Government would threaten the close co-operation which exists between the Royal Mail, Parcelforce and Post Office Counters and places in commercial jeopardy post offices and sub post offices in communities where presently they play a vital role; believes that the Government should safeguard the universal access and uniform pricing of this country's postal services; recognises that the Post Office does not call for or receive a subsidy from the public purse; and is of the view that British customers will continue to have the best opportunity of enjoying this standard of service only if the Post Office remains as a single corporation within public ownership.

One of the gravest charges that may be laid at the door of the present Government is that they have ceased to serve Britain's national interests. In fact it sometimes appears that, obsessed as they are by the Conservative party's interests and divisions, they have ceased even to recognise that such a thing as the national interest exists. In few areas of policy is that more blatantly the case than in their approach to the future and potential for development of Britain's Post Office.

It is not disputed, even by the Government, that our publicly owned and run Post Office is efficient, well run and profitable. Not only is it without subsidy, but it makes substantial contributions to the Exchequer. It is, in short, a public sector success story, and not only that but a British success story; but the Government steadfastly refuse to acknowledge that because it does not fit their blind ideology.

Nor is it disputed that, given the opportunity, the Post Office might further develop its commercial potential, with advantage to the public. The Post Office and the private sector believe that there is special potential advantage to be gained by successful public-private partnerships, which might readily be developed if Britain's Post Office were to be given the commercial freedoms enjoyed by similar organisations in other states of the European Union.

Under successive boards and chief executives, the Post Office has brought pressure to bear on the Government to take what appeared to most observers to be the requisite common-sense decisions. The response has been a blank rejection, accompanied by the dogmatic incompetence that is the Government's dubious hallmark.

As long ago as February 1994, representatives of the Post Office told the all-party Select Committee on Trade and Industry that there was a sense of approaching crisis due to indecision about the future of the Post Office. By then, its structure had been under review since July 1992. Post Office management, the work force, the Select Committee and even, it seems to me, some of the private sector competitors of the Post Office all seemed to believe that the Post Office was being messed about by the Government to the detriment of its ability to deliver its present services and of its competitive potential.

In June 1994, after that two-year review, the Government finally produced their Green Paper, in which they explicitly endorsed the opinion, expressed in the Select Committee report, that the Post Office

"cannot be retained in its present form".

Three options were discussed. They were full privatisation, commercial freedom without a change of ownership in the public sector, and splitting up of the Post Office accompanied by partial privatisation—the Government's preferred option.

No mention had been made of the privatisation of the Post Office—a major piece of policy—in the 1992 Conservative general election manifesto. In fact, as my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) pointed out, even Margaret Thatcher ruled out privatisation of the Post Office, saying:

"I have indicated that the Royal Mail would not be privatised. People feel very strongly about it, and so do I."

It became obvious, however, as soon as the Government had made their proposals, that the chief, if not almost the only, beneficiaries would be the City institutions and advisers on whom the Government have lavished so many millions of taxpayer's money, and that the chief losers would be the public, whose money was being spent, and especially members of the public for whom the local post office or the postal services represent a lifeline. The Labour party and the Post Office unions set in train a strong public campaign which received an equally strong public and parliamentary response. Then, as now, it showed that the Government are completely out of touch with public opinion. Of nearly 16,000 responses to the Green Paper, only 60 favoured privatisation. The Government were forced to back down and their resentment was evident—I do not think that it is too much to say that they sulked. However, it appeared that the Government had accepted—with much bad grace—the rejection of their proposals.

As they had been forced to acknowledge that there should be change if the Post Office were to continue to be at the leading edge in the development of communication services, pressure mounted afresh on the Government to accept reality and to allow the greater commercial freedoms from which the Post Office has clearly demonstrated it can benefit. A further report from the all-party Select Committee in January 1995 made such a recommendation. It also said:

"The continuing uncertainty over the future of the Post Office benefits no-one except foreign competitors".

The Select Committee's next point was even more relevant. It stated:

"Whatever the Government's response, it is essential that a clear statement be made, either that specific changes will be adopted and implemented without delay or that there will be no change in the status of the Post Office for the foreseeable future".

The Select Committee went on to call for stability so that the Post Office could get on with developing its services.

For a brief halcyon period it looked as though at least a little sanity had set in. In May 1995, the then Secretary of State—I beg his pardon, I mean the President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—the present Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State, who might be thought, in view of all those titles, to be speaking for the Government of which his membership is described in such exhaustive terms, told the House that the Government had, in effect, accepted representations from the Post Office that the scale of its contributions to Treasury coffers was hindering its ability to invest and almost wiping out its profits. He said that a fairer level of return would allow

the Post Office to finance investment in new technology, which would enhance both productivity and competitiveness.

On 11 May 1995 the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) responded to the Trade and Industry Select Committee's call for

"an EFL set by reference to an agreed percentage of planned profits".

He suggested that the Government's previous practice of milking the Post Office for revenue to the detriment of the service it might provide would cease—or at least that is what those who heard him thought that he told the House. He said:

"I am prepared to agree that in future we shall aim to set the EFL at about half the Post Office's forecast post-tax profit. I hope to make progress in that direction this autumn."

That would have still resulted in a contribution from the Post Office to the Exchequer of about £172 million this financial year. The right hon. Gentleman went even further and said that, because the Government wanted to discuss arrangements with the management of the Post Office for

"a more stable relationship in the future . . . we have attempted to quantify, within the constraints that I have set out, what that EFL might look for in the future".—[*Official Report*, 11 May 1995; Vol. 259, c. 885-87.]

As late as September 1995, the right hon. Gentleman commissioned KPMG Management Consulting to produce a report after plans for privatisation had been abandoned. The report, which was leaked to the *Financial Times*, was said to agree on the value and effect of such investment and to suggest that it would open up the possibility that postal charges would not have to rise until the end of the century. That would benefit the public and commercial users of the Post Office, as well as making it far more competitive.

Then came last November's Budget, when the Government announced a change in the financing arrangements for the Post Office. Without consultation even with the Post Office board, the Chancellor announced that, on top of the £1.25 billion that the Post Office has contributed to the public purse over the past 10 years, it is to contribute a further £900 million—almost as much again—over the next three years alone. That is almost £1 million a day. As the Post Office pointed out, that was the biggest Government financial demand in its history, which followed hard on the heels of the biggest Government financial demand on British taxpayers levied in recent Budgets.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I am very interested in what the hon. Lady is saying. Will she commit a future Labour Government to taking only half the profits of the Post Office if it were under their control?

Mrs. Beckett: At the moment we are concerned with the policy of the Government. We shall have to review a whole range of matters—some of which may be raised later in the debate—about the future policy of the Post Office should we be successful at the next general election. In the meantime and for the next three years—which takes us to the deadline for the next general election—the Post Office will be milked of its profits. Does the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) support that policy or will he support us in the Lobby tonight? He is clearly interested in these matters, as he said a moment ago. Does he support the Government's policy? I look forward to seeing him in our Lobby tonight; I am sure that that was the purport of his intervention.

As I said, almost £1 million will be extracted from the Post Office every day. The Post Office has made a record-breaking profit, yet when it has paid the levy and its corporation tax, it could end up in the red. Once again, most of us will lose. It is not enough that the Government's general tax increases since 1992 are still equivalent to 6p on the basic rate of tax for a typical family. Now the people of this country must pay another Tory tax in the form of higher postal charges—a "stamp tax"—because that is inevitably how most of the cash demand will have to be financed.

Furthermore, British business will face another tax, as business users of our postal services have pointed out. I do not know whether the Secretary of State has seen the most recent issue of *The House Magazine*, but I draw his attention to a joint advertisement which contains quite a plain message from business users of Post Office services. They point out that, as a result of the Government's policies, jobs will be lost in their industries. They, too, no longer feel safe with the Tories.

The Post Office board is faced with complete disruption of its financial management entirely out of the blue. Its chances of beating off competition from other European Union countries are seriously diminished. The folly of the decision is not all that is remarkable. It is clearly an abrupt and a complete reversal of the policy announced less than six months previously by the right hon. Member for Henley, the Deputy Prime Minister.

This shabby little episode shows once again how dangerous it is to rely on anything that Ministers say. Faced with the contradiction between those assurances and the Government's actions, the Secretary of State could mutter only that his predecessor had said it was "an aim" to move in that direction, rising magnificently above the clear evidence that the Government have lurched in the opposite direction.

Now we have the final stupidity of yet another lurch to the right. Speaking on the "Breakfast with Frost" programme, the Prime Minister told the nation that, if re-elected, the Government would embark yet again on the dogmatic and unnecessary folly of Post Office privatisation. That is yet another example of why the Post Office, like Britain's future, is not safe in the Government's hands.

The Labour party rejects privatisation of the Post Office. It is unnecessary because the Post Office is already achieving standards that are the envy of the world, despite the difficulties that the Government place in its path. Privatisation would undermine the public service ethos of the Post Office, which is one of the reasons why it has achieved those high standards. Under the Conservatives, consumers can expect a postal charge increase, the sell-off of Crown post offices without proper public consultation, and the privatisation of Royal Mail and Parcelforce. Those policies are bound to lead to a threat to the high standards of postal service that we now enjoy, with postal deliveries to all parts of Britain at a common price.

That is not just evidence of the Government's neglect of Britain's commercial interests if it conflicts with that which the right of the Conservative party wants to hear or

[Mrs. Beckett]

of the degree to which the Government are out of touch even with their own supporters. More gravely, it shows that the Government utterly fail to understand that public services such as the railways or the Post Office do not just underpin the community but help to create community—especially in rural areas. They are services without which communities cannot survive.

Opinion polls consistently show great public support for the Post Office and concern at the threat to its future posed by Government policies. In recent months, many Conservative Members have registered their concerns about post office closures, and those of Crown offices in particular.

The Government's case for privatising services such as the Post Office is that commercial freedom is incompatible with the service's place in the public sector. That is just the kind of commercial freedom that the Government have been prepared to offer other public sector organisations. The most recent example is the BBC, but there are others. When the right hon. Member for Henley came under pressure when giving evidence to the Select Committee on that point, his argument seemed to terminate with the fact that it would be a matter of policy, as to whether or not commercial freedom for the Post Office could be undertaken—and as it was not Government policy, it was therefore impossible. That circular and self-satisfying argument clearly does not address the case.

The Government's other argument is neatly self-fulfilling—that privatisation is necessary because Government interferes in a public sector Post Office to its disadvantage. They claim that the way to protect the Post Office from the Government's incompetence, stupidity and short-sightedness is to remove the Post Office from their control. At last, we are on common ground. However, the way to protect the Post Office is not to put it in the private sector but to put the Government out of power.

7.31 pm

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian Lang): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes the substantial benefits which have flowed to customers from the Government's programme of privatisation; recognises that 19,000 of the 20,000 post offices in the United Kingdom are already in the private sector; and endorses the Government's continuing commitment to a universal postal service at a uniform and affordable tariff and a nationwide network of post offices.".

This evening's debate was trailed as being about the "threat" of Post Office privatisation. The word "threat" begs a large question. As I shall now show, before I deal with the specific issues of the Post Office, privatisation does not represent a threat. On the contrary, it provides the conditions for enterprise and success—

"the enterprise of the market and the rigour of competition",

to quote the Labour party's new clause IV.

The privatisation programme is one of the great successes of this enterprising Government. The only threat that it presents is to the cherished but discredited dogma of nationalisation that is central to the beliefs of many in the Labour party. We were told that new clause IV was meant to signal a change of heart by the Labour party. We knew that the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) thought differently. Before clause IV was changed, the right hon. Lady said:

"I am not against Clause IV."

She said also:

"And changing it would give the wrong signal to the party."

She went on to say that there were

"circumstances in which I would want to see a return to public ownership—for example, in the water industry."

Perhaps the right hon. Lady can explain. Will that feature in Labour's election manifesto? Is nationalisation back on the agenda? Or is no one paying any attention to the right hon. Lady?

The motion for today's debate gives the lie to Labour's attempts to portray a change in attitude. Even the late Leader of the Opposition was far more enlightened than his party seems to be today. He told us, "Ownership is irrelevant." Clearly not in Labour's stakeholder economy. Continuing to parrot their opposition to privatisation and extolling the benefits of state control would appear to be integral to stakeholding. After the successes of our privatisation programme, however, it is not now so much about controlling the commanding heights as about the commanding stakes. Who is going to be holding them?

We know all about the trade unions—those great upholders of principle who condemn privatisation while they make a tidy profit on the back of the success of privatised industries and then, no doubt, use those resources to help sponsor Labour Members of Parliament who they put up to oppose privatisation. There is no doubt either that that is Labour's idea of a virtuous circle.

If there is a threat to our economy, it comes not from privatisation, which taken as a whole has dramatically enhanced our economic performance, but from the right hon. Lady who supported Arthur Scargill and his striking miners, backed the "resolve" and "fortitude" of the Wapping strikers, wanted to keep clause IV, called for a return to secondary picketing, backs a national minimum wage, supports the social chapter, wants a training tax on industry and would clearly revel in some meddlesome stakeholding. The real threat to the Post Office would come if the right hon. Lady and her trade union friends ever got a chance to put that agenda into practice.

Privatisation has brought many benefits. They include benefits to the taxpayer from revenues totalling almost £60 billion and the £55 million in corporation tax that is paid to the Exchequer each and every week—where before, nationalised industries cost £50 million a week. It has brought benefits to customers. BT's prices are down by 40 per cent., gas prices are down by 23 per cent. and electricity prices are down by 7 per cent—all after taking inflation into account.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): It is clear to everyone that the external financing limit set by the Government is about to put up prices in the Post Office. May we return to the Government's hand in the Post Office, which is taking so much from that service's investment plans?

Mr. Lang: In due course. I am talking about the benefits of privatisation. It brings benefits to employees, who have been given the opportunity to own shares in

their companies. Ninety-five per cent. of BT's employees took that opportunity, as did nine out of 10 British Aerospace employees. Labour would have denied them that opportunity, just as it would deny that opportunity to the employees of British Energy and Railtrack. Seven million more shareholders today have a stake—a real stake—in British industry. Labour says that it supports wider employee share ownership, while opposing it at every turn. It is yet more of the say one thing, do another politics of the Labour party.

The motion talks about the threat of privatisation. Perhaps Labour Members should visit some of the industries that we have privatised. Try telling British Aerospace, which is now the UK's largest industrial exporter and the largest defence contractor in Europe, about that threat. Try telling British Airways, which is now the most profitable airline in Europe and one of the most profitable in the world, about the threat. Rolls-Royce has more than tripled its share of the world's civil aeronautical engine business since privatisation. British Steel is now one of the most efficient steel producers in the world, exporting half its output. Try telling those companies about the threat of privatisation. It is nonsense, and ideological nonsense at that. All those companies have seen privatisation as an opportunity, and acted on it—and our economy has been the main beneficiary.

The debate so far has illustrated once again the Opposition's reluctance to face reality about the future of the Post Office and postal services in the UK. They take refuge in complacency, distortion of the arguments and whipping up unfounded fears about the future provision and level of postal and Post Office services. The Government's position and policy on the Post Office is clear. The Green Paper "The Future of the Post Office", published in June 1994, set out the case for changes that we believe will be necessary in the not too distant future if the Post Office is to remain successful in the face of the threats and opportunities that all its main businesses must face.

Ms Judith Church (Dagenham): If the Secretary of State felt that Post Office privatisation was such a good idea in 1994, why did the Government not proceed with it then, or include such a proposal in the Queen's Speech for this Session?

Mr. Lang: It is well known that the Government decided that there was insufficient parliamentary support, so pursued an alternative course in the interim.

The competition is growing and includes the fax, the telephone, electronic mail, couriers, British private sector companies that can be seen on the streets every day, such as Securicor and Business Post, foreign companies that run giant international delivery networks, such as DHL, Federal Express, UPS and TNT, and the privatised Dutch postal services. No doubt other countries' postal services are on the way.

Although it has not proved possible to move forward with changes in this Parliament, the Government have never sought to conceal their view that a future change to some form of private sector status for major elements of Post Office business is essential to remove the public sector constraints that inhibit its prospects.

The Opposition motion is completely misguided when it talks of the privatisation of the Post Office, as it ignores the fact that 19,000 of the 20,000 post offices in the United Kingdom are already in the private sector. They are private businesses already. Far from being a threat, they are the backbone of the industry and the lifeblood of many small communities all over the country.

The Government set out in the June 1994 Green Paper proposals for the changes that would enable the Post Office to meet the major challenges it will face over the next decade. Our preferred option was to move to joint ownership by the Government, the public and employees of Royal Mail and Parcelforce. Under that option, a retained Government share stake of 49 per cent. would maintain a close link between the Government and Royal Mail, safeguarding the interests of consumers in essential public services while giving the business the commercial freedom it needs to respond to increasing competition and to develop new services for the benefit of consumers.

The Government concluded that the strength of the Post Office network lies in the existing public and private partnership which combines national provision for the size and activities of the network with local private sector provision for the delivery of services to customers.

No change to the ownership or structure of Post Office Counters was therefore proposed. This option had the support of the Federation of Sub-Postmasters. I remind the House of what it said:

> "The Federation warmly welcomes and supports the majority of the Government's proposals for the Counters Business and we see them, together with the commitment to retain Benefits Agency work at Post Office counters as critical for the future of sub-post offices."

In the absence of the necessary level of support in the House to proceed with legislation to advance our preferred option for Royal Mail and Parcelforce, the Government set out last May, in the statement by my predecessor and right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, to which the right hon. Lady referred, a number of pragmatic changes in the financial regime of the Post Office which I shall address shortly.

The Government remain of the view, however, that the proposals I have described for the Royal Mail and Parcelforce would be in the best interests of the Post Office and its customers. It is in that context that, in a recent television interview, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister indicated that consideration would be given to including proposals in our manifesto for the next election. This means no more and no less than it says.

Whatever the Government decide in due course to propose in our manifesto, I emphasise once again that the Government have an absolute and non-negotiable commitment to a universal letter and parcel service with a delivery to every address in the United Kingdom within a uniform and affordable tariff structure and a nationwide network of post offices. That has been, and always will be, central to any proposal for change.

Sir David Mitchell (North-West Hampshire): Will my right hon. Friend comment on the suggestion that the ability to service all addresses, including many in rural areas that cost the Post Office a great deal to reach, is best safeguarded by the continuation of an expanding and profitable Post Office business which in turn can best be achieved in the private sector?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend has an extremely sound and valid point and I take serious account of it.

Mrs. Beckett: I do not want to detain the Secretary of State, but in view of his hon. Friend's intervention just

[Mrs. Beckett]

now I remind him that he seems to have overlooked the phrase in the evidence given by the Federation of Sub-Postmasters which states:

"The Federation remains of the view that ownership should not be at the forefront of Government consideration, the key issue . . . being the need to improve the commercial prospects"

of the network.

Mr. Lang: The federation is involved with ownership of sub-post offices, 19,000 out of 20,000 of which are in the private sector already. That is the point the right hon. Lady seems unable to grasp.

I have already referred to the threats and opportunities that face the Post Office, such as fax machines, electronic mail and the telephone. Real costs in these areas are falling fast, making them even more competitive. Changes are necessary to enable Royal Mail to respond to the challenges and opportunities it faces. It is increasingly clear that the present public sector approach is not flexible enough to allow the management to respond properly to the competitive pressures. The all-party Trade and Industry Committee's report of 1994 concluded that the various public sector constraints on the Post Office's activities were

"having a detrimental impact on the Post Office's ability to act as a commercial organisation, to deliver an ever higher quality of service to its customers and to meet the challenges and opportunities of international competition."

As has been demonstrated time and again, flexibility to meet and respond to the stimulus of competitive challenge and, indeed, the broadening of competition which follows privatisation bring valuable and tangible benefits to consumers and the businesses alike.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): A constituent of mine might tell me that the competitors to a future privatised Post Office will still be around and that the Post Office technology and innovation of the past decade will still be around, and ask what is the problem with the restrictions in the public sector. Why not let the Post Office do what it wants to, as it asked the Select Committee to be allowed to do but was refused by the Government?

Mr. Lang: It is typical of the Labour party that its members see no disadvantage in allowing a subsidised public sector corporation to compete on an unfair basis with the private sector. Of course we shall consider expanding the activities of the Post Office, but not in ways that would displace the private sector and distort competition, thus damaging the interests of consumers.

Mr. Connarty: Will the President give way?

Mr. Lang: No.

In his statement to the House last year, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister set out a number of changes relating to the financial control regime of the Post Office which sought to balance the realities of the Post Office's continuing public sector status with the need for commercial freedoms without undermining the Government's economic and competition responsibilities.

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): Was my right hon. Friend as surprised as I was to hear the right hon. Member for Derby, South talking about the Labour party's commitment not to interfere in the commercial freedom of the Post Office? Was he aware that the deputy leader of the Labour party recently visited my constituency and said that a future Labour Government would intervene and decide on the location of individual post offices, which goes far beyond the powers that Post Office Counters currently has? Does not that show that the Labour party remains committed to intervention to a degree unknown before in peace time, and would willingly tear up legally binding contracts if that suited its purposes?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend makes the point very well. The Labour party says one thing and does another. It claims that it would give the Post Office commercial freedom—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) is getting there slowly. The Opposition say they would give it freedom to borrow in the markets, and freedom to enter new markets. In doing so, they choose to ignore the constraints of the public sector. Do they seriously believe that a public sector Post Office can be permanently ring-fenced from the constraints and pressures on public expenditure? Perhaps the Labour party could explain exactly what commercial freedoms it would give the Post Office that it does not already have?

My right hon. Friend has proposed a pragmatic and balanced package for the Post Office and the public, providing a responsible and coherent way forward which, as far as the very real constraints and financial disciplines of the public sector will allow, gives the Post Office greater flexibility and scope to extend its activities into adjacent markets.

The May 1995 statement, in recognition of the importance of maintaining a viable network of post offices, confirmed the Government's commitment to offering the services of almost 20,000 post offices to a wider range of clients. Among the new services now available or being trialled at post offices are free payment of gas bills, sale of national lottery tickets and travel insurance and bureau de change services. These and other developments in the future should help to strengthen the network of post offices, not least in rural areas where they play such an important part in the life of local communities.

The May statement also set out a number of changes to be introduced in the financial regime of the Post Office, including the external financing limit. Many of the changes have been implemented: earlier restrictions on capital expenditure have been abolished, a new corporate planning process is in place and we are open to proposals for new business from Post Office Counters and moves into adjacent market areas by Royal Mail in partnership with the private sector.

I recognise, of course, the Post Office's disappointment that it has not yet been possible to make progress towards our aim of setting the EFL at about half the forecast post-tax profits, but the statement made it absolutely clear that no responsible Government could ring-fence the Post Office entirely from the pressures on public spending. We do, however, recognise the difficulties the Post Office faces in forecasting and financial planning to achieve precisely the EFL targets that it is set. We are, therefore introducing some additional flexibility in response to its request, and we shall in future allow it to match an over-achievement, by up to £30 million, of one year's EFL with a reduction in the following year's target.

The right hon. Lady has been quick to criticise this year's EFL settlement. Perhaps she would tell us, as she was asked to do, what she would have done. If she had taken a different approach, what cuts in spending would she have made instead? Or would the money have been raised through higher taxes? In reaching its decisions on the Budget requirements last autumn, the Government were faced by the need to strike a balance between the needs of publicly financed services such as health and education and those of a public corporation such as the Post Office.

The Post Office EFLs must be seen in their proper context. The Post Office is a very successful and profitable business, but it is also a partially protected monopoly organisation, owned by the taxpayer, with an income of more than £15 million a day. In recent years, its capital investment has been running at well over £300 million a year—an historically high level and twice the rate in real terms of 15 years ago—and it should have scope to continue to invest both from its own financial resources and through private finance initiative projects. However, the Government's long-term aim is still to move towards setting the Post Office EFL at about half forecast post-tax profits.

It is worth noting that, in the last five years of Labour government, the Post Office was allowed to undertake capital expenditure of £800 million at today's prices. Under the last five years of Conservative government, the Post Office has invested £1.7 billion—more than double in real terms the figure under Labour. That is an illustration of the fraudulence of claims that increases in Post Office EFLs in recent years have starved it of capital investment.

It is for the Post Office in the first instance to present a specific proposal on the amount and timing of any tariff increase that it believes will be necessary. We shall study its proposal carefully, as will the Post Office Users National Council, which the Post Office is statutorily required to consult on tariff changes.

The Post Office has undertaken to maintain the existing level of postal charges until at least 31 March this year. By then, it will have been almost two and a half years since the last letter tariff increase. Customers are currently enjoying the longest period of stability in stamp prices since the late 1960s, but with an enormous improvement in the quality of service in recent years. The last letter tariff increase was in November 1993, and stamp prices continue to fall in real terms. At the same time, service standards remain at very high levels. Nationally, some 92 per cent. of first-class mail is delivered the next day, and over 98 per cent. of second-class mail is delivered within three days. By international standards, British letter tariffs represent very good value for money in terms of cost and quality of service.

I am aware of the concern—mentioned by the right hon. Member for Derby, South—in the direct marketing, printing, publishing and other industries that rely heavily on the mail service about the impact of an increase in letter tariffs. In the past 10 years, the volume of mail posted has increased by more than 40 per cent., with increases in each consecutive year. Recent evidence does not suggest, therefore, that a modest tariff increase has any significantly adverse effect on mail traffic—and I would point out that letter tariffs are currently lower in real terms than they were in 1979.

Today the right hon. Member for Derby, South has sought to claim that her party would give the Post Office more commercial freedom. Do she and her party support Crown conversions? If so, someone should have bothered to tell the deputy leader. On a recent visit to Glossop, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) is reported in the *Glossop Chronicle* as saying that Labour's policy would be to stop Crown conversions—and, indeed, to reverse them in some cases. According to Labour, that is greater commercial freedom. Yet again, the Labour party says one thing and does another.

There is not even any reason to intervene; no doubt that is what appeals to Labour. According to independent surveys commissioned by the Post Office, customer satisfaction levels are higher for converted offices than for Crown offices. Recent surveys of 42 franchise offices around the country also show that customers perceive significant improvements in service over the Crown offices that they replaced. The customer is happy, the Post Office is happy, but never let it be said that Labour lets reason overcome ideology.

Of course, the reality is that Labour would never give the Post Office greater commercial freedom. Labour wants to intervene in the commercial decisions of the private sector, let alone those businesses unfortunate enough to be left stranded in the public sector should it ever win power again.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Why has there been a 33 per cent. increase in the industry's productivity over the past 10 years? Last year it made a profit of £472 million, an increase of £306 million on the previous year's figure. Why are the Government demanding £925 million, as against the £534 million demanded in previous years? They are bankrupting the Post Office.

Mr. Lang: I welcome the improvements in efficiency made by the Post Office in recent years, which it has been able to make as a result of the benign and efficient Government who have been in charge of its affairs since 1979. However, it remains a publicly owned corporation in the public sector, which cannot be exempt from the rigours of public expenditure constraints from time to time.

The real threat to the Post Office lies in tying it indefinitely into public sector constraints and scaremongering about privatisation. The real danger lies in the policies and postures of the Labour party. At the heart of the Government's policy are the three non-negotiable commitments to which we are pledged, and which the public rightly see as essential: a universal service for letters and parcels, a uniform tariff structure and a nationwide network of post offices.

It is in everyone's interests to have an efficient and effective Post Office that can respond confidently and successfully to the many challenges it faces. We have said how we believe it should be achieved; all that the Opposition can do is whinge.

7.54 pm

Ms Judith Church (Dagenham): I am sponsored by the Union of Communication Workers, which assists me in the employment of my researcher and from which I receive no personal financial gain.

[Ms Judith Church]

It is frustrating to have to return to the subject of the maiden speech that I made 18 months ago, in an attempt to dissuade the Government from their current foolish course. Moves to reopen the Post Office privatisation issue reveal the vacuum at the heart of their policy.

Turning on the "Breakfast with Frost" programme on 7 January, I was amazed to hear the Prime Minister say—this was mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett)—

"we will look again and see whether that is a subject for the next Parliament when we come to look at the manifesto."

I can hardly believe that—after the climbdown of the former President of the Board of Trade, and the huge hole left in the Queen's Speech for this Session of Parliament, the Government are now scratching around for measures to put in their manifesto for the next election. I can hardly believe that they think for one moment that privatisation of the Post Office will be popular with the people. If the Government really believe that, and intend to put it in their manifesto—I note that the Secretary of State made no commitment in that regard—they are more out of touch with the views of the people than even I believed.

The Government's approach to the issue of Post Office privatisation has been characterised throughout by ideological dogmatism, intellectual myopia and economic incompetence. Their approach underlines their failure to heed the democratic decisions of the House and the voice of the people. They persist in a sterile argument about ownership, while ignoring the substantive issues of efficiency and competitiveness that were dealt with today by my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South.

The most remarkable aspect of the whole issue is the fact that the only impediment to the greater success of the Post Office is the Government. Over the past 10 years, the Post Office has contributed £1.25 billion to the Treasury; as my right hon. Friend said, over the next three years the Government intend it to contribute nearly £1 billion more. It is unbelievable that the Government should talk of profitability and enterprise in public, while doing their best to strangle one of the country's finest corporations—a public corporation with a proven track record of 19 successful years of subsidy-free profit.

The recent radical increase in the negative external financing limit not only contradicts the Government's previous statements—as my right hon. Friend pointed out—but threatens to put the Post Office in the red for the first time in 20 years. If ever there was a case of, "Do as I say, not as I do," this is it.

I suppose that we should not be surprised at the Government's continued duplicity following, as it does, the recent advice by the Deputy Prime Minister on late payment wheezes, the string of broken tax promises and the hypocrisy on crime figures. The Government have been a tragedy for Britain and they want to compound that tragedy by damaging our Post Office, which is such a vital part of this nation's life.

In rural areas, the Post Office provides a valued focus for community life. That may not mean much to the Government, oblivious as they are to the fragmentation of communities after 17 years of their policies, but Labour understands the relevance and value of cohesive communities to the nation's overall economic success.

What the Government do not seem to understand is that the nation derives a social return from the present operation of the Post Office that could not be gained from a privatised entity concerned solely with private profitability. That aspect of public service, married with efficiency, represents the cornerstone of the Post Office's success and its popular support.

Labour's alternative draws on a true belief in the ability of public enterprise to develop the vast potential of this successful British corporation. By removing the current capital expenditure limits, we shall allow the Post Office true freedom to plan for the future and invest to the optimum to meet its requirements. The Post Office will then have access to the scope and flexibility of options offered by the world's capital markets. Similarly, there must be a greater liberty from interference from the Department of Trade and Industry in proposed trading projects and a new freedom to enter joint ventures.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): If the hon. Lady was running a private courier or parcel delivery company and found herself facing competition from a nationalised Post Office that was released from the constraints of the public sector and, therefore, able to invest capital, underwritten by the state, without risk, in businesses to undercut the hon. Lady's own business, would she regard that as fair competition, or would she go on taking advice from the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett)?

Ms Church: It is amazing that the hon. Gentleman should enunciate such a view. It is clear that he has not read the Select Committee's report or followed the arguments put forward by the Post Office about greater commercial freedom and the sort of investments that it would wish to make. I advise him to do a lot more homework on the subject.

The Post Office must be allowed to preserve its competitive edge and evolve efficiently in the rapidly globalising communications market. Otherwise, 10 years from now we could be faced with the failing corporation which, judging by the Government's actions, they seem to wish they had now.

In responding to Labour's proposals for the Post Office, the Government usually justify their approach in two ways. We have heard those arguments in part today and I am sure that we shall hear more of them later in the debate.

The first concerns the tyranny of an accounting convention and a political view that is so short-termist that it makes a goldfish seem attentive. The Government have been holding back investment in the Post Office on the ground that it would show up as an increase in the public sector borrowing requirement. Debt is, of course, a serious problem and not to be taken lightly by any Labour Member, but surely even the Government can see that investment, from which will be derived a future income stream, is qualitatively different from spending, which has no direct revenue return.

At the moment, we are in the crazy situation where all spending is regarded as bad regardless of the fact that the future income created would help to reduce debt. What is clearly needed is basic common sense, greater transparency and a more long-term approach to the Government's finances.

The other reason that the Government give for rejecting Labour's approach concerns the role of the state, to which the Secretary of State has already referred this evening. There are two related points—protecting taxpayers from private sector risk and protecting the private sector from the unfair competition of a state-backed company. Unfortunately, that view is based on the fundamentally flawed premise that a clear line can easily be drawn between state activity and private sector activity. It may well be that in the minds of the think tank-dwelling Conservatives that that is how the world works, but out in the real world which we know, things are quite different.

Mr. Jenkin: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Church: No, I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman. If he listens to this point, it might help him with the issue that he raised earlier.

The state already has massive responsibilities and obligations in the private sector. For example, if one of the main clearing banks was to suffer a financial catastrophe tomorrow, would the state sit idly by while it went broke? Certainly not. The Government would have to intervene and intervene heavily, unless the Minister is prepared categorically to assert that the Government would do nothing.

What about Government bonds which finance the national debt? They are readily traded on the open market. But whose money is backing those bonds? Who else, but the taxpayer? What about black Wednesday, which all hon. Members well remember, when within hours the Government poured billions of pounds into defending a futile position? What was the ultimate source of that revenue? Once again, it was the taxpayer.

Therefore, in terms of exposing taxpayers to commercial risks, we are already widely exposed and thoroughly intertwined in the workings of the private sector. The argument is spurious. The Government do not seem to realise that, but the public have now seen enough privatisations to recognise that the private and public sectors are properly linked in a sensible way in our economy.

In that context, it is entirely right for the state to take part in profit-making activities if appropriate, as in the case of the Post Office. Given that so many of the Post Office's major competitors are also state owned or have substantial state involvement, what situation could be more appropriate? For instance, the Dutch post office has had a sales division operating in the United Kingdom since 1991. Similarly, the Canadians have allowed their post office to enter the private sector joint venture Global Delivery Express World-wide.

Overall, we have a Government bereft of ideas, trapped in the past and ill equipped to deal with the future. In place of the stagnation and confusion that distinguish the Conservative approach, clarity of vision and a more precise analysis are required. Only new Labour, with its new approach and radical agenda, can deliver that.

Greater commercial freedom would give the Post Office the opportunity that it deserves to evolve into a truly world-class corporation while retaining a clear social dimension in its operation. Under our plans, it would not be just a few fat cat executives who would benefit, but the whole nation, and that is the essential difference between new Labour and old Conservative.

The lottery of privatisations that has been delivered by the Government during their period in office is not a genuine lottery and the British people know it. We know who the winners and the losers will be. If the Government include the privatisation of the Post Office in their manifesto for the next general election, the British people will reject it overwhelmingly. I do not believe that so many turkeys on the Conservative Benches will vote for Christmas.

8.8 pm

Sir Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): I make it clear at the beginning that I am concerned with the Government's policy, and that is what concerns my constituents, my supporters and my former supporters. They are concerned about what the Government are doing about specific problems. I am not concerned about the Opposition, because I do not want them in power. What has reduced the public's esteem of the House is the fact that the two sides spend all their time throwing mud at each other. That is not what the people want. They want a thorough examination of the Government's policy and a thorough explanation from the Government of why they are carrying the policy through and what they think the results will be.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spent the first half of his speech dealing with privatisation, and accused the Opposition of dogma. The real dogma lies in believing that privatisation can be extended to everything. The country realises that that cannot be substantiated. I agree with many of the tributes that he paid to the industries and firms that have been privatised. That is good. But that does not mean that privatisation can be stretched to every activity in the community. There are many activities for which a Government should take responsibility and organise and provide finance. That is the only safeguard for the community if a Government do that.

Now we hear talk about the privatisation of prisons. I am strongly opposed to that. That is a facility in the community for which a Government must take responsibility. We have already seen some of the consequences of that particular action. It is said that the police can be privatised. I think that it is an absolute horror that it should even be mentioned as a possibility.

One must accept that, in a large sphere, privatisation has been successful, but one cannot then go on to deduce that every activity should be privatised. When I say that I am concerned about the future of the Government, it is because the people do not believe that everything can be privatised—the Post Office, for example. I am against what is proposed because my constituents are against it, and I want to be re-elected. I want a Conservative Government again. There is no doubt that my constituents are against it. The Secretary of State admitted that the people are against it. The Government should recognise and respect that. Why are people against it? Because for them the Post Office is something more than just an activity.

I do not represent an agricultural area, so I do not have the acute anxieties that hon. Members who represent agricultural areas must have, but I have a dormitory constituency in which sub-post offices are not just a service that is dished out, as people at the top think, but a way of life. It means much more to people in their

[Sir Edward Heath]

activities than just using stamps, drawing pensions and so on. I ask my right hon. Friend to recognise that. The people are against privatisation. Let our Government recognise that and accept that we have to win the next election. I am talking quite brutally about votes. I want votes. What is wrong in saying that? I know when my constituents are against a particular item and when I shall not get their support if my Government insist on going on with such items.

I can support the Government's amendment, because the last phrase is so worded that I can read into it that the Government intend to do nothing. That is satisfactory. If my right hon. Friend feels that he can come along after the next election, if he is re-elected, and say that the Government promise to think the whole thing over, well and good. We could then have another vote and another debate.

Mr. Leigh: My right hon. Friend makes a very moving appeal that we should listen to public opinion. I presume therefore that he agrees that we should listen to public opinion that tells us that 60 per cent. of people are opposed to a single European currency, so we should abide by it.

Sir Edward Heath: My constituents will support a single European currency. *[Laughter.]* There is no point in my hon. Friend laughing and being so arrogant as to think that he knows what my constituents will do. Of course he does not. What is more, 82 per cent. of British industry wants a single currency, and we shall get a single currency. I apologise to my hon. Friend.

Why are people so opposed to the privatisation of the Post Office, apart from the fact that it is part of their way of life? The Secretary of State said that 49 per cent. of it will not go into private hands. What do my people say about that? They say that with 49 per cent., the Government cannot control anything. Whoever gets it will do whatever they like. We have seen what has happened to 49 per cent. holdings in the past. After a period, they just disappear. Look at what happened to BP, where we always had a 51 per cent. holding, to ensure that BP did what we believed was in the national interest. Then it was reduced to 49 per cent., and then it was wiped out. People know that, and the plain fact is that they do not trust anybody who says, "If it is completely privatised, it will carry on."

Great emphasis has been placed on the 19,000 post offices, but how many will remain? I use a sub-post office, outside Cathedral close in Salisbury. My constituents use them. What undertaking is there that we shall have them? None whatever. That is why people are so strongly opposed to any complete privatisation that goes ahead in the way that has been discussed. I ask my right hon. Friend to recognise that fact. I shall certainly tell my constituents, because I get many letters on the subject, that I am absolutely opposed to privatisation. They know that already, and I shall do my utmost to stop it. We have too many privatisations at the moment, and they are all on the basis of the same dogma. People want to keep the Royal Mail.

Many people think that one can just sell off the royal yacht because it does not matter. They are completely wrong. People say that if we are to have a monarchy, it must be treated appropriately. The royal yacht has stood this country in good stead, with royal visits all over the world. Why throw it away?

Look at Greenwich, which is one of our great glories. The Government say, "Away with it." The Secretary of State for National Heritage sent me an advertisement to take Greenwich, if I wanted to, on a 100-year lease or whatever. The advertisement was of the most vulgar kind, to which the lowest estate agent would not put his name. Why must that happen?

We now read that the royal train will be run by an American company. I am not opposed to American railways, but I believe that our royal train should be run by this country whether it is private or nationalised. People feel that things which are in our own interest and which are of historical importance, such as Greenwich, the royal yacht, the royal train and other items, should not be thrown away in the haphazard way that they currently are.

I hope that my right hon. Friend can influence the Government, so that we British can be proud of the things that are our heritage. That is completely different from spending our time attacking our allies and neighbours for what, allegedly, they are doing, because that is xenophobic, but we can rightly take a pride in the things that are of great historic importance. If we do that, the people will begin to trust us much more and will support us more in the other difficult things that from time to time we have to do.

I shall read the last phrase of the Government's amendment to my own satisfaction—if not that of my right hon. Friend—so that it means that the Government will do nothing beyond what has already been done. My constituents can rest assured that they will have the way of life that they are used to and I shall know that I can continue to use my little place outside Cathedral close. What is more, my constituents may then return their support to us as a party and a Government. I am not ashamed to say that that is what I want and that it is what we have to work for. I wish that the Government would take the same view.

8.18 pm

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): This is a welcome opportunity to discuss in the House the future of the Post Office, because in his television interview the Prime Minister chose once again to throw into uncertainty the whole issue of the future of the Post Office. There is no doubt that the people of this country feel strongly about it. It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), because he made two valid points. His account of where public opinion lies on the issue was entirely right. There can be no doubt about that whatever. His second point, that there had been successful privatisations in some industries but that that does not prove that one would enjoy success by privatising every part of public service, is also right.

By suggesting yet again that the Post Office is a suitable candidate for privatisation, the real risk exists of undermining what is undoubtedly a genuine British success story. The Post Office needs to be able to compete in an increasingly competitive market, but it is being hampered from doing that by the uncertainty caused by the Prime Minister's latest outpouring.

The same thing has happened to the railways industry, where the Government took far too long to decide what they wanted to do. As a result of an appalling hiatus that

lasted several years, the country's train-building industry has collapsed. If we have a rail renaissance, we shall have to go to France and Sweden to buy our trains. The Government are creating in the Post Office the same degree of uncertainty that affected the railway industry, and they are inflicting the same damage.

When I hear the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry yet again tell the House that it remains the Government's policy and preference to privatise the Post Office, but that they are not doing so because there is inadequate parliamentary support for it, I am forced to conclude that the Government are in office but not in power. If they are unable get such a policy through the House, they should think again and come up with another policy.

Some time ago, in their Green Paper, the Government proposed three alternatives: to privatise, to give commercial freedom within the public sector, or to split the business up. If they are unable to press ahead with privatisation—and I hope that they have rejected the option of splitting up the business—they should try to give some meaning to the commercial freedom option. I thought that some modest progress was being made in that regard. When the former President of the Board of Trade told the Select Committee on Trade and Industry that there would be an attempt to keep the negative external financing limit at about half the projected pre-tax profit, that seemed to give the Post Office at least some basis on which to plan its business. There has, however, been the most appalling reneging on that commitment.

Let us be clear about privatisation's principal problems. The Post Office has already been split into three operating businesses: Post Office Counters, the Royal Mail and Parcelforce. If the Royal Mail, by far the most profitable of those three parts, is to be privatised, there are two obvious consequences. First, the cross-subsidisation option, which is not currently being used, would go indefinitely. I represent a constituency with many small rural sub-post offices. I talk to the people who run them and respect their role in small village communities—a far broader role than simply running a business. Such businesses are a focal point for the community.

I talk to the people who are struggling to run those small businesses. They are inadequately rewarded and remunerated for the service that they provide. The salaries, if one dares to use that word to describe the payments that they receive from the Post Office, are pathetic and insulting. When the Government take away those vast sums of money, which could sensibly have been used to ensure that small rural post offices were more viable, we will think that whole world has gone completely mad.

If the Royal Mail is to be taken out of the equation and its profit may no longer be used for cross-subsidisation, only one sensible conclusion can be drawn: the future of the rural sub-post office network is in doubt and in danger. That is the first principal objection. If the Royal Mail were taken out of the equation, the option of using the considerable revenues that it earns to improve and to build for the future of the rural sub-post office network—and of urban post offices, which also play an important role—would be gone.

Secondly, let us consider what a privatised Royal Mail would be like and what it would choose to do. In representing my constituents, I look to the example of what has happened in the gas, electricity and water industries, to name but three. In all cases, new private operators are, sensibly and properly, beginning to develop cost and charging bases that reflect the true economic cost of doing things. That is a fact. I represent a rural constituency. Providing services in scattered rural areas is much more expensive than providing them in densely populated, urban areas. If the costs of all public services are to start reflecting that, the rural way of life will be undermined.

If the privatised Royal Mail is to continue to be under a Government obligation or regulation saying that it must be willing to deliver a letter from Penzance to the northern reaches of Scotland for the same price as it will deliver a letter from one London street to the next, what on earth is the point of privatising the Royal Mail? What great philosophical leap forward will be achieved if they tell Royal Mail what to charge, to whom to charge it and what the conditions of service will be? If we really cast the Royal Mail free and allow it to do what it pleases, my constituents will suffer. If we do not, but leave it heavily regulated and tell it exactly how to run its business, what to charge and how to do it, what is the point of privatising it?

If we allow the Royal Mail to go its own way and the competitors that we hear about start cherry-picking—to quote an expression that has been used in debates on privatisation—the more profitable business in the towns, then the viability of the business that is left will be reduced as a consequence. Perhaps the Government intend to offer certain routes, accompanied by certain amounts of subsidy. After all, that is the way in which they have chosen to approach rail privatisation. It seems that anything is possible in the ideological quest to privatise.

The Secretary of State properly made the point that Post Office Counters is largely in private hands already. In the past seven years, more than half of directly operated main post offices have been turned into franchises. In addition, about 20,000 sub-post offices are private businesses. As I have described, many of them struggle against considerable odds just to keep going and to provide the useful and broad service that I have spoken about.

The Prime Minister should be aware that his Back Benchers representing rural areas—certainly those representing Devon and Cornwall constituencies—are acutely aware of that as well. That is why some of them have been unwilling to support the ridiculous suggestion that the Royal Mail should be privatised. They understand only too clearly the damage that they will do in their constituencies and, as the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup rightly said, to their vote on polling day.

That is not to say that the Post Office should be left exactly as it is. As we have been told, competition at home and abroad is growing. To counteract that, to respond to it effectively and to try and beat the competition, the Post Office needs commercial freedom and access to capital to make decisions and to get on with competing. We want the Post Office to develop into new sectors of business. It would make sense to allow it to join the private sector in joint ventures. That would improve the quality of service that customers receive and ensure that costs are kept low. It could help to turn a national success story into an international success story.

I understand the fact that Conservative Members, in some cases, would prefer, for ideological reasons, to go down the privatisation route. They are entitled to that

[Mr. Nick Harvey]

view, but when they say to Opposition Members that it is impossible to grant commercial freedom in the public sector, they are simply wrong. Examples exist in other industries in this country and abroad of post offices and many other enterprises proceeding on that basis. It may not be Conservative Members' preferred choice. I accept and respect that, but it is wrong and phoney to say that it cannot be done. It is done successfully in other industries and in other countries.

It is imperative that we ease the financial constraints that have been imposed. It is outrageous for the Government to seek to purloin such revenue from the Post Office. It has made great strides forward and achieved great things in terms of its productivity yet, since 1981, it has contributed £1.250 million to Government coffers. Now the Exchequer is looking for the best part of another £1 billion in the next three years.

As has already been said, if we add together the negative financing limit and the corporation tax that will have to be paid, the sums that the Government are looking for are greater than the current profit.

Ms Church: Extortion.

Mr. Harvey: By any reckoning, that is totally ludicrous.

What sort of business anywhere, in any sector, in any country can expect the Government to take away from it at the end of a highly successful trading period a sum greater than the profit that it has made? That is utterly nonsensical, the desperate move of a Chancellor of the Exchequer who is in a tight financial corner and has decided to turn on the Post Office and raid its coffers.

Mr. Jenkin: Of course the money that the Government plan to raise from the Post Office will be incorporated into their financial plan. Can we take it that the Liberal Democrats, who are famous for wanting to increase income tax, will apply that increase not to education, as they promised, but to replacing the revenue lost from the Post Office?

Ms Church: Is that a tax?

Mr. Harvey: The hon. Gentleman should recognise that that is indeed, as the hon. Member for Dagenham (Ms Church) says, a tax. The Government are imposing on the Post Office such huge costs that it will have to levy more costs on the taxpayer, in the form of more expensive postage stamps. The whole gamut of its business will be there, and it will have to charge more. The hon. Gentleman's point—

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest) *rose—*

Mr. Harvey: I am still replying to the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin). If his argument is that we are trying to save the taxpayer from a great burden, he must realise that there are alternative ways in which to do that.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): If the money is, as the hon. Gentleman says, a tax, with what would his party replace that funding?

Mr. Harvey: One draws up a budget for the entire year, and the Government have chosen to draw it up on that basis. Most of the money will constitute a tax that falls on business, but the other element, which falls on individuals, could hardly be less progressive. One could hardly turn one's mind to any form of taxation that could be deemed more unfair, or to penalise vulnerable people more. I can think of any number of ways in which a Government might chose to increase revenue, almost any of which would be preferable to the one that the Government have chosen.

On commercial freedom, how can the Government justify—

Mr. Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Harvey: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman.

How can the Government agree to the BBC's participating in just such joint ventures—in the past they have also allowed various parts of the nuclear industry to do so—yet for some reason find it total anathema to consider allowing the Post Office to do the same? Moreover, there is one crucial difference between the BBC and the Post Office—the Post Office is turning in a huge profit, which the Government are raiding for the sake of easing their predicament over the public sector borrowing requirement.

The threat of Post Office privatisation is real. The word "threat" is appropriate because by taking the profitable business away and so preventing cross-subsidy, the Government will put the rural sub-post office network under threat, and by allowing private operators to drive a coach and horses through the principles that have guided our Royal Mail network ever since its inception, they will threaten the universal mail coverage service.

Changes must be made to the way in which the Post Office operates, but the way forward must be through greater commercial freedom within the public sector, not through privatisation. Splitting and privatising the different parts of the network would be unprecedented. Any such move would be to the detriment of customers, and the sooner the Prime Minister abandons that foolish idea, the better for the Post Office and its customers.

8.33 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): May I comment briefly on the speech by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) before he leaves the Chamber? He made a most interesting point, with which I agree—that the public are concerned, and probably oppose Post Office privatisation. There is no doubt about that.

However, the right hon. Gentleman recognises that many of our privatisations have been successful over the years, although the public opposed every one of them beforehand, and while they were going through. The public are naturally concerned about change. However, the fact that the public are concerned does not mean that we should immobilise our policy. We have to consider the economic reality.

This is an example of an issue in which political sentiment flies in the face of commercial reality. The Post Office is a commercial organisation. We simply cannot give it the commercial freedom that it needs if we retain it in the public sector. The right hon. Member for Derby,

South (Mrs. Beckett) asked me a fair question—whether I approved of the Government's using the Post Office as a milch cow. I am not a Member of the Government, so I have a certain freedom in what I can say in the Chamber. I do not approve of the Government's doing that, but I do not believe that we could expect better from any other Government. We certainly did not expect better from Labour Governments in the past, nor could we do so in the future.

Ms Church: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Leigh: I shall give way later, but first I want to develop my argument.

One of the most interesting features of the debate was that when I asked the simple question whether the right hon. Lady would limit the external financing limit to halve the profits of the Post Office, she could not answer. Of course she could not. We well know that a Labour Government, like any other Government, will be strapped for cash, and will use the Post Office as a milch cow so long as it remains in the public sector.

I am sorry to say that the speech by the Liberal spokesman, the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey), was utterly illogical. Would he really increase income tax to cut the price of a stamp? That seemed to be what he was suggesting.

Mr. Harvey: May I ask the hon. Gentleman exactly the same question? He has told us that he does not approve of the Government's using the Post Office as a milch cow. Can I ask him what the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) asked me? How would he replace the revenue? Is he not arguing against his own case?

Mr. Leigh: I am delighted, because the hon. Gentleman has led with his chin and made precisely the point that I was about to make. I would privatise the Post Office. We should not be running it. That is the simple answer; that is the commercial reality. It is nonsense to suggest that what the hon. Gentleman says can apply to a successful commercial organisation. The Post Office is becoming more and more commercial. Even its brochures say things such as:

"European postal administrations are now able to operate much more commercially and are making the most of their new status. Success in the future will go to those communications companies who can operate globally".

The whole tenor of that is not that the Post Office is a public service, but that it is a highly commercial company operating in the real business world.

The Post Office makes huge profits because it has a monopoly. It delivers the 67 million letters every working day that its propaganda tells us about—and good luck to it.

Ms Church *rose—*

Mr. Leigh: I shall give way to the hon. Lady in a moment, but I want to answer the question first.

The Post Office is a commercial organisation, and it will make huge profits because it is a monopoly. It can hardly fail to do so. So long as it makes profits the Government, rightly, will view it as an alternative means of taxation. That is the real world in which we live, and there is no point in denying it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North made a good point about that. I have received a communication from DHL (UK) International Ltd., a successful private company that deals with parcels. Talking about VAT, the document rightly says:

"Many of the premium services currently offered by the Post Office are in direct competition with the express distribution industry and yet are still classed as VAT exempt, while DHL has to charge VAT. Consequently, DHL is prejudiced in its ability to compete on price with the Post Office".

One could mention 101 other examples, if one wanted to. My hon. Friend and others asked the question strongly: is it fair for a company wholly owned by the public sector and entirely buttressed by it, with a monopoly, to compete unfairly with the private sector because it has full commercial freedom and can do whatever it likes?

Ms Church: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to inform us what proportion of DHL's profits are paid into the public purse, in contrast to the percentage of Post Office profits that are currently bailing out the Treasury from its economic mess.

Mr. Leigh: I am sorry, but that is not the point that I was making. DHL pays corporation tax, like any other business. If we privatised the Post Office it would pay corporation tax. It would be a highly successful company and would yield at least £2 billion or £3 billion on privatisation, which could be used to build hospitals or whatever we liked. It would be able to operate globally in the world marketplace, pay its corporation tax and do all that it could possibly want. But it would not be competing unfairly with the private sector—nor would it be held back.

Those of us who try to run the Post Office in the public sector, as I have done, and as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is now doing, have found that one of the main problems involved is that the postmasters, about whom we have heard so much, keep coming to us and saying, "We can't compete. Give us more power."

The Treasury is right to say to Department of Trade and Industry officials that the Post Office cannot be given more powers because it is in the public sector and unfair competition would result. I understand the Treasury's arguments. We are therefore considering a decline in business. As long as the Post Office is kept in the public sector, regardless of who is in control in this House, the Treasury will prevent sub-post offices and post offices from competing unfairly with the private sector. That is the economic reality that we face.

The only way to solve the problem is to push the Post Office out into the private sector and allow it to deliver the kind of service that it wants. The Royal Mail would be allowed to become a modern communications company, break into the new electronic age and compete on a level playing field with other companies. Post Office Counters would be able to compete, and build itself up by establishing local financial centres in towns and villages where it could deliver the services that it liked. As long as the Post Office is shackled to the public sector it will be used as a milch cow and will not grow.

We face a political problem, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup rightly underlined. *[Laughter.]* There is no point in Opposition Members

[Mr. Leigh]

laughing. There is a political problem; people are worried about change. As we well know, there is no overwhelming public demand for the Post Office to be privatised, any more than there was for any industry to be privatised. The Government must therefore think of ways in which to achieve Post Office privatisation.

One of the ways in which the Post Office could be privatised—I do not know why the Government have not done it during the past couple of years—is to make it a public limited company before the general election, selling, say, 15 per cent. of the shares to the work force, 15 per cent. to the general public, 15 per cent. to city institutions and retaining about 55 per cent. in Government control.

I have no doubt that such a measure could have got through Parliament. Although some Conservative Members are—apparently—opposed to Post Office privatisation, I would have thought that every sensible person would allow it to become a public limited company despite the fact that there is not a majority in the House in favour of it becoming a plc and 51 per cent. of it being owned by the private sector. We could have at least moved down that road. That would have been a sensible halfway step. In our next manifesto we should promise that we will sell 51 per cent. of the shares.

When the right hon. Member for St. Albans (Mr. Lilley) was Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, I tried to persuade him to put the proposal in our previous manifesto, but it was early days and I did not succeed. If there had been a line in our previous manifesto stating that we were to privatise the Post Office, I doubt that it would have lost us a single vote. I do not think that when the public vote—whether they vote Conservative or Labour—they are really concerned about items in a manifesto that state that the Government are or are not planning to privatise the Post Office, as long as the policy is explained. We could have done it, we should have done it and we will have to do it in the end because we certainly cannot leave things as they are for the reasons that I have given.

Whatever the hon. Member for North Devon says, the Post Office is very different from the BBC. There is no point in comparing them and saying that the BBC is owned in the public sector but has full commercial freedom. It is a completely different organisation. The Post Office is a modern, commercial company. There is nothing very romantic about delivering pieces of paper around the country. The overwhelming volume of that paper comprises not letters from old grannies to their nephews, but correspondence from business to business and business to people. It is virtually an entirely straight commercial operation. Apart from political sensitivity, there is absolutely no reason why that business should not be privatised tomorrow.

Plans to privatise the Post Office should be put in our manifesto and carried out. Indeed, I predict that we will put it in our manifesto, that privatisation will be carried out sooner or later, and that it will produce an exciting new future for the company. The Post Office will become one of the great British success stories. It will carve out markets all over the world. I also predict that across the countryside, successful local post offices will deliver financial services and have an assured future. It should happen, and it will.

8.44 pm

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I should like to put on record that I am sponsored by the Communication Workers Union. Its money—the amount is in the Register of Members' Interests and has been since the day I was sponsored—goes to run services in my constituency party and does not come to me in any way or form. I make no financial gain from it.

It is interesting that the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) is registered as being a political adviser to an insurance company. There is a slight difference between being a political advisor to an insurance company that is directly commercial and being a Member of Parliament whose constituency party is sponsored by a trade union. Hopefully, Conservative Members will one day realise that and that we are not bought and sold by the money that a trade union gives us. I would say everything that I am about to say regardless of whether I was sponsored by any trade union.

I shall not follow the high level of analysis of my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) or the high finances adequately covered by my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Ms Church). I was surprised at the approach of the President of the Board of Trade. The Prime Minister put his foot in his mouth during the interview with David Frost and tripped up his hon. Friends by letting slip some little secret idea to win over the right wing of his party and thereby keep himself in office. Perhaps it was a thank you for what happened in the 1922 Committee a week or so ago. I do not think that the idea had been thought through. It was quite clear that the Secretary of State, whom I have known for a long time through his work as Secretary of State for Scotland, was not up to his brief. He made several substantial errors.

The President of the Board of Trade said that Post Office privatisation was being considered, as the Prime Minister had said. That is as far as it goes. The President of the Board of trade revealed in response to an intervention from the hon. Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell) that he, personally, was a privatiser. That was interesting: he put himself on the line. Perhaps he, too, is looking for right-wing support. If he is a privatiser, he had better not go looking for the support of people in Galloway, because he will be out on his ear—and any Member representing a Scottish constituency who tries to support Post Office privatisation will join him.

In reply to another intervention, the President of the Board of Trade said that the Post Office was a subsidised industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham pointed out that for the past 19 years the Post Office has not only been a subsidy-free service to the public—it has been much more. I should like to put a simple lesson in economics on the record so that the right hon. Gentleman can read it later. If a private company borrows money, invests it, makes a profit and pay backs the money that it has borrowed, it is not subsidised. That is called making a profit.

Of course the President of the Board of Trade is not supposed to know about such things because he is not the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is at last beginning to make salutary comments about his party's policies in the run-up to the 1992 election and how they are costing him a great deal of money and preventing him from balancing his Budget. I believe he said that the blame for £28 billion of public sector borrowing requirement lay clearly at the feet of the Prime Minister.

The previous President of the Board of Trade, the Deputy Prime Minister, is responsible for all the comments that have been quoted. He said in response to the Select Committee report that the Government would try to reduce the Post Office public sector take to 50 per cent. through its external financing limit. Now the Government are talking about reducing the take by £925 million over the next three years, which is almost 66 per cent. of profits. The Post Office has said that that leaves it nothing for investment and for all the initiatives that the Government tell us they will allow it to introduce.

The bottom line, which everybody will realise from what has been said tonight, is that postal charges are going up to pay for the Government's failures. As the President of the Board of Trade said, the Post Office cannot escape the difficulties of public sector finances. The Post Office does not have a problem with public sector finances. It is the Government who have a problem with public sector finances, and their failures will now be paid for by everyone who licks a stamp and sticks it on a letter.

Mr. Jenkin *rose—*

Mr. Connarty: I give way to the hon. Member for Legal and General.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman should look at the history of privatisation. If he does, he will see that prices have tended to fall after privatisation. The only reason why stamp prices are having to rise is that the Post Office remains in the private-public sector. If we privatised it, it would increase its efficiency, profitability and competitiveness, and there is no doubt that it would cut prices. Indeed, because of its monopoly position, there is no doubt that the Government would want to privatise the Post Office with a K-minus formula to ensure that it did cut prices.

Mr. Connarty: I shall return to the economics of delivering post, which is very important. I hope that Conservative Members will listen because the comments will not be mine, but those of Professor Baumol. He spoke about what he called handicraft industries, or those delivered by a human being at the point of consumption. These include the delivery of letters, and also the health service and education. The quality of the service is important, and not just the speed or cheapness of the service.

I am always amazed to hear Tory Members talk about privatisations as if they were universally successful. They may be successful for the person who gets shares, and particularly successful for those fat cat executives who receive shares at their original price and then take them up later under their share option schemes. We have been disgusted, as I hope the Tories have been—although it may be just jealousy from Tory Members—at the profit rake-offs by the so-called inadequate former executives of public sector industries. Suddenly, these people have become super-whizzkids and are worth a £1 million backhander.

The person who was in charge of the Post Office has run off to the private sector because the executive jets and money that he thought he would get following the privatisation that he was pushing for with the former President of the Board of Trade did not come off. He has had to go and earn his crust somewhere else.

I do not think that all privatisations have been successful. Hon Members should look at the shambles of British Gas. It is all very well for the Tories to talk about prices, but we should look at the structure of the business. A loss of £1.5 billion is pending, and the domestic side of the company has been split off into a company called BG Energy, with £2.6 billion assets. Meanwhile, TransCo and all the profitable overseas sectors have been hived off. The consumer will pay for those losses.

In every case in the water industry, the consumer—because of the monopoly—will end up paying in the long run. Investment has not gone into the water industry, and someone will have to pay for it. That someone will be the consumer. We will have to look at industries in the longer term before we can say that privatisation has been universally successful.

Let us look at the past attempts to privatise. The hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) talked of a fantasy world where not a single vote would have been lost had the Tories privatised the Post Office before the election. I do not know what world the hon. Gentleman is living in. There were 16,000 submissions received against the proposal, while only 60 were in favour. Lo and behold, the majority of those 60 were speculators, bankers and investment companies who could sniff the profits that they could make from another rip-off of a public sector service. That is the reality.

Mr. Leigh: Did the Conservative party lose the 1983, 1987 and 1992 elections after we had privatised 57 industries?

Mr. Connarty: It is a pity that the hon. Gentleman, who sat so close to the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), did not listen to what the Father of the House said. He said that his constituents did not want the Post Office to be privatised, and that is the reality in most constituencies around the country. The hon. Gentleman shows an absolute contempt—which unfortunately runs through his Back-Bench colleagues—for the people who put him here.

If Conservative Members do not listen, they do not deserve to be here. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the Government can get away with sticking people's noses in it, he deserves to go, as does every hon. Member who agrees with him. One day, people will not vote on the basis of slavish adherence to their party, and hon. Members will lose their seats on the basis of their contempt for people's wishes. That democratic deficit will be righted at the next general election. That is why 55 Tory Members are running for cover, including Front-Bench Members such as the Minister for Energy who has tried to explain the gas fiasco. They are running away because they know that the people are coming to get rid of them.

Let us look at some of the remarks made in previous debates on the privatisation, one of which was repeated tonight by the President of the Board of Trade. He said that this wonderful Government would not harm the sub-post offices network, which would not be challenged in the private sector. But let us look at the agenda that is beneath that comment, which was raised at the time and continues to be pushed.

The Government want to save money by the use of electronic transfer payments from the social security budget, and the way in which they intend to save money

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is very simple. One does not receive as much for a transfer payment by electronic means as one does for payments made over the counter, as they are at present. Something like 50 per cent. of the income of most sub-post offices comes from Government transfer payments for social security. Even with that income, there was embarrassment in the Prime Minister's constituency when the local post office had to shut down right in the middle of the last privatisation débâcle because it could not make ends meet. There were not enough people getting transfer payments through that post office.

If the Government increase the use of electronic transfer, they will cut the incomes of sub-post offices to such a level that sub-post offices throughout this country may have to close. These sub-post offices are marginal economic institutions at the moment. Alternatively, the sub-post offices will have to put up the prices of basic food and goods that people in small villages and communities need. Those sub-post offices are not just in villages and communities, however, but in the housing schemes of Paisley, Glasgow and the larger towns of Britain.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): My hon. Friend is absolutely correct about the effect of privatisation on sub-post offices and about the role that they play in the community. Does he agree that those sub-post offices are the only contact for many elderly and disabled people with the wider community, and nowhere more so than the constituency of the President of the Board of Trade—Galloway and Upper Nithsdale, which is a collection of small villages?

Mr. Connarty: That point is very well made. The public will certainly be coming for the President of the Board of Trade, not to wish him well in his defence of privatisation, but to wish him out of their lives. They will bring in someone else who represents their views. It is interesting that this is another example of Conservatives saying one thing and doing another. What the previous President of the Board of Trade said about privatisation rings as false as when he used to tell his creditors that the cheque was in the post.

Reference was also made to previous debates about Crown office closures. Crown post offices are very important to people in towns and it is not just a question of their symbolism as large buildings. For many people, the Crown office is the most convenient place to do their business. There is no doubt that the number of campaigns against the closure of Crown offices up and down the country were not spurred on by counter staff or by the CWU membership. I have been in cities—some of which are represented by Conservative Members—where petitions of 12,000 people were collected to try to stop the closure of a Crown post office because those people saw it as the most convenient place to do their business.

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): On the subject of Crown post offices, is my hon. Friend aware of the proposal made by Post Office Counters Ltd. to close Cambuslang Crown post office and make it into an agency post office, despite community protests? That Crown post office operates from premises leased to it by Lanarkshire county council for 999 years as long as it is used for community purposes. Post Office Counters intends to sell that building for £250,000. That is an example of the drive to turn money over to the Government through this semi-privatisation. The money will go straight into the Government's pocket.

Mr. Connarty: The point is well made. That example in Cambuslang is repeated throughout the length of breadth of Britain. It is interesting to consider the numbers. There were 1,500 Crown offices in 1989 and there are now only 700.

It is not just Labour Members who oppose the closure of Crown offices. The right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) and the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess), no less, oppose the closure of Crown post offices in their constituencies. The hon. Member for Basildon is the original Essex man. One would probably call him the temporary Member for Basildon because, like many others, he is on his way out. The hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Sir A. Haselhurst) also opposes the closure of Crown post offices.

There has been a report about what happens when Crown post offices are lost and replaced with franchise offices. The latest document which has been leaked to Members of Parliament shows that franchise offices make four times as many errors as Crown offices. I have a simple piece of advice for my Front-Bench team. I do not make policy, but I am not afraid to give advice. We should commit ourselves to cease Crown office closures immediately we come to office, before we do anything else, and then conduct a nationwide review of the network of post offices. I believe that we would find serious deficiencies.

Some post offices have gone into the backs of shops. Conservative Members do not seem to be concerned about people who have a marginal income going to collect it by transfer payment at the back of a supermarket, perhaps with a couple of kids, and then coming out and buying things that they did not intend to buy, are not in the family budget and they do not and cannot normally afford. That is the pattern that is beginning to emerge. People are not spending in a planned way because many other things are demanded of them. Conservative Members should take heed of that.

We are not talking just about whether something makes sense commercially and whether people make a profit. We are talking about whether it makes sense socially. Does it make sense for the type of fabric of society, not just the type of commercial enterprise that we want to see? That is the difference between Conservative Members and Labour Members. We believe that we should be concerned about the social results of the things that we do, not just the results in terms of profit and share price. We care for the many. They care for the few, and everyone knows it. *[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) wish to intervene?

Mr. Anthony Coombs: I will allow the hon. Gentleman to finish.

Mr. Connarty: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I will be on my feet for a few minutes yet.

Stamp charges are likely to rise. The increase in postage will damage some of the commercial interests that Conservative Members wish to see developed for post

offices. We are told that the post offices are successful and have operated for 19 years without subsidy. We have been told about all their achievements.

The Mail Order Traders Association, the Direct Marketing Association, the Mail Users Association and the Periodical Publishers Association have taken out an advert in *The House Magazine*. I hope that Conservative Members will take the trouble to read it. In case they do not, I will read some of it into *Hansard* for their benefit. It says:

"Direct mail alone generates £13 billion worth of business: Substantial economic decline"—

if postal stamp charges rise. It says that

"Over 50,000 jobs depend on the Mailing Industry: 15 per cent. to 20 per cent. of jobs could go"—

if postal stamp charges rise. It says that

"Most advertisers plan to increase print budgets: Substantial switch to electronic media"—

to save on stamp charges, if they rise. It says that there has been a

"60 per cent. growth in Direct Mail over 5 years: Lost opportunity for an expanding industry"—

if postal stamp charges rise. It refers to

"Financial Mail, the largest single sector: Severely damaged"—

if postal stamp charges rise—and a

"30 per cent. growth in magazine subscriptions over 5 years".

The President of the Board of Trade tells us that, despite the increase in charges, everything has grown, but the associations say that they are likely to become unprofitable if they have to pay the extra stamp charges on mail. The advert says simply, "Say no to postage price increases." That advert was paid for by the mail users associations.

Let Conservative Members listen to someone if they will not listen to us.

Another thing that is happening in Royal Mail is that delivery time agreements are being eroded. The Department of Trade and Industry has been behind encouraging that, just as it was behind setting targets for the closure of Crown post offices—as was revealed by a leaked memo during the last campaign.

The standard is supposed to be that all first-class mail is delivered by 9.30 am. The pressure is on to earn the money that will be taken away in the external financing limit by pushing postmen out with more and more mail in their sack. That will mean that people will sometimes not receive their first delivery of mail until 11 am, with a peripheral delivery of the last bits of mail after that time.

In London, there is an agreement that 60 per cent. of the mail goes out in the first delivery and 40 per cent. goes out in the second. In Scotland recently there was an industrial dispute caused by the actions of the management in trying to impose new rotas, under which 90 or 80 per cent. of the mail went out in the first delivery. We find people making deliveries at 11 o'clock. When we ask whether it is their first or second delivery, they say that it is their first delivery. It is the first delivery. The Government have a responsibility, before they talk about privatisation, to make sure that consumers get the standard of service that they thought that the Government were guaranteeing them through regulation.

Finally, I come to Professor Baumol's analysis of handicraft industries. I was an economics student when he was considered to be extremely right wing in the economic world. He recently gave a lecture on the health service but referred to other industries that come into the same category—industries delivered by the hand of a human being at the point of consumption. He named mail delivery as one of those and said that, as with health, we cannot get productivity by cutting the number of bodies doing the job. That leads to a loss of quality, not better productivity. There is a difference. The Government's pressure will bring about a loss of quality. It has already been said by the new chief executive of the Post Office that the stupid remark of the Prime Minister—I do not think that the Prime Minister had thought about it before opening his mouth, and forgot to put his brain in gear—has caused a great deal of concern in the industry and problems for its investment in the future.

I do not disparage the image suggested by the Prime Minister of a Britain with warm beer and cricket on the lawn. I prefer a good, cold pint of lager and a game of rugby, as do most Scots—especially when we play England, as we will in a few weeks' time. I predict that another victory is on the way.

The Government and Conservative Members should not diminish what is left of their reputation. They should back off and not put this in their manifesto. I say that for their sake and for the sake of the people, who want a public sector Post Office with commercial freedom, not a privatised Post Office fighting in the market and sacrificing its customers for the sake of its boardroom.

9.6 pm

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): The motion invites the House to accept that privatisation would threaten the continued success of the Post Office and place individual post offices in jeopardy. It is not a very full-hearted endorsement of the Opposition's argument for commercial freedom that they make no mention of it in their motion.

To be fair to the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) and the hon. Member for Dagenham (Ms Church), they did argue in favour of some measure of commercial freedom and were joined by the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey). One assumes, from what he said among the political invective, that the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) also believes in a measure of commercial freedom. None of those hon. Members gave a coherent presentation of how we could achieve commercial freedom in the public sector, which, after all, is at the heart of this debate.

The problem is that the Labour party is ideologically opposed to any proposals that are labelled as privatisation. The hon. Member for Dagenham accused us of it, but it is her party that is being ideologically dogmatic by not recognising that the Post Office needs commercial freedom and that the only way to deliver it is privatisation.

It is interesting to note that senior management of the Post Office have consistently argued for privatisation. Bill Cockburn was an articulate proponent of it. It is much to the loss of the Post Office that he tired of waiting for something to happen. He wanted privatisation, but, sadly, he has gone to W. H. Smith—to its gain and to the loss of the Post Office. Michael Heron continues to argue in favour of privatisation.

Sadly, the Labour party takes the view that what senior management want cannot also be in the best interests of the Post Office's work force. That was clear from the

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sneering comments of the right hon. Member for Derby, South and the way in which she referred to City institutions and from the reference of the hon. Member for Falkirk, East to fat cats. Those are typical left-wing arguments—what is good for management will automatically be bad for those who work for the business. Rather, it could more appropriately be argued that management is best placed to know what is likely to benefit the business.

The first thing that the management of the Post Office has always recognised is that Royal Mail is at the heart of the business and that success must be achieved in that sector. In relative terms, it is more important than any other part of the business. If the fortunes of Royal Mail go down, so, too, will those of Post Office Counters.

Royal Mail has been, historically, a labour-intensive organisation, but is becoming less so because of technology, especially automatic sorting equipment, which becomes more advanced almost every day. It represents a huge investment by the Post Office to keep up to date with technological advances.

Technology means that a given volume of mail can be handled by a smaller work force. We have heard from two hon. Members who are sponsored by unions with an interest in the Post Office, and I appreciate that the unions are concerned that the use of new technology could result in lost jobs. That is the gut reaction when one tries to gauge what might happen. My local sorting office on Eastern avenue, Gloucester provides several hundred jobs, and I must consider what is in the best interests of safeguarding them. To ignore the arguments about the advantages of privatisation is the very way to place those jobs in jeopardy.

That privatisation would ultimately mean job losses is the thrust of the message from the Labour party to the unions or, given the wording in the Opposition motion, perhaps it is the thrust of the message from the unions to the Labour party. The reverse is almost certainly closer to the truth. It is not possible now to stop new technology, and no one would want to stop new investment in plant. It is possible, however, to take steps to ensure that the volume of mail handled by the Post Office and the profit that it generates increases rather than decreases. That can best be achieved, as every hon. Member who has spoken has accepted, by facing up to the fierce and growing competition to which the Post Office is subject.

It is easy to talk about competition without appreciating the impact that it has on the business of the Post Office. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) has already said, one of the most profitable sectors of Post Office business is the delivery of bulk business-to-business commercial circulars. The Dutch post office, PTT, to which reference has already been made, has become extremely skilful at bidding for bulk United Kingdom direct mail business. That mail goes from the United Kingdom to destinations outside our country. PTT has been most successful at creaming off business that would otherwise have gone to Royal Mail.

The Dutch post office has now gone further, however, because it has succeeded in bidding for bulk mail destined for United Kingdom addresses. According to the accounting conventions operated by the Universal Postal Union, four fifths of the revenue raised through the postage rate goes to the country collecting the post and just one fifth goes to the country making that delivery. Where bulk mail business bound for destinations within the United Kingdom is taken on by an outside Post Office, Royal Mail bears the bulk of the costs and gains the minimum of the revenue. It is necessary to address that problem.

Why can the Dutch post office organise itself to win such business? The first reason is that it can make proper commercial quotations and charge proper commercial tariffs. In the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) in May 1995, some reference was made to Royal Mail being allowed to be more commercial in the deals that it makes. It must, however, still make deals according to fixed formulae. The Dutch post office does not have that constraint, so it can bid for a line of business at a price that it knows will secure it. Special tariffs for special customers is a commercial feature available to the Dutch post office but not available to Royal Mail.

Secondly, the Dutch post office can offer a combination of services, such as the fulfilment of a total postal requirement that covers designing and printing an item, enclosing it in an envelope, generating the address to which it can go and providing transport to take it there. Royal Mail is currently constrained from offering that combination, which customers want.

Thirdly, the Dutch post office is able to enter into realistic alliances and joint ventures. It does not have to ask the Dutch Government whether it is all right to make an alliance or a joint venture with a company; it can get on and do so. That is real commercial freedom.

It was encouraging, in one way, to note from the statement in May 1995 that we are starting to move in that direction, but we have not gone anywhere near far enough. Some Opposition Members have argued that it does not matter because foreign post offices do not have the right to deliver to United Kingdom addresses; the bulk of the business is a Royal Mail monopoly and therefore Royal Mail is protected. That is a misconceived point of view because it is based on the assumption that the post is an irreplaceable service. That is not so.

As a communication medium, writing on a piece of paper and sending it around the world carried by hand is a very outmoded concept, and will quickly be overtaken by all types of communication methods such as the Internet, e-mail, fax and all the others that were mentioned earlier. Royal Mail's problem is that its business is rooted in a function that is going out of date, and if there ever was an argument why it needs to be able to expand its repertoire, that must be it.

The strategy for the British Post Office should allow it to compete vigorously and effectively in its share of the postal market, whatever size that market may be, and to have the freedom to stake its claim to what will be the alternatives to carrying a piece of paper around the globe.

In my opinion, commercial freedom is vital, and commercial freedom in the public sector is a contradiction in terms. If commercial freedom means anything, it means the opportunity to take a risk—an argument that was well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin). If the Post Office is in the public sector and it is allowed to take a proper risk, that risk is underwritten by the taxpayer. That is the central message that the Opposition parties need to be able to understand

and digest because, until they do, they will never adopt a policy on the Post Office that would give it a satisfactory future.

It is wrong that an organisation such as the Post Office has to seek the Government's approval whenever it wants to make a significant investment decision and that an obligation is placed on the Department of Trade and Industry to involve itself in such decisions, not only because it has a right to do so but because, as guardian of the taxpayer's money, it has a duty to do so. The Post Office must be allowed to set its own financial targets, to make its own investment decisions and to raise capital when it needs to do so.

Opposition Members have complained about the level of the external financing limit. I entirely accept the basis of their complaint—that the EFL is far too high and that it inhibits the Post Office—but the answer is to replace the EFL with the corporation tax that the Post Office, as a public company, would pay like any other public company.

As things stand, Royal Mail is undoubtedly destined to lose business on a global scale unless steps are taken. Other post offices, such as the Swedish post office, the Dutch post office and PostDienst in Germany, have recognised that fact. Theo Jongsma, the managing director of PTT, when visiting London in 1994, said:

"I support the privatisation of postal companies worldwide".

That view is shared by chief executives of other leading European post offices. We must have a strong, profitable Post Office if we are to preserve the uniform price and universal delivery to which the Government are committed and which my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir D. Mitchell) stressed. Profits are the best way of ensuring that those undertakings are met.

Finally, I join my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle in predicting that Post Office privatisation will occur in the not too distant future. I further predict that, when it occurs, the unions that are linked to so many Labour Members who currently oppose privatisation will be the first to invest in it.

9.20 pm

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): Like my colleagues, I am a sponsored member of the Communication Workers Union and I freely declare that interest. My hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) explained to the House precisely what that means: none of us receives any financial payment for the honour of being sponsored by the union.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) has left the Chamber. Last year he and I participated in a debate at Durham university, where he was a former student. That evening he had the unenviable task of defending the following motion: "That the House has no confidence in Her Majesty's Government". I won the debate and the hon. Gentleman, who was then a member of Her Majesty's Government, was subsequently sacked from it.

I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is not present to hear my remarks tonight, as I am always interested to hear what he has to say about these matters. He is a Thatcherite, and such people are now restricted to the political Jurassic Park. The hon. Gentleman wanders around in a field. He is let out occasionally to graze; he is then returned to the field and the gate is closed.

The hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle suffers from the political equivalent of mad cow disease: he believes that we should adopt the principles of privatisation and the free market. *[Interruption.]* If the parliamentary private secretary, the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff), will be quiet for a moment, I shall deliver my speech in my own way.

The hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle derided the concept of public service in his speech. Many years ago when I worked for the Post Office—admittedly, I was a telephone engineer and not a postman—I was proud of the public service that I performed. I know that the members of my union—including the postmen and women—are very proud of the public service that they provide. They do not simply deliver letters, issue stamps at a Crown post office, or pay social security benefits at a sub-post office: they are imbued with a sense of public service.

If the milk bottles are on the doorstep of an old-aged pensioner's house three days after they should have been removed, it is the postman or woman who reports it to the police or the local social services. They are much more than deliverers of letters: they are an essential part of the community. They take burgeoning pride in the fact that they are public servants—just as I did when I was a public servant working for the Post Office.

I remember connecting electricity late one winter's night for a farmer whose sheep were lambing. I did not do that because I was being paid overtime; I did it because it was my job. Postmen and women do the same thing. What is wrong with the principle espoused by Rowland Hill, the founder of the modern British Post Office—no matter where a person lives, be it in Land's End or the Shetland Isles, when he buys a second-class or first-class stamp he pays the same price as everyone else. It is not the private market but public service dedication that guarantees that his letter will be delivered—even if the postman has to put a sack on his back and walk 15 miles over the hills. For the price of a 19p second-class stamp, the letter will be delivered.

I do not want to hear any more from Conservative Members about deriding the concept of public service because—as the Father of the House said—their constituents value the public service ethic imbued in the members of today's Post Office.

Much has been said about the milch cow effect that the Government have on the Post Office. I am a simple soul—a telephone engineer who became a politician. I never understand the problem with allowing the Post Office to have a different EFL formula. Why must we constrain what is undoubtedly a very profitable business with Treasury mumbo-jumbo? The hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) said that the taxpayer guarantees the Post Office while it remains in the public sector. Is he saying that the Post Office will go bust if the public sector borrowing rules are relaxed? Of course it will not. A little more imagination is required—and that seems lacking on the Conservative Benches—with anything to do with the public sector. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) said, we should examine the potential for developing the Post Office in the public sector as a profitable business and releasing the shackles of Treasury constraint and phoney EFL rules.

For all the theorising of the Jurassic Park hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle, the constituents of Conservative Members will not allow them to privatise

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the Post Office. If Conservative Members want to be turkeys voting for an early Christmas, they should support privatisation. They will not win the next general election if that measure is in the Conservative manifesto.

9.27 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): After that somewhat intemperate and antediluvian contribution from the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott), I shall refer to the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), who spoke about a pragmatic approach to privatisation. Ever since I first became interested in privatisation in 1978, I have taken the entirely pragmatic view that it should be agreed only if it gives significant consumer benefits in terms of price, quality and service.

It is arrogant of the Opposition to table a motion that opposes even the stated intention of reopening the question of privatising the Royal Mail and Parcelforce. The Opposition do not even want to examine the arguments; they proceed from the ideological basis that the arguments should not be put to the British people.

Even more arrogant was the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty). When he was confronted with the facts by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh)—who pointed out that the Conservative party, having privatised no fewer than 57 companies and public sector institutions, won the 1983, 1987 and 1992 general elections—the hon. Gentleman said that that was not the result of any decision by the electorate but the consequence of

"slavish adherence to their party."

The fact that the Conservatives got 19 million votes—a record—at the last election shows that that is patent nonsense.

Ms Church *rose—*

Mr. Coombs: I do not have time to give way if I am to leave enough time for the winding-up speeches.

I come from the constituency where Roland Hill was born. We celebrated the 200th anniversary of his birth a few weeks ago. I support a universal letter service and a nationwide system of post offices, at a uniform price. I also recognise that, under a Conservative Government, the Post Office has taken significant steps forward, many of which have already been mentioned. The volume of mail has risen by 50 per cent. in the past 10 years.

Through its customer first culture—a 1993 survey confirms this—the Post Office has become more generally appreciated by the public. Postal charges have not risen since 1993 and are lower than they were in 1979, and last year the Post Office made a profit of £472 million. All this is evidence of an efficient organisation, but one operating as a monopoly. That enables it to produce results that might not be possible in a competitive market.

Although the organisation is commercial, it is operating in a significantly changing environment, which was described by my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French). The changes usually involve technology: e-mail, telexes, faxes, interactive television and cable. All will begin to eat into the traditional market held by the Post Office. The United States experience shows that only 15 per cent. of international express mail is now dealt with by public post offices. My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester talked about the Dutch privatisation and the inroads that have been made into the British bulk mail market. The Swedish Government have ended the monopoly of their service; the same goes for Canada and New Zealand. The German Government have just privatised their telecommunications business, so they will be looking for additional international outlets.

This, therefore, is an increasingly competitive international business. Two years ago, *The Economist* wrote:

"Those post offices that find new markets and cut costs—meaning those that are privatised—will be the ones that thrive. That means not just nationally but internationally. Cross-border business mail is growing fast. And successful private mail operators, like other privatised utilities, could one day invest direct in foreign businesses, galvanising sleepy local competition. For those that are held back by their political masters, the future would then be a bleak one, as shrunken suppliers of traditional domestic physical mail."

That is why I believe that, while Post Office Counters can be kept in the public sector and arrangements can be made to keep our network of already generally private post offices, and although the business of post offices is set to increase—insurance, bulk cash handling, banking, sales of tickets, pensions and driving licences—the organisation must go forward to the privatisation of Royal Mail and Parcelforce, and it should happen not on a 51 per cent. basis but on a 100 per cent. basis.

Competition must result from the privatisation. Ninety per cent. of the population, following the privatisation of BT, now have access to alternative services such as Mercury. Similarly, we must introduce a duopoly, or even greater competition, to the postal services market. That would lead to the sort of expansion that everyone in the House wants, and it would allow the Post Office to compete as it wants to. It would be quite consistent with the privatisation policy of this Government which has been such a success.

The Economist had this to say:

"One of the Conservatives' clearest triumphs over the past 15 years has been the privatisation of state-owned companies. Fat nationalised industries have been transformed into fit and profitable enterprises. Huge subsidies have been eliminated. The prices of phone calls, electricity and gas have dropped in real terms. Services have improved strikingly. Eager to learn from this success, scores of governments have studied the British example".

That is precisely what has happened in the case of British Telecom, British Gas, the water companies, British Aerospace, British Airways, Rolls-Royce and the rest of the 57 companies that the Government have privatised. The lesson has been learnt: privatisation means increased competition, more commitment, lower prices, more investment and better quality for the consumer.

What I find so nauseating is the fact that, although the Labour party pretends to be market-friendly and to approach subjects such as this in a way that is likely to assist the consumer, we find at every turn that it is the friend of the producer and the trade unions. It is no coincidence that all the Labour Members who have spoken in the debate have been sponsored by trade unions in the industry.

Labour Members says that they are objective. Why, then, did they oppose every privatisation proposed by the Government? They say that they want to examine the

issues objectively and sensibly. Why, then, do they not even want to engage in a study of the potential of telecommunications privatisation? They pretend to be the consumer's friend; yet they insist on interference and bureaucracy that would damage the consumer's interests. Most hypocritical of all, they say that they favour a stakeholder society—yet they would deny us privatisation, under which the number of private shareholders has risen from 3 million when the Conservatives were first elected to more than 11 million now. If that is not a stakeholding in British industry, I do not know what is.

Like Labour's policies, the motion is redolent of the party's hypocrisy in regard to industrial and economic matters. I urge the House to reject it.

9.36 pm

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): Madam Deputy Speaker—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was so intrigued by the speech of the hon. Member for Wyre Valley—[HON. MEMBERS: "Wyre Forest."] I mean the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs). Obviously I have valleys on the brain. Anyway, I was so intrigued by his speech that I failed to observe your arrival in the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The comments of the hon. Member for Wyre Forest were not appropriate. We chose this topic for debate because we are interested not only in the issue of Post Office privatisation, but in what happens to the Post Office in general. The motion refers to the future of the Post Office. I am sure that, like me, my hon. Friends are genuinely interested in debating the subject: that is why we are here tonight.

I valued not just the wisdom of those of my hon. Friends who have spoken this evening—some spoke from experience—but the contribution of the Father of the House, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) and, for different reasons, that of the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh). Both showed up the sham of the amendment. The Father of the House pointed out that the commitment to privatisation was conspicuous by its absence; indeed, he said that he would vote with the Government precisely because the amendment was vague, and pointed out that the Government were not going to privatise the Post Office. Nothing could be more damning than that. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say about whoever drafted the amendment: I cannot believe that he drafted it himself.

The speech of the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle was interesting. It was, at least, an honest, forthright and at times courageous statement that the Government should privatise the Post Office. The Government, however, are afraid to say whether they will do so.

Hon. Members' speeches have reflected in the House the public reactions of hon. Members to the Prime Minister's Frost interview in January. It is worth recalling the words of the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) who said:

> "I think it would be both astonishing and unwise to revive this matter again. The post office runs perfectly well as a successful and profitable public corporation, unlike other industries which have been privatised in the past. I do not believe its privatisation would command any strong public support in the next election."

The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Sir J. Lester) said:

> "It is still an efficient post office . . . I am lukewarm, to say the least, about the case for putting anything in the manifesto."

Such reactions are by no means limited to hon. Members. The passions aroused by the issue of Post Office privatisation are shared widely throughout the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister recognised that when, in the same Frost interview, he said:

> "We are democrats and if we can't get something through Parliament then we can't do it."

That quotation has the hallmarks of the Prime Minister's peculiar syntax, but I use it anyway.

Why on earth has the Prime Minister announced that he wants to have another shot at the privatisation of the Post Office? Is it because the Government have yet to find an ideological successor to the privatisation programme of his predecessor in the 1980s?

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Howells: No, I am sorry but I do not have time.

Are we to view that announcement as part of the legislative programme outlined in last year's Queen's Speech which Conservative central office described as

> "pushing forward radical policies for the millennium"?

I am glad that the Government Whip, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter), agrees with that. To privatise or not to privatise is the totality of the Tory vision for Britain.

The hon. Member for Harrow, East said that the Post Office runs perfectly well as a successful and profitable public corporation, and we must all agree. The evidence is irrefutable. Last year, it made £472 million profit. The Government certainly agree with him. That is why the Chancellor announced last November that the Government were requiring the Post Office to provide an additional £400 million for the Treasury coffers during the next three years. They will milk the Post Office, not for £532 million as the previous President of the Board of Trade, now the Deputy Prime Minister, said last May, but for £925 million.

If it works, why fix it? That was a question that the consultancy, London Economics, examined in its critique of the Government's Green Paper on the future of the postal service. It concluded:

> "Privatisation itself is not a fundamental driver of efficiency improvement. Competition, effective regulation and a determination to restructure the business when necessary matter more."

Why do not the Government understand that? The British people do. That is why they trust the Post Office. Polling evidence, which has been quoted by hon. Members on both sides of the House, tells us that they believe it to be efficient, safe, competitively priced, community based and accountable and, through its Crown post offices and sub-post offices, it constitutes a functioning social centre in most communities. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) reminded us so forcibly, the British people perceive it as being staffed by individuals who know and care about the communities that they serve.

The Post Office is one of the great popular institutions, binding together all parts of the United Kingdom. The Government must know that countries such as ours do not

[Dr. Howells]

hang together without some form of social and cultural cement, be it a common history of opposition to tyranny or an affection for institutions as diverse as the Queen's Christmas message or the theme tune from "EastEnders". We hear endless homilies from the Government about how important it is for the British people to recognise the strength that we have in unity. It is curious that they seem unprepared to consider the possibility of strengthening this great national institution.

People trust the Post Office. They trust postal staff and, in particular, they trust postmen and postwomen. If anybody wants proof of how far the public trust them, I challenge the Government to try to make a lovable children's cartoon hero out of Private Pension Adviser Albert and see how he gets on in the television ratings against Postman Pat.

The Post Office brand name is invaluable to it. Its red vans and office signs are among the best known of all liveries in the world. It guarantees good and reliable service, uniform prices and universal delivery. No matter what the Government might promise to convince us that they are interested in protecting those guarantees, the public do not believe it, and with good reason.

By international standards, the Post Office is very efficient and its services are competitively priced. If it is given sufficient powers by the Government, it will be capable of meeting all its commercial challenges from home and abroad. Will the Government give it those powers? On the contrary. When the Chancellor announced his intention to levy the extra £400 million on Post Office profits, he was levying a new tax on the public through the inevitable increase in stamp charges. Why did he decide to do that? Because the new levy makes sense only if it is interpreted as an attempt to sabotage the image of the Post Office as a profitable concern—in other words, to blacken its name in the eyes of the public. It is the softening-up process for privatisation.

From the same briefing document to which the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle referred, the Association of International Courier Express Services and DHL made no secret of the fact that they are, as they put it,

"extremely conscious of the value of the universal service provided by the Royal Mail"

and none of the Government's proposals for extending competition in the postal services seeks to undermine that service. Why should they? Those organisations, which represent 95 per cent. of the United Kingdom's express distribution industry, also represent the commercial interests of some 60,000 employees. That is 60,000 households that know the value of the service that the Post Office provides. Those organisations demand not that the Government should start to dismember the Post Office or bleed it to death but that they should get their act together on examining and strengthening the rules of competition so that the express distribution companies have an equal opportunity to compete.

Their aspirations are not a world apart from those expressed by the Post Office chief executive, Mr. John Roberts, and his managers in the aftermath of the Chancellor's November announcement. They are as acutely aware as the private operators of the challenges posed by the European Commission's draft directive and, more worrying, the draft notice on the implementation of proposals and timetables for the liberalisation of postal services in the European Union. Through the media grapevine, they have made it abundantly clear that the Chancellor's increases in the negative external financing limit are likely to mean that they will be damaged in their attempt to meet those challenges.

If the indirect extraction of capital is too great, it will leave little funding for the Post Office's investment programme and the competitiveness of the Post Office will be affected. That in turn could have an adverse effect on the quality of service and give the Government the perfect excuse for arguing that the only way for the Post Office to compete successfully is through privatisation. That is happening at a critical time for Post Office Counters. A huge modernisation programme is about to be implemented there under the private finance initiative. If any project demands a secure and consistent business climate, it is that one, but it is not likely to enjoy such a climate because the Prime Minister's statement has nothing to do with improving the performance of postal services.

The Government have decided to privatise the Post Office through a secret agenda and not openly. I have no doubt whatever about that. That is why the Government's amendment is so weak and inconclusive. The Prime Minister is considering, once again, the privatisation of the industry for one reason only: he needs to throw his own right wing—many of whom have been represented here tonight—some red meat occasionally, and the latest lump of red meat is this reheated bit tonight. He will not be able to look to the Post Office for support, as I do not think that Mr. John Roberts will take the same line as his predecessor. He has made it clear that he wants to get on with the job that he is paid for: making this a successful, efficient and profitable business. Judging by the Post Office's financial results, it seems that it has been doing that job well.

This is a case of the worst sort of political interference in the affairs of a healthy and forward-looking company. The Post Office is asking questions that are generated by the commercial realities of national and international competition, but it is receiving nothing more by way of a reply from the Prime Minister than the whine of internal party conflicts on the Conservative Benches.

Why do the Government bother when the best that the Prime Minister could come out with on Post Office privatisation in his fateful interview with Sir David Frost was:

"I would like to have seen it but there was no parliamentary majority for it . . . We will look again and see if it is a subject for the next Parliament when we come to look at the manifesto."

Talk about hedging his bets. That statement is the worst sort of mischief-making. There is no courage in it, no determination. It is a tease. Will he or won't he? What he will do is remind everyone that this clapped-out Government have only one agenda: to cling to power by persuading their rebellious right-wing to troop through the Division Lobby. If that means sacrificing a first-class postal service, so be it, says the Prime Minister. That is why I commend the motion to the House.

9.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): I am grateful for this chance to reply to the debate. I have

listened carefully to all the speeches and I especially enjoyed the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), who has much experience in this sector, and of my hon. Friends the Members for Gloucester (Mr. French) and for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs), with which I agreed.

I was interested also in what Opposition Members said about possible Post Office privatisation. I remind those who bothered to turn up to what, after all, is a debate on an Opposition motion—at one point, only seven Opposition Members were here, most of whom seem to be sponsored by the Post Office union—of the comments that some of their predecessors have made about earlier privatisations. When we privatised British Airways, the Labour spokesman said that it would become

"the pantomime horse of capitalism".—[*Official Report*, 19 November 1979; Vol. 974, c. 125.]

The person who said that was the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), who now sits on the Opposition Front Bench and is the Labour Chief Whip. What happened is that British Airways has been transformed from the airline that was rated below Aeroflot by its passengers, to the world's favourite airline, carrying more international passengers than any other in the world. It is the most profitable and the largest airline in Europe. French, Italian and Spanish taxpayers are still contributing hundreds of millions of pounds keeping their sad, state-owned flag carriers in the air, but British Airways is contributing money to hospitals and schools—not bad for a pantomime horse.

Mr. Connarty: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have limited time. Could you persuade the Minister to return to the subject of the debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I was not aware that the Minister had left it.

Mr. Oppenheim: As the hon. Gentleman spoke for 22 minutes and then left the Chamber—no doubt to collect his cheque from his union sponsors—

Mr. Connarty: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mrs. Beckett: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Oppenheim: I am not giving way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Is the right hon. Lady raising a point of order?

Mrs. Beckett: I do not think that the Minister has given way. I ask him again to do so.

Mr. Oppenheim: I have only a short time left. Opposition Members spoke for too long.

Mrs. Beckett *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot possibly have two hon. Members shouting across the Dispatch Box. The right hon. Lady has the Dispatch Box.

Mrs. Beckett: I was saying that the Minister has made a disgracefully worded allegation against my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty). He should withdraw it, according, I think, to the rules of the House.

Mr. Oppenheim: Had the right hon. Lady been in the Chamber for her hon. Friend's 22-minute speech, she would know that he admitted to being sponsored by the union.

On Second Reading—

Mr. Connarty: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that this is a genuine point of order.

Mr. Connarty: It is, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister said that I left the Chamber to receive a cheque from another organisation. That was an accusation that I took money in my hand, when I had explained that I received no money from anyone. I believe that that was a severe abuse of the Minister's position, and I ask him to withdraw it. I ask you to instruct him to withdraw it, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the Minister said that the hon. Gentleman received a cheque for his speech—*[Interruption.]* Order. If that is what the Minister said, that was not an appropriate charge, and I should be grateful if he would withdraw it.

Mr. Oppenheim: As the hon. Gentleman is so sensitive about his union sponsorship, of course I withdraw.

On Second Reading of the Telecommunications Bill—the Act that privatised BT—the Labour spokesman, the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme), said:

"The public telephone box could be threatened with extinction."—[*Official Report*, 18 July 1983; Vol. 46, c. 41.].

Instead, the number of BT call boxes has risen by 30 per cent., and now they work. Getting a telephone line in the 1970s, when the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) was up his telegraph pole, was like trying to get an interview with the Pope. Now one can get a telephone in seven days.

It is not only in the utilities that privatisation has brought benefits. As a nationalised industry, British Steel was the world's largest loss-maker. Now it is the most efficient steel producer in Europe, and one of the best in the world. British Aerospace has overtaken state-owned Aerospatiale of France to become Europe's biggest defence and aerospace manufacturer. Unlike the French company, British Airways makes a profit. Rolls-Royce, on the borders of my constituency, has increased its share of the world civil aero-engine market from 10 to 30 per cent.

Best and perhaps most important of all, whereas in 1979 state-run industries were depriving hospitals and schools in Britain of £85 million a week—that is what they cost to run—the privatised industries are now contributing £55 million a week in taxes to our schools and hospitals.

Ms Church: What about the Post Office?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady cannot keep yelling the words "Post Office". I draw her attention to the amendment.

Mr. Oppenheim: I am glad that the Opposition chose to debate the Post Office, because we have a policy and they do not. We have a policy, because the past 16 years have shown that privatisation has resulted in more investment, better services and lower prices.

[Mr. Oppenheim]

We have our policies in place. Now the Opposition, who called the debate, should say what their policy is. Tonight they have complained about the external financing limit. Let us hear what their policy is. I challenge the Opposition spokesman, the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), to say whether a future Labour Government, if there is one, will reduce the external financing limit. Will she or will she not? Of course she will not.

I am told that a Labour party publication called *Women Today* recently held a competition inviting people to

"Win a day in Parliament—all you have to do is say in no more than 100 words what the policies and priorities of a Labour Government would be."

Obviously we shall have to wait until those good ladies have returned their answers before we hear any clear policies from the Opposition.

As usual, all we have heard from the Opposition is motherhood and apple pie—political escalator muzak, meaningless waffle. But perhaps I am being unfair, because the Opposition are clear about one thing: the core values of new Labour's great visionary forward-looking project do not include an acceptance of the benefits of privatisation.

That sits oddly with Labour's stated desire to make new Labour more like Europe's social democratic parties. Over the past decade, privatisation has been accepted by social democrats in Sweden, Holland and Belgium. Even the socialists in France, Italy and Spain have accepted it. Even in Vietnam and Cuba, they are beginning to see the light. Who does that leave? It leaves new Labour and North Korea; the Leader of the Opposition and Kim Jong Il walking in lockstep to oblivion.

I invite the House to reject the Opposition motion and support the Government amendment.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 255, Noes 289.

Division No. 46] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Purchase, Ken

Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Clarke and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John

Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexf'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the substantial benefits which have flowed to customers from the Government's programme of privatisation; recognises that 19,000 of the 20,000 post offices in the United Kingdom are already in the private sector; and endorses the Government's continuing commitment to a universal postal service at a uniform and affordable tariff and a nationwide network of post offices.

DEREGULATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to deregulation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14A(1) (Consideration of draft deregulation orders),

That the draft Deregulation (Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976) (Amendment) (Time Limits) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 20th November, be approved.

That the draft Deregulation (Corn Returns Act 1882) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 27th November, be approved.

That the draft Deregulation (Fair Trading Act 1973) (Amendment) (Merger Reference Time Limits) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 20th November, be approved.

That the draft Deregulation (Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976) (Amendment) (Variation of Exempt Agreements) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 20th November, be approved. —[*Mr. Knapman.*]

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

10.16 pm

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): I rise on behalf of hundreds of my constituents who are concerned that the Government are not doing enough to protect sites of special scientific interest. The petition says:

The petition of York Friends of the Earth and residents of York

Declares that we understand that every year between 200-300 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), our best wildlife sites, are damaged or destroyed.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the government to support Friends of the Earth's SSSI campaign by passing tougher laws to protect our best wildlife sites.

That is signed by Guy Wallbanks of York Friends of the Earth and 742 supporters of his cause.

To lie upon the Table.

Fire Stations (London)

10.17 pm

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): This is a petition from residents of Plumstead, Shooters Hill and the surrounding area. It is backed by a petition in similar words with 30,000 signatures that is being delivered to the Department of the Environment and more than 1,000 letters that I have received from constituents and organisations, including the community police consultative committee. The petition sheweth:

That it is proposed to close the Shooters Hill Fire Station, Woolwich SE18 3BT and that we the undersigned, vigorously oppose the planned closure, which will seriously reduce the fire cover available in the surrounding area putting both lives and property at risk. The danger will be compounded by the closure of the Downham Fire Station in the neighbouring Borough of Lewisham and the removal of a Fire Appliance from the East Greenwich Fire Station in Charlton. These cuts in fire cover are part of a package of proposals which will result in the closure of four fire stations across London and the removal of 22 Fire Appliances from other stations and result from the substantial cut in the resources available to the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority. Furthermore, categorisation of risks, and the attendance times based upon that categorisation, place a higher priority on protecting buildings than saving lives.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House do urge the Secretary of State for the Environment to increase the Standard Spending Assessment for the LFCDA and urge the Home Secretary to conduct an independent review of risk categorisation and for them to intervene to prevent the closure of Shooters Hill Fire Station.

To lie upon the Table.

Libya and Iraq (Sanctions)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

10.19 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The United Nations economic sanctions against Iraq have caused the death of more than 560,000 children since the Gulf war, according to a UN Food and Agriculture Organisation study reported in *The Lancet.* According to Dr. Mary Smith Fawzi of the Harvard School of Public Health,

"Food prices are high, purchasing power is low, water and sanitation systems have deteriorated, hospitals are functioning at 40 per cent. capacity and the population is largely sustained by government rations which provide 1,000 calories per person per day."

An editorial in *The Lancet* states that Governments are now being unrealistic in expecting sanctions to cause Iraqis to rebel and notes:

"Western arms and diplomacy have failed to unseat Saddam Hussein. Why expect a population enfeebled by disease to do so?"

I have asked the Foreign Office to respond tonight to the moving "Thought for the day" that was given by the Bishop of Leicester, Dr. Tom Butler, of which I have given it a copy. He said:

"Five years ago . . . the allied attack started in the Gulf War which drove the Iraqi army out of Kuwait. Hostilities ended with Saddam Hussein still in power, but we are told that his overthrow hadn't been the objective of the war.

An economic embargo was then imposed by the United Nations together with a ban on Iraqi sales of oil so denying it access to foreign exchange. The assumption obviously was that if life became sufficiently uncomfortable for the Iraqi people they would overthrow their leader.

Not surprisingly, this hasn't happened. It is rather like a teacher telling a class of frightened schoolboys to sort out the class bully themselves and that they would all be punished until they did so. Well, the Iraqi people have been well and truly punished and Saddam Hussein is still in power."

The bishop went on to say that, 18 months ago, he and the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel)

"visited Baghdad on a humanitarian mission to see how UN sanctions were affecting the Iraqi people. We were horrified by what we saw. We paid unannounced visits to modern hospitals staffed by Western trained doctors and nurses now operating in virtual stone age conditions without electricity, drugs, clean dressings or bedding. We saw children dying of diseases usually only seen in famine conditions in sub-Sahara Africa. Once people heard our English accents, they came up to us angrily demanding to know why the West was punishing them in this way.

It wasn't easy to answer for to withhold medical supplies from enemy civilians is against the Geneva conventions but, of course, we are not at war with Iraq and so the conventions do not apply. Neither is the UN totally refusing to allow medical supplies into Iraq but the Iraqi government say that it finds the conditions which would be imposed humiliating. We had several meetings with Iraqi ministers and were angered and frustrated by the way it seems to us that they were prepared to hold their own people hostage to put pressure on the West to totally lift sanctions when, with a modicum of goodwill, modest amounts of medical and food aid could be supplied to the Iraqi people without any great principle being breached.

But eighteen months later sanctions still bite into every Iraqi home and add to the climate of fear present everywhere. Meanwhile the world turns its attention to other trouble spots. In our own country this week there has been a call for a return to the teaching of traditional moral standards. Well, with the ordinary people of Iraq in mind, let me remind you of some of Jesus's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God.

Blessed are they that mourn for they will be comforted."

It is not only left-wing Members of Parliament and bishops who take that view. The Saudi prince, who was the joint commander of the Gulf war allied forces, said that the United Nations should look for an alternative to sanctions against Iraq because the punitive measures had not worked. General Prince Khaled Bin Sultan told reporters after meeting Egypt's President, Hosni Mubarak, that sanctions imposed after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 had strengthened rather than weakened President Saddam Hussein's Government.

"The sanctions have not achieved their aim"

said the Saudi Prince

"and we must look for another way. I am not against ending the sanctions on Iraq but they are based on UN conventions and resolutions . . . The alternative must come from the United Nations and from the only world superpower, the United States."

I do not know what the British Government have to say in reply.

Secondly, I shall discuss Lockerbie. At Inverness, at the meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee on 5 February 1996, I said:

"May I ask a short question, which could be answered in three words, about the evidence that Law Officers claim to have on Lockerbie? Where physically is the crucial timing device and in whose possession?"

The Lord Advocate replied:

"As members of the Committee know well, it is not the policy of Lord Advocates to discuss in advance of trial any evidence relating to the guilt or innocence of the accused."

He told my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), who is in the Chamber tonight:

"My position on the matter is clear. A petition warrant has been granted for the two individuals concerned and we are . . . ready to prosecute them in Scotland. The only reason why they are not in Scotland now is because of their actions and those of the Libyan Government. There will be no change of policy on my part to that adopted by my predecessor in trying to bring them to justice in Scotland."—*[Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee,* 5 February 1996; c. 6-8.]

I ask some questions. First, would any set of British Ministers, were the boot on the other foot, encourage two Scots whom they believed to be innocent to surrender themselves to a country with whom we had no extradition treaty?

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Dalyell: I see my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) nodding in agreement because he has been to Libya and witnessed what the reaction is likely to be.

Mr. Austin-Walker: I have indeed had discussions with the lawyers for the two accused, and I believe that we would all agree that it is in the best interests of the accused and of the families of the victims of Lockerbie

[Mr. Austin-Walker]

that those accused are brought to trial soon. I have also had discussions, as my hon. Friend is aware, with the Secretary of the Arab League, who has made proposals, which I believe are acceptable to the defence counsel in Libya and to the Libyan Government, for a trial to take place in The Hague before Scottish judges under Scottish law. Does my hon. Friend consider that that would be a way to proceed, and would he urge the Government to accept that offer?

Mr. Dalyell: I do, and I believe that my hon. Friend's intervention is extremely important and must be replied to by the Government.

Secondly, are Her Majesty's Government prepared to allow our hostile relations with Libyans, many of whom were educated in Britain, to drift on indefinitely and for a longer period than our post-war hostility to Germany after massive bloodshed, mayhem and horror in the second world war?

Thirdly, how does information about the whereabouts of the timer, and in whose possession the timer is, in any way prejudice a trial? The truth, I believe, is that if the authorities have a timer at all, it is not the timer from Pan Am 103 but a different timer, probably acquired later via Senegal.

We do not know when the timer was found, who found it and what happened to it after it was found, and it beggars belief that such a sensitive device, after months of exposure to a Scottish winter, could, in fragments or otherwise, be in a pristine condition. It is all too clear why the Government will not show the timer to the makers, Edwin Bollier and Ulrich Lumpart—because they might identify it as not having been of a Libyan batch. Photographs are all that have been made available.

Pamela Dix, their secretary, speaking for the relatives of the Lockerbie victims, says that they are deeply suspicious of photographs and want an independent forensic inquiry, conducted by agreed experts. Will such an inquiry be considered?

Finally, can it be true that the Minister, in his meeting with the relatives, Dr. Swire and the Rev. John Mosey, said that the British Government were opposed to a trial in The Hague partly because they were worried about the possibility of wrongful acquittal? "Fear of wrongful acquittal"—did he say that?

It is my pleasure to give way to the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), who has an honourable part in the discussion.

10.29 pm

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): I congratulate the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on securing the debate on this important subject. I am grateful to him and to the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), for agreeing to allow me to make a short contribution to the debate, in which I shall concentrate on the Libyan question. I begin by declaring an interest which appears in the Register of Members' Interests—I visited Libya last April as a guest of the Islamic Council of Scotland.

I do not intend to examine the position of the Crown Office. However, it is fair to say that many people with no particular axe to grind are having increasing doubts about the Crown Office's position—particularly about why apparently solid evidence which might have led the Crown Office to a different conclusion has been rejected. I shall make two points about the sanctions policy.

First, what is the objective? The hon. Member for Linlithgow pointed out correctly that the objective is not succeeding in relation to Iraq. History shows that such economic sanctions do not succeed, and there is not the slightest evidence that such sanctions will be effective in achieving their declared purpose in relation to Libya—especially as there appears to be no real communication between the British and the Libyan Governments on the issue. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to explain why the British Government are so opposed to the international court idea, to which the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) referred.

Finally, there is a widespread view that the British are the only people who are obeying the sanctions policy. The Americans are using the South Koreans to get around the policy and the Italians, being Italians—I do not want to sound like a Euro-sceptic—never obey any of those policies. The net result is that the British are obeying the sanctions and other countries are not. Great damage is therefore being done to jobs—particularly in the west of Scotland, given its export orientation—without achieving any political objective.

The policy cannot possibly continue for ever. What will be the end result? My hon. Friend the Minister is renowned for being fair and open-minded. I hope that he will seriously take on board the arguments put by the hon. Member for Linlithgow, who speaks tonight on behalf of many people.

10.32 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Nicholas Bonsor): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) for his kind remarks at the end of his speech. I assure him that the Government and I are acutely aware of the great suffering of the relations of the victims of the appalling Lockerbie disaster. The Government will do everything we can to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice—that is the bond which unites all of us in the House tonight. However, we have substantial differences of opinion as to how that could best be achieved, and that is why we are debating the issue this evening.

I am slightly saddened that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has raised the issue again, only two and a half months after he last raised it in the same terms on 29 November last year. It does not do the cause any good to run continually around this course when there are no new facts and no changes which might make the Government look at the issue afresh. We discussed the matter at great length during the debate on 29 November and I have met the hon. Gentleman and the families of the victims. We all want to achieve the objective of bringing to justice the persons responsible for a horrendous crime, but replaying the record when we have substantial differences of opinion on how to achieve that objective is not necessarily the best way forward. The hon. Gentleman raised precisely the same points today as when he was previously answered by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, but he raised other points as well and I shall attempt to respond.

Mr. Dalyell: If that is not the best way forward, what is the best way?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The best way forward is that which the Government are adopting. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman thinks that there are better ways. I know that he does not agree with us, but we have made it abundantly clear to him why we are taking the action that we are and going down the road that we are. I shall spell out the reasons again for the hon. Gentleman, so that there can be no conceivable doubt.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow quoted the Bishop of Leicester—and in fairness to the hon. Gentleman, he did so in full—but he paid no regard to the phrase used by the bishop in regard to the responsibilities of the Iraqi Government. The House will forgive me if I repeat that part of the bishop's broadcast. He said:

"We had several meetings with Iraqi Ministers and were angered and frustrated by the way it seemed to us that they were prepared to hold their own people hostage to put pressure on the West to totally lift sanctions when, with a modicum of good will, modest amounts of medical and food aid could be supplied to the Iraqi people without any great principle being breached."

Responsibility for what is happening to the Iraqi people rests squarely with Saddam Hussein and his cohorts. Security Council resolution 986 would allow a net purchase of $2.5 billion worth of medical and humanitarian aid per annum in exchange for the oil that Iraq could sell. The UN conditions for providing that relief are perfectly reasonable, but Saddam Hussein's regime has consistently rejected them. I am not prepared to accept any responsibility on behalf of western Governments for the action of that evil man in denying to his people the aid that is available to them.

The $2.5 billion that is available to Iraq under the UN arrangement compares with a total of $5 billion spent annually on all civilian purchases made in Iraq before the Gulf war. It is ridiculous for anybody to suggest that the hardship being caused to the Iraqi people by the absence of medical and humanitarian aid is the responsibility of western Governments, because it is not—it is the responsibility of the home Government. I cannot spell that out more strongly or with greater sincerity and fervour.

Iraqi and United Nations representatives are meeting today in New York to discuss implementation of the Security Council resolution. I am not hopeful that they will arrive at a solution, because every time until now the Iraqi Government have turned down the UN offer. Nevertheless, I pray that the Iraqis will see reason on this occasion.

There is an argument that sanctions are not effective, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood implied. I do not believe that that is so. I hold the opinion that in this case, as with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in that troubled area, sanctions have been immensely effective. We have seen substantial compliance as a direct result of the sanctions that we have imposed on Iraq. I refer in particular to Iraq's recognition of Kuwait and the weapons inspections that have been allowed. I wish that I could say that that was satisfactory, but it is not. The British Government are not satisfied that all chemical and biological weapons have been destroyed—clearly they have not. Iraq's development of Scud missile technology continues apace, and we have not received any satisfactory explanation from the Iraqi Government of how they will comply with UN requirements—and that is critical in preventing Iraq going on the warpath again.

Iraq's human rights record has been appalling and remains appalling. I refer to the report by Mr. van de Stoel—as my right hon. Friend did in the last debate—of 8 November 1995, in which he set out in graphic and horrific detail the torture and abuse that the Iraqi regime is inflicting on its political prisoners. Therefore, sanctions must be continued, and we must ensure that Iraq complies with the UN resolutions. We cannot look for a swift end to these problems, but it must be made clear that this dictator will not be allowed to rearm his country and go on the warpath once more, as I believe he has every intention of doing. The international community must remain vigilant at all times to contain this man and maintain the sanctions as a warning to him that he must not again invade Kuwait or attack western interests.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood and the hon. Member for Linlithgow have a great and abiding concern about Libya, especially with respect to the Lockerbie disaster. I greatly respect that, and the relatives who suffered from this appalling tragedy are lucky to have a champion such as the hon. Gentleman. For all his good intentions, however, I profoundly disagree with the conclusions that he draws as to the way forward on this issue.

I believe that the sanctions against Libya—unlike those relating to Iraq, they do not include oil—must remain in place. They are limited, but they are having an effect on the Libyan regime. There has been a change in Gaddafi's attitude to actively supporting terrorism over the past few years, and there has been some lessening of his aggression against the west. With regard to the Lockerbie disaster, however, we have not yet reached the point that we must reach—to get the two people whom we want indicted and brought to justice released to us for trial in Scotland.

I recently met the relatives of the victims of the tragedy. I cannot express this evening my sympathy for them any more strongly than I did on those occasions, but it is sincere: I can think of no worse horror befalling any father, mother, family or relative than to have their beloved killed in such a fashion. But sympathy cannot divorce us from the reality of the political situation: we have no possibility of getting those people to trial unless we can persuade or force the Libyan Government to release them to us for trial in the place where they should be tried.

There has been an offer of a sort from the Libyan Government to release the men for trial in a third country. I did not find unanimity among the relatives for that offer. Some thought it was a good one, others did not. In any case, it was a phoney offer. It was made in an advertisement in the *Washington Post* of 8 November, and it has not been sustained by the Libyan leadership.

The Libyan position is contradictory. In a letter to the president of the Security Council on 27 January this year, the secretary of the General People's Committee for Foreign Liaison and International Co-operation repeated Libya's demand that an

"independent inquiry should be conducted to arrive at the truth of the incident".

That is very different from saying that the accused will be delivered for an independent trial at The Hague or elsewhere.

We cannot be sure from one moment to another what the intentions of the Libyan Government may be. I explained to the relatives the reason why we find the

[Sir Nicholas Bonsor]

idea of trial in The Hague unacceptable. They were the same as those given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) in the Adjournment debate on 29 November. His main points were that, first, it is unacceptable to allow suspected terrorists to dictate where and how they should be tried. The United States and Scottish courts have both exercised jurisdiction, and they are the courts with a proper right to do so. The trial should be held in one or other of them, as the Security Council resolution has demanded.

Secondly, a third country trial might imply that the Lockerbie suspects could not get a fair trial in Scotland. The Libyan Government indicated in 1993 acceptance that the suspects would indeed get a fair trial if they were tried in Scotland, and I am sure that no Member of this House would suggest otherwise. The court in The Hague, as proposed, would not have a jury, and that in itself is a fundamental breach of the principle of Scottish law. We would have to think very carefully before considering a trial that did not accord with the full precepts that Scottish law demands. There is no provision for a trial outside Scotland. Enormous practical and legislative difficulties would therefore be involved in the arrangement of such a trial, should that be appropriate. Legislation would be required in both countries.

Even if it were possible to set up a court, there would be no guarantee that suspects would be made available to it. The Libyan Government have never given a strong and positive undertaking to hand over the accused; indeed, they have maintained that they have no powers to force the suspects to go to trial anywhere. Thus there is enormous scope for the Libyan Government to prevaricate, and to try to delay the matter into the distant future.

As the hon. Gentleman said, when I was talking to the relatives and trying to convey my profound sympathy for their suffering, I said that they, like Her Majesty's Government, would consider it important for no trial to take place in any form that would not have a proper, legal and justifiable outcome. I said that it would be possible for a court—constituted we know not how or where—to come up with an acquittal that the evidence did not justify. That would not be satisfactory, and I do not believe that any hon. Member would want such an outcome.

Only after years of painstaking effort was sufficient evidence amassed to enable the then Lord Advocate to seek the warrants. The present Lord Advocate and his two predecessors are fully satisfied that the evidence supports the charges that have been brought. After so much work, it would be a tragedy to undermine the deployment of the evidence before an appropriate and properly constituted court of law that was able to try the case fairly and reach the right conclusion under the law, whatever that conclusion might be. The case is prepared so as to be readily presentable before a Scottish or United States court. That is the way in which it is prepared, and it would not be appropriate to try to deploy it elsewhere—before a tribunal or court whose constitution could not be compatible, under present law, with the way in which such matters are dealt with in Scotland.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned forensic evidence, particularly that relating to the mechanism that was used to detonate the bomb. I can only repeat what has been said in successive answers in the House to the same question: I will not, cannot and should not be drawn into commenting on any of the evidence held by the Scottish authorities that forms part of the prosecution's case. Were I to do so, it would jeopardise the value of the evidence in the trial, which would be in the interest of no one seeking justice.

I confirm again that the forensic examination in the investigation was carried out by the Royal Armaments Research and Development Establishment. The prosecution and investigating authorities are careful not to be drawn into disclosures about the evidence, and stories that hon. Members may have read in books or the media are pure speculation. It is absolutely right for the Government and the prosecuting authorities to rely on the evidence that we have.

Mr. Dalyell: Would the Minister agree to a proper independent investigation by agreed forensic experts?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I cannot believe that the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that the Royal Armaments Research and Development Establishment is not either independent or reliable. If he is, I must take the strongest issue with him. I am certainly not prepared to accept such a challenge to that establishment. If he can provide me with the slightest evidence that on occasion its evidence has been challengeable in that way, I will investigate, but I do not believe that it is possible. It is extremely sad that the hon. Gentleman should make such an allegation in the House when I do not believe for a moment that he has any evidence to back it up.

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at eleven minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 8 February 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords]*

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Promoters of the City of Westminster Bill *[Lords]* may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session; and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session;

That, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed) and shall be committed to the Chairman of Ways and Means, who shall make such Amendments thereto as were made by him in the last Session, and shall report the Bill as amended to the House forthwith, and the Bill, so amended, shall be ordered to lie upon the Table;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during any previous Session.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered again on Thursday 15 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

Budget Deficit

1. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the United Kingdom's budget deficit as a proportion of gross domestic product; and if he will publish equivalent figures for other states in the European Union. [12671]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): The UK's general government financial deficit for 1995-96 is forecast at 4¾ per cent. of GDP. In 1995, six European Union countries had lower budget deficits as a proportion of GDP than the UK, and eight had higher.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for that reply. Does that not show that Britain has achieved a position at the top of the tree in relation to the budget deficit as a percentage of GDP? Will he acknowledge, however, that that is not the only statistic where we lead in the European Union? Will he confirm that, although our unemployment continues to fall, today Germany has announced that its unemployment has increased to 4 million?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend is right. We are reducing our fiscal deficit faster than any other major European country and today Germany has unfortunately announced that its unemployment has gone above 4 billion—I mean 4 million. *[Interruption.]* Let the Opposition take it as a warning. One of the main reasons why unemployment has risen in Germany is that it is suffering from a social chapter and all the additional on-costs on employment that this country has avoided.

Mr. Shore: We know that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is hellbent on reaching the 3 per cent. of GDP borrowing requirement—one of the essential criteria—at the earliest possible moment, but what does he now say to his colleagues in the European Union, especially Germany, which has just reported a 4.1 million unemployment level? In those circumstances, will he urge it to cut its public expenditure further and to raise taxation so that it can conform next year to the 3 per cent. of GDP borrowing requirement criterion?

Mr. Clarke: I am a strong advocate of getting down towards a balanced budget and of low inflation. They happen to be the Maastricht criteria as well, but as we move towards achieving them it is doing no harm to this country's economy. Sound Conservative policies are giving us the fastest growth of any major European country and falling unemployment. The problems in Germany and France are that they have not made the structural changes in their economies that a Conservative Government have been making in our economy for the past 16 years. Those two countries need more privatisation, less Government intervention, no social chapter, no minimum wage, a flexible labour market and the conditions for enterprise that we have put in place.

Sir Michael Spicer: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that convergence of budget deficits is not the key factor determining whether a single currency would work, but that much more important is a convergence of business cycles, for instance?

Mr. Clarke: Yes, I do. The criteria are important. I am one of the people who argue that, if economic and monetary union is to go ahead, it is important to have strict adherence to the criteria on budget deficit, inflation, GDP-debt ratio, and so on. I have also frequently said, however, that the countries should go into economic and monetary union only if they are genuinely compatible with each other in other ways and would benefit from doing so. That includes being in the same stage of the business cycles, as my hon. Friend said.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: If the reports that the Government are to announce today—that public sector pay awards are to be about 4 per cent.—are correct, will the Chancellor explain how that will be funded, welcome as it may be to public sector employees whose pay has

been squeezed? Following, for example, the local authorities settlement, does such an award not inevitably mean that other services will have to be cut or that teachers will be made redundant? Does that not add to the crisis facing many national health service trusts, which are unable to meet their current demands, never mind such a pay award?

Mr. Clarke: With respect, the hon. Gentleman knows that I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reporting to the House on the review body's report, which he will do this afternoon, but we have had a straightforward, successful approach to pay for several years. We take the view that, in the public sector as in the private sector, pay settlements should be affordable and fair and should reflect the low inflation culture that we have created, but the hon. Gentleman must wait for the proper announcement from my right hon. Friend.

Mr. David Shaw: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the United Kingdom's position relative to other European countries is much better than the statistics that he has announced might suggest, because many other countries in Europe do not take unfunded pension liabilities into account when they calculate their budget deficits? If a common accounting basis were used throughout Europe, would not our budget deficit position be shown to be infinitely better than those of other countries?

Mr. Clarke: Actually, for the purposes of European comparisons we endeavour to compare fiscal deficits on the same basis. Where other countries' accounting methods differ—they do not differ too much—there are moves to bring them on to the same basis. But my hon. Friend is right about funded pensions. When one looks forward and tries to judge the economic potential of a country, it is important to know to what extent it faces what is known as a demographic time bomb, especially if that will turn into unfunded pension demands that future working populations will have to pay. We have anticipated that possibility, with all the changes that we have made to pensions policy through the 1980s and into the 1990s. Our occupational pensions funds exceed the pension funds available to the whole of the rest of Europe, and we shall continue to ensure that we leave our successors a pensions liability that can be afforded and is properly funded.

Mr. Gordon Brown: The Prime Minister has said that public spending should fall to 35 per cent. of national income; the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has said the same. Does the Chancellor agree with the Prime Minister that that should happen—yes or no?

Mr. Clarke: If the hon. Gentleman would do the Prime Minister the courtesy of reading the quotations from him in *The Sunday Telegraph*, and also read the full text of what I said to the journalists from the *Financial Times*, he would find that the two are indistinguishable. The Prime Minister's remarks and mine could be swapped with each other. We have a clearly stated policy, which we have both enunciated, of a 40 per cent. target, and beyond that to go as far as we can. The 40 per cent. will be hit in 1997-98. If we continue to restrain growth in public expenditure below the growth in the economy, a steadily declining share of GDP will be taken by the state. The Government are achieving that, and the high-tax, high-spending policies of the Labour party would take us in the opposite direction, as they always have in the past.

Mr. Brazier: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, although the current budget deficit figures are good in terms of international league tables, the cumulative figures are even better? If we consider the total weight of debt in accumulated budget deficits as a percentage of GDP, on which interest will have to be paid by future generations, is not this country almost the best in the developed world?

Mr. Clarke: I can give a short answer. My hon. Friend is exactly right and puts his point clearly. The fact that we are steadily reducing our fiscal deficit means that we shall be on target to reduce debt as a proportion of GDP, and therefore to continue to reduce the burden of debt interest, as we have done in our period in office, which leaves room for economic growth and for other public expenditure, too.

Following is the table:

General government financial deficit as a per cent. of GDP in 1995

Country	*Per cent.*
Belgium	4.5
Denmark	2.0
Germany[1]	3.6
Greece	9.3
Spain	5.9
France	5.0
Ireland	2.7
Italy	7.4
Luxembourg	-0.4
Netherlands	3.1
Austria	5.5
Portugal	5.4
Finland	5.4
Sweden	7.0

Note: Estimates from "European Economy", supplement A, *Economic Trends*, No. 12, December 1995.

[1] German figure for 1995 is its latest estimated outturn.

Takeovers (Special Dividends)

2. **Mr. Pearson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding the use of special dividends in takeover bids; and if he will make a statement. [12673]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Jack): My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has received a handful of letters on this subject, including one from the hon. Gentleman. These are receiving attention.

Mr. Pearson: When City financiers freely admit that the use of huge special dividends is a tax abuse, when the *Financial Times* says that no public interest in served by the loophole whereby the taxpayer subsidises corporate raiders and when *The Times* calls the practice an outrage and a state bribe, why are the Government doing nothing about it? When will they act to close the loophole which may already have cost the British taxpayer £200 million?

Mr. Jack: I understand the concerns that the hon. Gentleman articulates, on behalf of those who may not understand the basis on which the mechanism is used. He will realise that, put simply, any dividend, whether special or not, is paid out of already taxed profits. So there cannot be the tax loophole that he identifies. If he is uncomfortable about the process of bids being made by one company to take over another, that shows his fundamental discomfort with the marketplace.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that the fact that there are many more shareholders in this country than there were when the Conservative party came to office is a very welcome development in our society?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend is, as always, absolutely right on that point. When we came to office, there were 3 million shareholders; there are now 10 million. All the policies that enabled that increase to take place were opposed by Labour. Those shareholders now look forward to dividends without double taxation—a policy introduced by the Conservative Government. The Labour Government, on the other hand, believed in double taxation on dividends.

Budget Statement (Leeds)

3. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the impact of his 1995 Budget statement on Leeds. [12674]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Angela Knight): My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has received a number of representations since he made his Budget statement in November from all parts of the country, welcoming the measures in the Budget.

Mr. Battle: Ministers may be content to reel off average figures, but is the Economic Secretary aware that the pay rates of thousands of workers in Leeds are still the lowest in the country? Some of my constituents earn well below £2.50 an hour and they have been hit hard by Tory tax rises for years. Is it not the case that it is not only the unemployed who are paying a high price for the Government's economic policies but thousands of people in work who are seeing their living standards fall?

Mrs. Knight: The hon. Gentleman may care to learn that a family on average earnings is expected to be £4,500, or 40 per cent., better off next year than in 1978-79. When Labour was in power, real take-home pay grew not by 40 per cent. or 30 per cent., but by a miserly 1 per cent. Unemployment has fallen in Leeds in his constituency in the past year, and I hope that he will welcome that.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. It is to be regretted that the Minister widened what was a narrow question by her answer. I call Mr. Marshall, as the question was widened by the Minister.

Mr. John Marshall: Will not the Budget lead to a £9 a week increase in real take-home pay and a reduction in unemployment in Leeds and elsewhere in the United Kingdom, as well as faster economic growth in Leeds and elsewhere in the United Kingdom than in other countries in Europe?

Mrs. Knight: My hon. Friend is correct. I look forward to the people of Leeds enjoying the benefits of the Conservative Government's economic policies. I only hope that the Labour-controlled local authority in Leeds runs the city rather better in the future than it does at present.

Ms Primarolo: What representations has the Minister received about regard the Deputy Prime Minister's endorsement of the late payment of bills, a practice that wreaks havoc on small businesses in Leeds and elsewhere? Will she condemn that practice? When do the Government intend to bring forward legislation to introduce a legal right to interest on late payment? Will the Government continue to string the business community along?

Mrs. Knight: This question seems to have become extraordinarily wide. If the hon. Lady had ever run her own business, she would have found that there are both good times and bad times, and sometimes it is harder to pay the bills than others. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Wait a moment.

Regarding interest on the late payment of debt, the organisations that represent small businesses are undecided about the route they wish the Government to pursue. I can assure the hon. Lady that the Government are determined to support small and large businesses, and our economic policies have proven just that.

Mr. Pickles: With reference to the low paid in Leeds, has my hon. Friend had an opportunity to look at the statement from Unison on recent pay rises? Has she noticed the number of low-paid people in local authorities, particularly Labour authorities, including Leeds? Given that those authorities—particularly Leeds—support a national minimum wage, does she agree that this is a clear case of Labour saying one thing and doing another?

Mrs. Knight: My hon. Friend makes exactly the right point. He may also be interested to know that, in Leeds, the local authority has decided to pass a lot of money into the reserves rather than spending it on services to the benefit of people in the city.

Landfill Tax

4. **Mrs. Jane Kennedy:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the economic impact of introducing a landfill tax. [12675]

The Paymaster General (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): The landfill tax will encourage the minimisation, re-use and recovery of value from waste where it is economically efficient to do so. Since the revenue will allow the main rate of employer's national insurance contributions to be reduced, the tax will provide for a further boost to employment.

Mrs. Kennedy: Does the Minister agree that, notwithstanding adjustments to the standard spending

assessment, the cost of the new tax will fall heavily on local authorities, which will find that the cuts in national insurance will not fully compensate for the new tax? Does she also agree that the people of Liverpool will face an extra burden of £1.5 million a year on their council tax bills? Is that not another example of a new Tory tax on an already overburdened people?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Local authorities will see a reduction in their national insurance contributions. As many of their services are labour-intensive, they will benefit in that way. Obviously, it is the instinct of Liverpool council to pass everything on to the ratepayer. That is not the instinct of Conservative councils. They will be in a good position to reduce the amount of waste that they send to landfill by seeking alternatives, such as re-use and recycling, which will reduce the amount of tax that they pay while they get the benefit of the national insurance contribution cut.

Mr. Renton: Is it the intention that the landfill tax should be paid by a local authority, if it has to move thousands of tonnes of waste from where the authority put it 10 years ago to another site? May I warn my hon. Friend that an extension to the Bluebell railway line in my constituency, which is loved by railway buffs and is an important tourist attraction in Sussex, may not be able to proceed if the answer to my first question is yes?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I will clearly have to look into the Bluebell line, because I would not want to inhibit my right hon. Friend's project. I can confirm that, in principle, it is a rule of the tax that all controlled waste sent to a registered landfill site will bear tax at an appropriate rate.

Incomes

5. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on real personal disposable income levels in the United Kingdom between January and December 1995. [12677]

11. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Treasury's most recent estimate for the level of real personal disposable income in 1995. [12646]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. William Waldegrave): Last November's Budget forecast showed real personal disposable income rising by 2 per cent. in 1995. We do not yet have the final figures.

Mr. Miller: Is it not the case that, after tax and inflation, someone on average earnings will see his or her real income fall by the sharpest rate in 1995 since 1981, or is it that the only real disposable income in which the Government are interested is that of the likes of Cedric Brown?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman is partly right and partly wrong. It is true that people's take-home pay fell last year. That is because earnings were restrained. That was responsible behaviour by trade unions and employers, which helped to cause unemployment to fall fast. None the less, real personal disposable income rose sharply last year. I guess that the hon. Gentleman does not understand that dividend income, which goes into pension funds that belong to people, has risen sharply, so people are better off in the assets they own.

Mr. Mudie: The Minister's figures disguise the fact that the typical family is £800 a week worse off this year because of tax increases and that, despite the changes in the Budget, the family will be £670 a year worse off because of tax increases. In view of the fact that the Conservatives committed themselves, on page 5 of their manifesto, to reducing taxation further, are those tax increases incompetence or straightforward deceit?

Mr. Waldegrave: I think that the hon. Gentleman got the decimal point in the wrong place when he was talking about £800 a week. He is on very weak ground. Take-home pay increased by 1 per cent. during the whole period of the last Labour Government. It has increased by not far short of 50 per cent. under the Conservative Government since 1979. That is very weak ground for the Opposition parties to try to fight on.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the important thing is how this country has helped those who were unfortunate enough to be affected by the recession and that it is rich for the Opposition, who are always telling the Government to act, to complain when the Government have done so? They should consider how that is reflected in our performance when compared with that of every other European Union country.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is perfectly right. In a recession, it was right to protect public services. If we had not taken the tough steps that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer took to correct the budget deficit afterwards, we would be facing a serious situation. The implication of the Labour party's questions is that Labour would not have put taxes up, in which case the debts would have been completely unsupportable. That is a nonsensical policy, like many of those put forward on the economy by the Labour party.

Mr. Viggers: Is it not true that, by their firm action on the economy, the Government have held down interest rates and provided the lowest mortgage rates for 30 years? Will that not have a significant effect on disposable incomes? Has my right hon. Friend had any representations on interest rates from the Opposition?

Mr. Waldegrave: Opposition policy on interest rates is an enigma wrapped in a mystery; they never tell us whether rates should move higher, lower or sideways. They have no views on the matter whatsoever. It is true that the firm handling of these matters by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has meant that we have the lowest mortgage rates for a generation, inflation is in effect at its lowest rate since the war and the economy is growing faster than those of its main competitors in Europe. That is a formidable record.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Is it not the truth that the very assumptions behind the Government's claim that people are an extra £9 a week better off in terms of living standards have been shot to pieces, on the one hand by the Government's driving up taxes and charges—putting up rail fares, driving up the council tax by at least

8 per cent., as the Chief Secretary admitted, and with prescription charges going up as well, as we will see today—and, on the other hand, by the fact that millions of public sector workers will not now receive a full 4 per cent. increase in 1996? Those are the very figures on which the Chancellor's assumptions were based. Is it not the case that living standards are not safe with the Conservatives and that the £9 a week claim is yet another broken Conservative promise?

Mr. Waldegrave: I can answer that very shortly. The answer is no, because the forecast took into account the matters to which the hon. Gentleman refers. If he wants to fight on living standards rises under different Governments, he is on the weakest possible ground for Labour. There was complete stagnation in take-home pay under the last Labour Government.

Economic Growth

7. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the rate of growth of the economy in the current and next years. [12680]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I expect the economy to grow by 3 per cent. in 1996 and by $3\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. in the year to the first half of 1997.

Mr. Coombs: Would my right hon. and learned Friend care to tell the House where those excellent figures put Britain in the league tables for growth both in Europe and among the Group of Seven countries? What advice would he offer to other Governments, and to those who yearn for Government, on the best way of maintaining such levels of sustainable growth?

Mr. Clarke: We have had the fastest growth of any major European country since the recovery started in 1992 and we are likely to continue to achieve that. Forecasting is always a difficult business, but I suspect that we are likely to have the fastest growth in the G7. That is because of the combination of policies that we are putting in place and the excellent competitive position that British industry has achieved.

Mr. MacShane: If growth is so superlative, will the Chancellor of the Exchequer tell the House why the CBI has said this morning that exports are falling across all regions? Why is Jaguar laying off, or putting on short time, 1,000 people? Why is the steel industry having to go on to short time? What is the gap between the rhetoric of the Chancellor and the reality of an ever-declining manufacturing base in this country?

Mr. Clarke: The reason our exports are not doing so well is that other countries are not doing as well we are. When France, Germany and, to a certain extent, the United States of America do not achieve the sort of growth that we achieve, their markets do not expand quickly enough for our competitive exports to perform quite so well. Nevertheless, we expect—as does everybody—an increase in disposable consumer income this year. Everyone accepts that conditions for investment are very good. Manufacturing investment went up by 12 per cent. last year alone. It could achieve at least that this year. It is not true that we have a declining manufacturing base; manufacturing is continuing to do extremely well in this country and will do better when other countries begin to match our performance and provide the markets for our goods and services again.

Mr. John Townend: If there is any danger of the Government not achieving their 3 per cent. growth targets, will my hon. and learned Friend not hesitate to make further reductions in interest rates? I should like to take this opportunity of congratulating him on how he has dealt with interest rates over the past 12 months.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's last point. We set interest rates in order to achieve the inflation target and we shall continue to set interest rates on that basis. That is why—I think that everyone now accepts this—we shall achieve our $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. inflation target by the end of this Parliament. We shall keep the target at $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. or below during the next Parliament. Low inflation is helping to create the competitive position of British industry, the new jobs that the economy is creating, and the steady and continuous fall in unemployment that we have seen over the past 18 months.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Is it not true that Britain is floundering, and that the truth is a long way from the rosy picture painted by the Chancellor? Growth is lower than the Government predicted last year; Professor Patrick Minford—a Government adviser—said today that it will be less than 2 per cent. this year. Non-oil growth since 1979 has averaged 1.7 per cent.—the worst record of any post-war Government. Britain has fallen from 13th to 18th place in the international prosperity league. The reason for that is that Tory economic incompetence has let down the hard work of the British people.

Mr. Clarke: The sadness for the hon. Gentleman is that he knows perfectly well that the truth is as I have just described it—it is difficult for a party in opposition, such as his own, to accept that. I am astonished to hear the hon. Gentleman pray in aid Patrick Minford, a man whom I have known and liked for many years; the two of us have never agreed on economic policy, as he is far to the right of me and far to the right of any of the wise men—or wise persons—who now advise me. One thing on which Patrick Minford and I are totally agreed is that the Labour party's recipe, with the social chapter, minimum wage, more Government intervention, higher tax and higher public spending, will be totally disastrous for this country and will put us way down any league table that anybody likes to produce.

Mr. Yeo: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the estimates that he gave for the growth of our economy are based on an assumption that Britain will not be burdened with the obligations of the social chapter? Does he further agree that if we were to be burdened with those obligations, that would undermine our competitive position faster than any other single policy change and would reduce the prospects for cutting unemployment in this country more seriously than any other policy measure?

Mr. Clarke: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. It is totally absurd for the Labour party to try to scoff at that argument. It makes an enormous difference to the jobs

market if extra non-wage costs are piled on to the employer. Extra costs on top of wages for an employer in France are more than double those in the United Kingdom, which is why France has unemployment of more than 10 per cent. and is troubled with problems, while the unemployment rate in this country is falling so steadily. That message must be spread across the rest of the continent—meanwhile, we are benefiting, with more than 500,000 new jobs and an unemployment rate which is already down by 750,000 from its peak.

VAT (Tourism)

8. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much value added tax the Exchequer recovered from the tourism industry in (a) 1993, (b) 1994 and (c) 1995; and if he will make a statement. [12642]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There are no reliable figures available on the amount of value added tax paid by the tourism industry. Some indication of the scale is given by the net VAT paid by hotels and similar businesses. In the three years to March 1995 this amounted to £614 million, £668 million and £727 million respectively.

Mr. Llwyd: The Minister may be interested to know that I recently conducted in my constituency a wide survey of hoteliers and others involved in tourism. At the top of everyone's list was the problem of the imposition of 17.5 per cent. value added tax. That rate makes them uncompetitive compared with France, where it is 5.5 per cent.; Spain, where it is 7 per cent.; and Italy, where it is 9 per cent. Is it not time to review the imposition and the rate of VAT on our tourism industry?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The tourism industry has to pay tax just like any other industry—in some member states it is paid at a higher rate and in some it is paid at a lower rate. The tourism industry in this country is doing well. I am advised that in 1994, there were 21 million visitors to the United Kingdom—that figure was up on the previous year, and on the year before that. The industry does not need and will not get a tax privilege. The best thing that Governments can do is to stay out of the way, to stop over-regulation and to try to lower taxes generally, not just on tourism.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Tourism is extremely important for small businesses, especially small businesses of Ribble Valley. Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the great boosts to tourism is fighting hard to ensure that our small businesses involved in tourism do not suffer from the imposition of the minimum wage or the social chapter?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes. Tourism is, classically, an industry that would suffer from over-regulation and red tape, whether it came from an opposition party or by the back door from the European Community. We are, therefore, adamant in keeping the social chapter out of Britain so that it does not restrict the highly successful growth of the tourism industry noticed by my hon. Friend.

Fuel Tax

9. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent estimate he has made of revenues accruing from the increases in fuel tax in the next 12 months. [12644]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The figures published at the time of the Budget show that the 5 per cent. increase in road fuel duties previously announced and confirmed in the Budget will raise £1,475 million in 1996-97, compared to a non-indexed base, and £850 million compared to an indexed base.

Mr. O'Brien: Is the Minister aware of the increase in bus fares and other travel charges as a direct result of the increase in fuel tax? Is he also aware that the people who suffer most from that are pensioners, widows and families on low incomes? Does he accept that the increase is a further hidden tax introduced by this Government, which only confirms that the Conservatives are the party of higher taxation?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The transport industry generally must bear its share of any increase in road fuel duties, which were pre-announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor. The hon. Gentleman will, however, know that the fuel rebate to the transport industry, and to the bus industry in particular, is still valuable. The help and subsidies given by local authorities mean that buses are still a subsidised form of transport.

Mr. Fabricant: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, if he travelled in Europe, he would find that petrol and diesel are considerably more expensive than they are in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes, I can confirm that, despite the recent rise in petrol duty, we still have about the lowest excise duty rates on petrol of any European Union country.

Mrs. Fyfe: In view of the severe weather experienced in some parts of the country, now and in the recent past, the Treasury must have an unexpected gain from spending on domestic fuel—not so much a windfall gain as a snowfall gain. Can the Minister estimate how much the Treasury has gained from the necessity to spend more on domestic fuel?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Cold weather payments are available and have been paid during periods of cold weather. The hon. Lady knows that help is given where it is most required.

Economic Growth

10. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give official growth forecasts for 1996 for (a) the United Kingdom, (b) the EU and (c) Germany. [12645]

Mr. Waldegrave: As set out in the November "Financial Statement and Budget Report", we expect the United Kingdom economy to grow by 3 per cent. in 1996.

The European Commission forecasts European Union growth of 2.6 per cent. in 1996, and the latest official forecast for growth in Germany in 1996 is 1.5 per cent.

Mr. Riddick: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the level of growth in this country will help the continued fall in unemployment? Is he aware that, in January, unemployment in France hit the 3 million mark and that it is forecast to hit 4 million this month in Germany? When before was British unemployment almost half that of Germany's? Is that not a ringing endorsement of the British Conservative approach of free markets and minimum labour regulation?

Mr. Waldegrave: I strongly agree with the implication of my hon. Friend's question. I do not think that there has been a time since records began when the relationship between British and German unemployment was so favourable to us. It is no benefit to us that the German economy is slowing down, but it cannot be denied—German leaders are now saying this—that the over-taxing and over-regulation of that economy is largely the cause of its slowing down.

Mr. Sheerman: The Minister would not want me to nit-pick about the fact that the reunification of Germany has had a significant effect on the figures.

How realistic are the targets for growth? Surely the Minister should wake up to the fact that manufacturing output is less now than it has been at any time since 1992 and that we appear to be heading for another deflation and another recession under the present Government.

Mr. Waldegrave: It would be unwise of the hon. Gentleman to nit-pick in the way that he suggests, because unemployment in the former West Germany is increasing too, I am sorry to say, so his argument would be invalid.

Growth in the United Kingdom in the coming year will outpace that in Germany and in most of our competitor countries. That is happening because the liberal economics that the Government have been following are right, and the type of mid-1960s so-called stakeholder economy favoured by the Labour party is producing exactly the wrong results.

Mr. Forman: While I warmly welcome the figures given in my right hon. Friend's original answer, does he accept that we have the best possible chance of maintaining our comparative lead in the European Union if we give a high priority to continuing with our supply side policies—deregulation, privatisation and supply side reform?

Mr. Waldegrave: I strongly agree. I would quote in aid of my hon. Friend's argument the article by Gavyn Davies, an economist who is respected on both sides of the House, I believe, in *The Independent* on Monday 5 February, headed:

"No reason to copy the fading German miracle".

Copying the fading German miracle is exactly the policy of the Labour party—the old social consensus management schemes of the 1960s, which are producing the very problems out of which Germany needs to get.

Mr. Darling: On growth forecasts, both the Prime Minister and the Chief Secretary have told us that they believe that the public spending ratio should be 35 per cent. of GDP, but the Chancellor told the *Financial Times* that, in his judgment, 40 per cent. was the maximum that we should aim at. Which figure is right, and why cannot the Chancellor bring himself to mention the figure of 35 per cent.?

Mr. Waldegrave: That is one of the most bogus of the Opposition's soundbites at the moment. It entirely depends on the timing. Let us get to 40 per cent. first and then, if the economy grows, as it continues to grow under the Tories, and if we restrain spending—my right hon. and learned Friend has been one of the toughest Chancellors in recent years in controlling spending—the proportion will fall further.

Social Chapter

13. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from business leaders regarding the economic implications of the social chapter. [12648]

Mr. Waldegrave: The overwhelming majority of British businesses support the Government's decision to reject the social chapter because of its adverse effects on jobs and prosperity.

Mr. Robathan: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. Tomorrow, a group of senior business men will publish their opinions on the economic implications of various EU policies, including the ludicrous social chapter and the single currency. Will my right hon. Friend examine that publication and consider carefully the opinions therein of those senior business men?

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall certainly do so. I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the Confederation of British Industry survey of the year before last, which showed that the majority of companies firmly opposed the social policy measures then under discussion under the social chapter. I am sure that their opinions have not changed.

Mr. Pike: Will the Minister recognise that the majority of people want a Government who want fair pay and working conditions, and that they will be glad when the present Government go?

Mr. Waldegrave: I believe that the majority of people want a fair chance to obtain jobs and that they know that they come in an enterprise economy, not an over-regulated, over-taxed economy, which the Labour party would give us, and did give us when the country had the misfortune to have a Labour Government.

Mr. Mans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the main difference between the Government's approach to the social chapter and the opposition parties' approach to the social chapter is that we want to leave it up to individual firms to decide whether to take up parts of that legislation, whereas they want to impose it on everyone?

Mr. Waldegrave: That is entirely right. I am glad that the Leader of the Opposition has joined us because he showed himself to be profoundly ignorant of what the social chapter meant when he spoke to the CBI about it.

VAT (Charity Sales)

14. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest estimate of the cost of zero rating for VAT purposes all sales by registered charities; and if he will make a statement. [12649]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There are no official figures on which to base any firm estimates.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Minister accept that disability charities play a vital role in helping disabled people, particularly with care in the community? That being so, is it not invidious that disability charities should be used as tax collecting agencies and have their work set back because of the level of value added tax that they must pay?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I readily acknowledge the good work that is done by disability charities. They receive help through the tax system, such as relief from business rates. The whole charitable sector receives tax relief of more than £1.5 billion per year. The hon. Gentleman will accept that VAT is a broad-based tax. It would be wrong to give charities total tax relief on their business activities, which in some cases are in competition with ordinary commercial activities.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the Minister agree that charities have suffered as a result of the decline in the level of tax that they can recover on covenants, the imposition of VAT at the point of sale, and the triple whammy of the loss of money to the lottery?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I do not think that that is a decisive objection to our aim of, and achievements in, lowering taxes generally. The hon. Gentleman will know that lottery funding is welcome and has benefited a great many charities and at least counters any drop in revenue that is experienced across the sector.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 8 February. [12661]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Riddick: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Conservative and Unionist party will always stand four-square behind the Union? Is it not the case that the British constitution has evolved over centuries, but that it could take a matter of months for a meddling, middle-class public school boy to undermine or even destroy it?

The Prime Minister: We have made some evolutionary changes to the constitution in recent years, and I believe that there is scope for more evolutionary change in the years ahead. I do not believe that large-scale changes that would significantly alter the face of the United Kingdom and the Union as we know it are in the interests of the United Kingdom. Frankly, I believe that many of the plans that have been put forward do not address the difficulties.

I see no reason why Scotland should be taxed more highly than the rest of the United Kingdom. Neither do I see any reason why Scottish Members should vote on Scottish matters that English Members cannot vote on, and then vote in the House on the same matters as they affect England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Those issues need very careful examination. I hope that they will receive that careful examination, as they clearly have not had it yet.

Sir Malcolm Thornton: Has my right hon. Friend seen the recent newspaper article about education by the Labour transport spokesman, which I shall quote—*[Interruption.]*—which I shall paraphrase. It refers to public schools producing more social cripples than any other form of education devised by man. Does my right hon. Friend believe that that is yet another veiled attack on the Labour leader and some of his Front-Bench colleagues, or is it simply another example of hypocrisy?

The Prime Minister: I feel as though I am in an air raid shelter on this occasion, speaking as a grammar school boy. My hon. Friend should not be too hard on the hon. Member concerned. I think that Labour Members are required to put their children down for private school these days so that they can remain in the vanguard of Labour education policy.

Mr. Blair: Does the Prime Minister agree that the Scott inquiry was entirely fairly conducted and that no criticism can or should be made of its processes or procedures?

The Prime Minister: As I said in the House on a previous occasion:

"I asked Sir Richard to carry out the report and I have confidence that he will do so"—

and has done so—

"thoroughly."

Mr. Blair: I must press the Prime Minister on that because he will know that, in the past few days, there has been a concerted attempt to rubbish the inquiry. Will he say unequivocally that he accepts that it was entirely fairly conducted?

The Prime Minister: I just said to the right hon. Gentleman:

"I asked Sir Richard to carry out the report and I have every confidence that he will do so"—

and has done so—

"thoroughly."

The right hon. Gentleman is saying that neither he nor anybody else can comment fairly on the Scott report until people have had the opportunity to study it. I agree with that point, but it also applies to the past three years. It applies to the fact that the Opposition have made crude and blatant smears throughout those past three years without having had the evidence of the Scott report before

them. If, in his question, the right hon. Gentleman was making it clear that he believes that those were unjustified attacks without any evidence, I would be pleased for him to withdraw them now and make it clear that he will repudiate them.

Mr. Blair: The Prime Minister is not even prepared to say whether the report is fairly conducted. When he says that we should await the findings of the report, let me remind him that he and his Ministers will have had the report for eight days, that four Government Departments have units working on it and that we are to get it a few hours before publication. I am not asking him to comment on its findings, but on whether it was fairly conducted. He set up the inquiry. He chose Sir Richard Scott. Is he now prepared to state that he is confident that it was fairly conducted? If he does not say that, the final vestiges of respect will be removed from the Government.

The Prime Minister: I know that the right hon. Gentleman had carefully prepared his third soundbite before my first answer, and I am tempted to refer him to the two answers I have just given. I made it clear that

"I asked Sir Richard to carry out the report and I have confidence that he will do so"—

and has done so—

"thoroughly."—[*Official Report*, 6 June 1995; Vol. 261, c. 15.]

I have now said that three times. Will the right hon. Gentleman now stop preparing his soundbites in advance and listen to my answers before he prepares his questions?

Q2. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 8 February. [12662]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Illsley: Why cannot the Prime Minister publish such an important document as the report of the Scott inquiry a few days before the statement on it next week so that the Opposition, and indeed the House, can be properly informed? Is it not disgraceful that a few Conservative Members will have had that report for eight days, but the rest of the House will receive it on the day of the statement?

The Prime Minister: We plan to follow the precedents for a weighty report of this nature, and to permit Opposition spokesmen to see the report several hours before the statement is made. Of course, the House will also wish to study and comment on the report. That is why we propose to find time in Government time for an early debate on the report a few days after the statement has been made, once the whole House has had the opportunity to study the report and comment on it on the basis of detail, not of innuendo and smear, which has been the nature of the comments thus far from a number of Opposition Members.

Dame Jill Knight: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the House of Lords provides a useful and important advisory service for this country at very little cost? It has no power to overrule or frustrate the will of the House of Commons. Has my right hon. Friend heard of the old phrase, "If it ain't broke, don't mend it"?

The Prime Minister: I believe that this House should treat constitutional reform of any sort with care and consideration, and examine what the outcome of that reform might be before being committed to it. I do not believe that the reforms proposed to the House of Lords are relevant to the problems and opportunities facing this country over the next five to 10 years. It seems to me that the reform in question is irrelevant—and intended to be a spiteful, thoughtless irrelevance.

Campbell Soups

Q3. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Prime Minister when he next plans to visit a Campbell Soups exhibition stand at a United Kingdom food trade fair. [12663]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans at present to do so.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Prime Minister will be aware of the call for an international boycott of Campbell Soups and Fray Bentos products, arising out of the appalling decision by the company to close down the highly profitable Homepride plant in my constituency—having purchased it for £58.6 million only 11 weeks earlier. Are not the real stakeholders in Homepride not the greedy shareholders in America who do not give a damn about the people of Maryport, but the work force who have invested their lives in making that company a success and who are now being put on the scrap heap? Will the Prime Minister join the 341 Members of Parliament—a majority of this House—who have called on the company to reverse its decision?

The Prime Minister: I realise the extent of the disappointment that must be felt at Maryport over the decision. I understand that Campbell's has offered employees jobs at one of its five other plants—although, self-evidently, that will not be appropriate for many employees. I also understand the depth of the hon. Gentleman's concern for his constituents, but I hope that he and everyone else will bear in mind the fact that Campbell's has been in the United Kingdom for over 30 years. It employs more than 2,000 people here and has shown its commitment to the United Kingdom by investing more than £100 million here in the past 12 months. I would not wish to threaten and damage those investments, or the jobs that are safeguarded and are being created as a result of those investments.

Engagements

Q4. **Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 8 February. [12664]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Chidgey: Does the Prime Minister agree with the Social Security Secretary, who has described today's proposed cuts of £1 billion in the social security budget as devastating?

The Prime Minister: That is in no sense what my right hon. Friend has said about the outcome of the public expenditure round. The whole House will recall that, in recent weeks, I have been criticised by the Opposition for administrative costs being too high. Here we have a practical illustration of the Government seeking to cut administrative costs, in the interests of the taxpayer, to preserve the resources available for benefits—yet on that point the Opposition criticise me as well.

The hon. Gentleman must make up his mind: does he criticise the Government for not cutting administrative costs or for making administrative savings? Even though he is a Liberal Democrat, he cannot have it both ways.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is the height of hypocrisy to maintain that one is committed to the elimination of state subsidy and then to do the reverse? Do not the recent decisions by the Transport Commissioner show that the Labour party—whether old Labour or new Labour, in Westminster or in Brussels—is committed to state subsidy and to Spanish practices?

The Prime Minister: The whole House will know of our concern about the Iberia decision. It is certainly not in the interests of the air travellers of Europe, and we have made that known to Commissioner Kinnock and to others.

Q5. **Mr. Hoon:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 8 February. [12665]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hoon: In a statement to the House about the setting up of the Scott inquiry, the Attorney-General stated that matters of form and procedure were a question for the learned judge. Why will not the Prime Minister condemn unequivocally those, such as Lord Howe, who have sought to impugn the integrity of the learned judge and to attack the contents of his report before publication?

The Prime Minister: On attacks on the contents of the report, if anyone has predetermined what the contents of the report might be, it is the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) and not my noble Friend Lord Howe.

On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I refer him to what I said on 13 January 1994 at column 332.

Mr. Butler: Does my right hon. Friend recall the words of Lord Palmerston, who said that to be born British is like winning the lottery of life? Will my right hon. Friend now go further and say that to be born or to live in Milton Keynes is like winning the national lottery, and join me in welcoming the grant of £19 million to build what will undoubtedly be the best theatre outside London?

The Prime Minister: There may be some challenges about the scheme being the best theatre, but I know that my hon. Friend is proud of the scheme and I congratulate him on it.

As for being proud of being British, I just hope that we do not reach the situation where to live in Scotland is to lose the lottery of taxation because it has to face extra taxation and a tartan tax.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): May I ask the Leader of the House for details of future business?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for next week will be as follows.

MONDAY 12 FEBRUARY—Opposition Day (5th allotted day). Until about 7 o'clock, there will be a debate on ministerial responsibility. That will be followed by a debate entitled "The Effect of Government Financial Constraints on Local Government Services". Both debates will arise on Opposition motions in the name of the Liberal Democrats.

Motion on section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act.

TUESDAY 13 FEBRUARY—Opposition Day (6th allotted day). Until about 7 o'clock, there will be a debate on the morale of NHS staff. That will be followed by a debate on the private security industry. Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

WEDNESDAY 14 FEBRUARY—Until 2 o'clock, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Remaining stages of the Security Service Bill.

Motion relating to the Local Government Reorganisation (Compensation for Loss of Remuneration) regulations.

THURSDAY 15 FEBRUARY—Motion to approve the agreement between the Secretary of State for National Heritage and the BBC.

FRIDAY 16 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 19 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill.

Motion on the Appropriation (Northern Ireland) order.

In the following three days, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, I anticipate taking Government business, including the social security uprating orders. Friday 23 February will be a non-sitting day. On Monday 26 February I propose a debate on the Scott report on a motion for the Adjournment.

One other piece of information that the House might like to have is that, subject to the progress of business, I propose that the Whitsun recess will be from close of business on Wednesday 22 May until Tuesday 4 June.

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for that information. I am sure that the House will welcome the final piece of information and the advance warning. I thank the right hon. Gentleman also for moving the debate on local government regulations from late on Tuesday evening to Wednesday. I think that that will be for the convenience of the House.

What further information can the Leader of the House give us in response to Madam Speaker's statement yesterday about access to the Scott report? Will he confirm that the Government are proposing that Her Majesty's Official Opposition should have only six hours' prior sight of the report next Thursday morning? What are the Government's intentions about providing access to the report to Back-Bench Members, about which I could make some suggestions? Does the right hon. Gentleman think that it is in the spirit of Madam Speaker's statement yesterday that Ministers should have eight days to consider the report while the Opposition have only six hours?

Will the Leader of the House confirm that the debate that he has announced for a week on Monday will be a one-day debate or the start of a two-day debate? There has been some speculation about that.

The Leader of the House has announced that on Monday the House will debate EU matters covered by section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1986. May I suggest to the right hon. Gentleman that that debate does not negate the need for a debate on the items recommended for consideration on the Floor of the House by a unanimous decision of the European scrutiny committees? That is a matter that I have raised with the right hon. Gentleman for the past three weeks. When does he expect that we shall be able to debate them? When can we expect the White Paper on the intergovernmental conference?

Perhaps the Leader of the House will tell us also when there will be further meetings of the European Standing Committees. They were meeting twice a week before Christmas and they still has outstanding business to consider, but it seems that since one of them passed a unanimous decision on the IGC documents, which was embarrassing to the Government, they have been closed down completely. What are the Government's plans for that Committee?

Does the Leader of the House recall the request that I made to him a fortnight ago for a debate on the waste of money due to the mismatch between social security payments and entitlements? Does the right hon. Gentleman think it appropriate to debate the Government's proposals to cut by 25 per cent. the administrative budget of the Department of Social Security? Surely the need for such a debate has become more urgent so that we can ascertain whether what the Secretary of State for Social Security described today as "process re-engineering" will undermine the Government's anti-fraud strategy. We need to debate that issue.

Finally, will the Leader of the House confirm or deny the suggestion that the Government have decided to press ahead with the privatisation of Her Majesty's Stationery Office without any further reference to the House? The right hon. Gentleman will be aware of the strength of feeling on the issue and will recall that when a debate took place—the House did not divide—right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House said explicitly that the privatisation process should not be finalised without the House being able to make a decision. Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that a final decision is taken by the House itself and not by Ministers behind closed doors?

Mr. Newton: That was rather a long list. Perhaps I might start by expressing my gratitude to the hon. Lady for her words about the recess announcement and about her response to the usual channels' representations about the local government order, which is now to be taken on Wednesday.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister indicated a few minutes ago that the intention would be, in line with comparable reports in the past, that Opposition spokesmen

[Mr. Newton]

would be able to see the Scott Report some hours before publication. [HON. MEMBERS: "Disgraceful."] Hon. Members say "disgraceful", but if they take account of numerous precedents, they will find that what is proposed is properly in line with precedent. For Members of the House generally, I anticipate that—again in accordance with comparably weighty reports—the report will be made available when my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade makes his statement, which I expect will be at 3.30.

On the debate for Monday 26 February, about which I gave the House early notice, I intended my announcement to be in respect of a one-day debate.

On European Community matters, which the hon. Lady raised, of course I acknowledge that the debate intended for Monday 12 February should not be a substitute for what is being pressed for by the European Standing Committees. We are still considering their recommendations and I hope to be able to respond shortly to the proposals.

On the IGC White Paper, about which the hon. Lady asked me last week, I cannot add to what I said then.

On scrutiny committees, I have written today to the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) and indicated that I hope to make further progress shortly.

On social security, again the hon. Lady will have heard what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said. I can assume only that she, like the Liberal Democrats, who have consistently demanded that the Government reduce administrative costs, now wants a debate to press the Government to increase administrative costs, or at the very least to end the effort to keep those costs down. I see no reason to suppose that what my right hon. Friend proposes will in any way diminish or damage the drive against fraud.

On HMSO, as the House knows, there is no need for further parliamentary proceedings before a decision is made, and therefore I do not anticipate such proceedings.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Will my right hon. Friend, who has shown himself to be a thoughtful and sensitive Leader of the House, think again about what he said about making the Scott report available? Is there not a case for allowing Back Benchers access to that report on an embargoed basis at least a few hours before it is discussed in the House? Is it not particularly important that the exchanges on that report should be sensible and based on fact?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend knows me well enough—he was kind enough to make some observations at the outset—to know that I would never simply reject out of hand such a request. I am bound to say, however, that I see the greatest difficulty, in that he asks for something that has no precedent in respect of any report, however weighty, and therefore I would not wish to encourage hopes that I might be able to respond in the way that he would wish.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): As my hon. Friends and I have given the House an opportunity on Monday to debate the principle of ministerial responsibility, can the Leader of the House confirm that the Minister who will speak in the debate on behalf of the Government will set out clearly the principles on which ministerial office is held in this country, and confirm that if the independent inquiry, which has the full confidence of the Prime Minister and was set up by the Government, finds that any Ministers have not discharged their responsibilities appropriately, they will, as has constitutionally been the custom in previous Administrations, leave office and resign?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. and hon. Friends who will speak in the debate on Monday will address the Government's policy on these matters with the clarity with which they always address matters.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): May we have an early debate on the over-representation in the House of Members of Parliament from Scotland, for if the people of Scotland have the misfortune to have devolution thrust on them, surely the House would wish to know by how many the number of Scottish Members should be reduced to bring them into line with the rest of the Kingdom? Is there any mechanism in the existing bodies that are examining the representation of Members of Parliament in the House to postulate a hypothetical figure that would bring the number of Scottish Members into line with English representation?

Mr. Newton: I see no sign in the reported remarks of the Leader of the Opposition that those or any other questions have been considered. I am thinking particularly of the question of the tartan tax, and above all—I see the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) rising in his place—the West Lothian question, as it used to be called.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I believe that the Leader of the House is trying hard to protect the interests of ordinary Members, and I therefore beg him to reconsider his answer about HMSO. This is a House of Commons matter: it is fundamental to the House of Commons. May I ask the right hon. Gentleman emphatically to consider the views expressed yesterday by right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) about the reputation of his Government before allowing the matter to proceed without a debate on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Lady, too, put her question in very kind terms. She will have heard what I said earlier, but I shall of course reflect on the point that she has made.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): The report by Sir Richard Scott, commissioned by the Prime Minister, touches on the most basic responsibilities of the House. It deals with whether the House was misled by Ministers of the Crown, and whether the liberty of the citizen was put at risk by the use of public interest immunity certificates. Will the Leader of the House give careful consideration to whether hon. Members who are elected on an equal franchise, and on the basis of equal representation, may have the same access to the document as the leaders of the Labour party?

Mr. Newton: Again, my hon. Friend will have heard what I said earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack). I am afraid that I cannot add to that.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): Although, strictly speaking, there may be no need for a vote on the

privatisation of HMSO, does the right hon. Gentleman—as Leader of the House and defender of its interests—believe that, given the enormous importance of HMSO's services to the House, a vote is morally inevitable?

Mr. Newton: Again, I cannot add to what I have already said. I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's constituency interest in the matter, but I hope that he will acknowledge that I took early action to enable the House to debate it, relatively soon after it had become an issue.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): Will my right hon. Friend consider arranging a debate, in Government time, on private education, so that hon. Members can have an opportunity to congratulate the hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Godsiff) on his decision to send his children to private school? In framing the motion for that debate, will my right hon. Friend draw on the words of the hon. Gentleman, who has said that he pays income tax at the higher rate to finance the state system, and is entitled to pay out of his own pocket to educate his children where he wishes? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the hon. Gentleman's right will always be protected under a Conservative Government?

Mr. Newton: I can certainly confirm that the right to choice in matters of education will be not only maintained but enhanced under a Conservative Government. As for the rest of my hon. Friend's question, I am sure that there will be further opportunities to debate educational matters, as we are to deal with at least two education Bills during the current Session.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House reconsider his decision relating to the distribution of copies of the Scott report to Opposition Members? The report is unique in that it concerns the Government's conduct, particularly that of certain Cabinet Ministers, and we should all be able to read what has been said in advance. I give the right hon. Gentleman a guarantee: if Opposition Members get an advance copy, we shall not sell it for £1,000.

Mr. Newton: I cannot add to what I said earlier, but I will say that, in my view, the time when it will be necessary for hon. Members to study the report thoroughly is when we come to debate it. That is why, although I have announced an early debate, I have allowed ample time for this very long report to be properly studied.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): Will my right hon. Friend make time soon for a debate on the Top Salaries Review Body considering Members' pay? I address his attention in particular to the fact that, if certain constitutional changes were to take place, Scottish Members would be unable to ask questions or work on matters that had been devolved to Scotland. Consequently, they would become part-time Members and that would surely influence salary levels and outside interests.

Mr. Newton: If my hon. Friend has in mind a proposal that Scottish Members should be paid less, he might care to put that to Sir Michael Perry.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): As it is clear that the Leader of the House and other hon. Members have concentrated their minds today on the scrutiny issue, may we have a statement next week on what seems to be the increasing abuse of planted questions on the Order Paper? I draw particular attention to today's Order Paper, which contains substantial questions relating to public service pay, prescription charges, safety on school buses and many other issues, including water authorities in Scotland. As a Scottish Member, I will be asked to comment by the press, who will no doubt be receiving the answers to those questions about now. I will not have seen them, although it is my duty as a Member of Parliament to scrutinise every aspect of Government legislation. Will he therefore deal with that serious issue quickly?

Mr. Newton: I shall consider the hon. Lady's point, but I am puzzled about how she puts it. There is nothing new about the practice of making announcements through written answers in the way that she appears to suggest is happening here. That has not caused difficulties in the past, and there is no reason why it should this afternoon.

Mr. Wilkinson: Repeatedly at Business Questions, including today, the issue of the scrutiny of European business has arisen. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that, if there is a European ministerial Council in the period to 26 February, to which his statement refers, the Minister concerned will report back to the House in a statement? There should, for example, have been such a statement after the recent European Fisheries Council and there was not. That is a thoroughly bad precedent.

Mr. Newton: I note my hon. Friend's point. He will agree that it is right to consider such matters on a case-by-case basis, but there is a long history of statements being made when we thought it appropriate.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an early debate in Government time on their attitude to the emergency services? He will recall that, on Tuesday, the Prime Minister heaped praise on the fire service and talked of the selfless bravery of firefighters, yet the Government's financial settlement for Tyne and Wear fire authority has left it with a £2.3 million shortfall. Is that not an example of hypocrisy and of the Government saying one thing and doing another?

Mr. Newton: I need hardly say that I do not accept the argumentative thrust of the last part of the hon. Gentleman's question, but I will bring his point on Tyne and Wear to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): May we have an urgent early debate on the constitutional relationship between Members of Parliament and their constituents, given that some Opposition Members appear to have difficulty deciding where their loyalties lie? Is it to the people who elect them or to the unions who sponsor them?

Mr. Newton: I shall certainly bear in mind that topic for debate as, alongside a number of other constitutional issues, a growing number of Opposition Members are not answering questions.

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): Is the Leader of the House aware that, as a direct result of cuts

[Mr. Thomas McAvoy]

imposed by the Secretary of State for Scotland, the new City of Glasgow council faces cuts in services of more than £60 million to balance its budget? In view of the crisis facing that council and other councils in Scotland, will the Leader of the House undertake to consider next week's business and allocate some time to bring the Secretary of State here to try and justify his actions?

Mr. Newton: With the relatively new sittings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland as well as here, increased opportunities exist to bring such points to the attention of the Secretary of State for Scotland, but I cannot promise to make such a specific opportunity available next week.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May we have a debate next week on local government finance, so that the House can consider the certain imposition on the council tax budget of several hundred pounds per household across London, including my constituency, if we had the regional government suggested for this country by the Leader of the Opposition last night? Will my right hon. Friend note that when pressed for detail, as the leading article in the *Evening Standard* says today, the right hon. Gentleman's words "turn to wool"?

Mr. Newton: I agree with my hon. Friend that many unanswered questions remain on such matters. But I am not sure that I can promise an early debate on them, because we have just had one.

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to the National Audit Office report released earlier this week, which revealed that £40 million had been overpaid to training and enterprise councils? South Thames TEC, which is now in receivership, has received a bill for £9.7 million, largely for courses that were inappropriate or did not take place. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that other training agencies in my borough have not been paid for courses that were carried out? I draw his attention to early-day motions 380 and 381.

[*That this House notes with concern the revelation by the National Audit Office that the receivers of South Thames TEC, which collapsed in 1994, have been sent a Bill for £9.7 million of overpayments by the Department of Employment for training courses which were never run or did not qualify for Government help; and contrasts this with the fact that some training organisations, including voluntary bodies, have not been paid for training courses which have been run and which were eligible for government grant.*]

The second early-day motion reveals that moneys voted by Parliament for a specific purpose may be applied to a wholly unrelated debt, as a result of the actions of the Department of Education and Employment. Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for a debate on that issue at an early stage?

Mr. Newton: I shall ensure that the Secretary of State for Education and Employment is made aware of the hon. Gentleman's concerns, and I can tell him now that the receiver has been working with the Department to secure appropriate evidence and reduce the bill. Any payments to unsecured creditors are a matter for the receiver.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May we, as a matter of urgency, have a debate on what is clearly a crisis in education provision in south-east London? About a fortnight ago we heard of a mother who had to reject all the schools in Labour Southwark and send her child to a grammar school in Conservative Bromley, and today evidence has emerged of a father who has severely criticised schools in Labour Lewisham and is sending his children to a private school. Clearly there is a crisis, but what is particularly odd about the crisis is where the evidence is coming from—both those parents are Labour Members of Parliament.

Mr. Newton: I look forward to my hon. Friend's contribution to subsequent debates on the Bill dealing with grant-maintained schools' borrowing powers.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): Does the Leader of the House recognise that the Scott report is of exceptional interest to hon. Members? Can he tell us when the report will be made available to Lobby and other journalists? If it can be made available to them under an embargo—and we know that as soon as they receive it they will start ringing up Members of Parliament for their comments—surely it would make sense to make copies available to Members at the same time as they are made available to the Lobby.

Mr. Newton: I do not expect copies to be made available to others before they are made available to Members of Parliament.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Can I persuade my right hon. Friend of the urgent need for a debate on the recent report by the chief inspector of schools? He will agree that too many pupils in state-controlled schools are not reaching their full potential. In the commentary on the report one point seems to have been missed—most education authorities are controlled by the Labour party or the Liberal Democrats. Should not the Government now say what they will do with those education authorities to secure value for money in the teaching of our children?

Mr. Newton: For some time the Government have been pursuing a range of policies to enhance and improve education standards in authorities of all kinds. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made some further announcements earlier this week.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Surely the biggest unanswered question in the House this week is why civil servants who were called to give evidence to the Scott inquiry have not received a copy of the report, although the Ministers in their Departments have. It is understandable that the Government would not wish Opposition Back Benchers to have copies of the report, but is it not indefensible, and a gross misuse of Government power, that civil servants who give dedicated service to the people of this country have been denied access, whereas their Ministers have received copies eight days in advance?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Lady will know that the arrangements have been agreed with Sir Richard Scott. The position as I understand it is that neither Ministers

nor civil servants have access to the report now unless they need it to help prepare the Government's response. There is no difference between the position of Ministers and the position of officials in that respect.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): May we have an early debate on early-day motion 379?

[*That this House notes with concern the Evening Standard's report on Islington Council, the local authority in which the Right honourable Member for Sedgefield has his home; understands that the council has been unable to calculate properly its own performance against national indicators, and has published inaccurate information in the local press as a result; notes that financial arrangements are unsatisfactory in several important respects; further understands that the council does not know the nature of its housing stock; congratulates the Evening Standard on its report; believes that the performance of the Labour-controlled authority in which the Right honourable Member resides exemplifies the reality of his party in power; and calls on him to deal with Labour's inability to run councils such as Islington before expressing readiness to govern Britain.*]

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the incompetence of Islington council demonstrates that new Labour is just as incompetent as old Labour? Anyone thinking of voting for new Labour would be well advised to look at Camden, Hackney, Islington and Lewisham, as they would then realise that new Labour is just as bad as old Labour, and—as has been said before—is hard Labour.

Mr. Newton: I am aware of early-day motion 379. The performance of Islington council is yet another warning to anyone who doubts the risks of allowing Labour to take control.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Although I am sure that no Opposition Member feels any personal hostility to the mistresses of Charles II, or to any of their descendants, we are baffled why they should have the same right to make laws as those of us who have been elected. In the light of the Cabinet's bizarre view—as expressed by the chairman of the Conservative party—that the continuation of the hereditary right to legislate is an essential part of British democracy as we know it, will the Leader of the House arrange for the right hon. Gentleman to come to the Dispatch Box and explain those views on behalf of the Government?

Mr. Newton: I would like the Leader of the Opposition to explain why he talks about the constitution without addressing any of the real issues, such as the tartan tax or the West Lothian question. Given that some 30 hereditary peers were among those who voted against the Government in the other place earlier this week, I am mildly surprised that there is so much hostility towards them among Opposition Members.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): May I thank the Leader of the House for agreeing to meet some of my constituents from Clay Cross later today? May I also thank him for his replies to two previous business questions that I have raised about the work of the European Standing Committees. Perhaps I will be lucky for a third time. May we have a debate on the work of the compensation recovery unit? The unit takes away masses of benefits that have been paid to people such as a constituent of mine from Grassmoor who received an award of £40,000 following two mining accidents, only to find that £22,000 of that was taken away. There is a threshold of £2,500 before money starts to be taken away, which results in many solicitors advising people only to take awards below that amount. A report on the matter by the Select Committee on Social Security has been produced, so it would be appropriate for us to have such a debate.

Mr. Newton: Having pleased the hon. Gentleman—somewhat unusually—in two requests, I would love to make it a hat-trick. All that I can say, however, is that the Government are carefully studying the Select Committee's report.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Will the Leader of the House reconsider the length of time allocated to debate the Scott report on the Floor of the House? In an average debate—even when Madam Speaker imposes a 10-minute rule—the maximum number of speakers who can take part is fewer than 30, or less than 5 per cent. of the Members of the House. The time at which the report will be in the hands of ordinary Back-Bench Members will mean that their ability to ask pertinent questions following the statement of the President of the Board of Trade will be somewhat limited. As this is one of the most important reports since the Franks report in the 1980s and earlier reports in the 1940s and 1950s, would it not be fairer and wiser to extend the debate to perhaps two or three days?

Mr. Newton: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but many important matters are debated in the House on the basis of one-day debates and it is not uncommon for there to be debates in which not everyone who wishes can take part. I certainly cannot promise always to provide enough time in relation to any subject for everyone who would like to participate to do so.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Will the Leader of the House reconsider the need for an urgent debate about the devastating changes proposed for the social welfare and support system? As a former Secretary of State for Social Security, he will know that in Tyne and Wear the present Secretary of State's statement puts more jobs at risk than all the jobs that we have lost in coal and shipbuilding in the area in the past 10 years.

Mr. Newton: The Department's aim is to try to improve efficiency in the delivery of the social security system by roughly a quarter in three years. Considering what is being said in other areas—for example in relation to national health service administration—it would seem entirely right that the Government should be trying to keep down administrative costs in the interests of expenditure, in this case on benefits, or, in the case of the NHS, on patient care.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Social Security to make a statement and justify why the War Pensions Agency is taking disability allowance away from war pensioners without there being any recourse

[Mr. Kevin Hughes]

to an appeal procedure? Or is it just a scam by the Government to raise revenue, so that they can dish it out in tax cuts for the rich leading up to the next general election?

Mr. Newton: That question verges on the irresponsible. The hon. Gentleman must know that there is nothing new about the way in which the war pensions system operates, going back over many decades. The method of operation has not been changed significantly by the present Administration, apart from the creation of the agency. That said, I will bring his concern to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Is the Leader of the House aware of all the significant developments that are, or could be, taking place in football? There is the possibility of a European Super League, the challenge to the deal between the Premier League, BSkyB and the BBC, and all the problems over the rulings on the transfer system. Those decisions are being taken by unelected people—general supporters have no input. There is no Parliament for football supporters. The people who are taking the decisions are self-appointed. Should we not have that debate here? We are the Parliament for football supporters and we should debate those developments. It would certainly please me and it might even please the Prime minister.

Mr. Newton: I have often thought that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) would be rather good on some terraces, but, on the main thrust of the question, the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) might like to consider applying for a Wednesday morning debate

Mr. Skinner: I used to play.

Mr. Newton: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is very good on the pitch, too. I do not think I would want to run into him, however. I used to play as well. Indeed, I was captain of football at school. Coming back to the question, if the hon. Member for Newham, North-West is proposing a debate on sport, I will add it to what I call my little list.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): At Prime Minister's Question Time, the Prime Minister talked about precedents. The Leader of the House has also talked about comparable precedents. What precedents does he have in mind? If it is the Franks report, I gave evidence for an hour and 25 minutes to Lord Franks and his colleagues and I assure the Leader of the House that there is no precedent there. First, what precedents does he have in mind?

In reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson), did we hear the right hon. Gentleman wrong when he said that Ministers and civil servants would be treated in exactly the same way? Therefore, is a civil servant like Sir Stephen Egerton, who gave evidence to Scott, to get a copy of the report eight days before it appears, like the Chief Secretary to the Treasury? The relevant question that my hon. Friend asked was whether civil servants who may be criticised, like Sir Stephen Egerton, were going to be treated like Ministers. What is the answer? Will Sir Stephen Egerton, whom I use as one example, get his report eight days beforehand? If he does not, the Minister's reply is misleading to the House, although doubtless he did not mean it to be.

Mr. Newton: If there is any question of something that I have said being misleading to the House, I will look into what the hon. Gentleman has said and correct it in an appropriate way. My understanding is that neither Ministers nor civil servants have access to the report now unless they need it to help prepare the Government's response. That is what has been agreed with the inquiry.

Mr. Dalyell: Ah!

Mr. Newton: That is what I said. That has been agreed with the inquiry, and any change to that position, if that is what the hon. Gentleman is urging, would similarly need to be discussed and agreed with the inquiry. On the first part of his question, the precedents that I had in mind were the Learmont report, the Nolan report and the report on Barings. I think that what I have suggested this afternoon would be broadly in line with what was done on those occasions.

Rev. Martin Smyth: While I welcome the fact that there will be a debate on the Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order, does the Leader of the House agree that that will be a wide-ranging rather than a specific debate? Would it be possible for a meeting of the Northern Ireland Grand Committee to be called to consider hospital provision?

Mr. Newton: I cannot make such a promise at the moment, but the hon. Gentleman knows that we are considering the matter, following the representations that he and others have made. I rather doubt that we shall be able to resolve that before the debate that I have announced this afternoon.

Mr. Janner: Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that I asked last week for a debate on the disgraceful vandalism in schools in my constituency? He said that he would refer the matter to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. Has he done so, and has he had a reply? He will be appalled, as I was, to learn that three more schools have been vandalised in my constituency in the past week—Wycliffe community college, New Parks community college and, perhaps worst of all, the Emily Forte special school. Those schools need protection, fencing and closed circuit television. They cannot get them without affecting the education of the youngsters. There should be Government money for that, and we should have a debate soon.

Mr. Newton: I understand that the hon. and learned Gentleman met my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—although I am not sure exactly when—to discuss some of those matters. I think that the points that he made last week have been—certainly, I asked that they should be—brought to my right hon. Friend's attention. I have a number of points that I could make to him, but I will ensure that my right hon. Friend writes to him.

Mr. Mackinlay: May we have a debate in Government time about Government policy on cautioning offenders?

The right hon. Gentleman will recall that I raised the matter last week and asked him to have a word with the Home Secretary about whether he would be prepared to answer questions on that during the debate on London policing. He failed to do that, other than to say that I had reached new depths of ignorance—which, of course, is Howardspeak for saying that I am correct.

We should have a debate because there is a Government circular on policy which will be of concern to Labour and Conservative Members. Policy is not being properly and equally applied. Replies have shown that 13 people were cautioned for rape in 1994. There is widespread concern that the Home Secretary is not on top of his brief on cautioning. May we have an early debate?

Mr. Newton: Anyone who thinks that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is not on top of his brief has not been paying close attention. I will certainly bring those further representations to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend, who is due to answer questions this day week.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Can the Leader of the House assure me that the terms of reference of the debate on the Scott report will include not only what is in the report but what ought to be in it, and in particular, the fate of the ex-workers of Matrix Churchill, many of whom are constituents of mine or of my hon. Friends who represent Coventry? We want to be assured that we will be able to debate the circumstances that caused the loss of those employees' jobs—and the loss of income for their families—and the need for proper compensation, if that is what would be right as a result of the report.

Mr. Newton: Subject of course to your judgment Madam Speaker, it would be in order to raise in the debate anything that is considered relevant to the report or that arises from it.

Point of Order

4.14 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Last year you were helpful and made a ruling that, when a parliamentary question affected an individual constituency, hon. Members should be given notice of it. As far as I know, Ministers have complied with that ruling. Today, during business questions, the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) asked a similar question, on which I do not think you have ever been asked to reflect. She asked whether, when a written question is answered which directly affects a large number of hon. Members, the same sort of protection could be given so that we are aware of the answers before the rest of the world and do not face the difficulty that you dealt with last year.

That issue relates to the subject of reports, which was raised with the Leader of the House. I heard your ruling yesterday, Madam Speaker, and I know that reports to Ministers are clearly different, although, as Ministers are accountable to Parliament, those reports are made, indirectly, to Parliament. The Leader of the House gave an assurance that the report would be available to us at the same time as to the press. Perhaps you, Madam Speaker, could reflect on whether reports to Ministers could be encompassed in the same ruling as that on parliamentary answers that are of general interest.

Madam Speaker: On the hon. Gentleman's latter comments, I made my views clearly known yesterday and I have nothing further to add. I shall look at what he said in his earlier remarks, as I want to be helpful.

Mr. Newton: I confirm that I shall look at what the hon. Gentleman said.

Local Government Finance (Wales)

4.16 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. William Hague): I beg to move,

That the Local Government Finance Report (Wales) 1996–97 (House of Commons Paper No. 141), which was laid before this House on 1st February, be approved.

I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss also the following motion:

That the Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Notional Amounts) Report (Wales) 1996-97 (House of Commons Paper No. 142), which was laid before this House on 1st February, be approved.

The finance report sets out my decisions on the local government revenue settlement for 1996-97. The standard spending assessments specified in the report have been calculated in accordance with a formula agreed with the local authority associations. The notional amounts report sets out the amounts in lieu of budget requirements for 1995-96, which I propose to use to measure the coming year's budget increases for the purposes of capping. Those notional amounts reflect historic spending patterns in unitary authority areas and preserve the spending power of the new authorities.

As the House will recall from my statement in December, I propose to allow total standard spending, or TSS, of £2.867 billion for local government in Wales in 1996-97. That is an increase of £85 million, or 3.1 per cent., on the previous year. It includes £331 million for the four Welsh police authorities—£2.463 billion in standard spending assessments for the 22 new unitary authorities, and £72 million in specific grants such as probation service grant and national park grant. Under my provisional capping criteria, each local authority in Wales can, if it sees fit, increase its expenditure in comparison with its notional amount by at least 3.4 per cent.

The settlement allows police spending to increase by 5.1 per cent., and follows an increase of more than 11 per cent. in police budgets last year. It corrects the historic underfunding of police services by county councils prior to 1995-96, and it enables Welsh police forces to build on their success in combating crime, and to make communities safer places in which to live and work. The chief constables of all four Welsh forces have welcomed the settlement.

I propose to provide £2.517 billion in central Government support, known as aggregate external finance or AEF, in support of total standard spending—an increase of £52 million, or 2.2 per cent., on the previous year. That amounts to £860 per person in Wales—about £130, or 18 per cent., more than the level planned for England. It is 87.8 per cent. of total standard spending, compared with 79 per cent. of total standard spending in England. AEF comprises £1.792 million in revenue support grant, £459 million in distributable non-domestic rates, £237.8 million in specific grants—which includes the police grant to be made by the Home Secretary—and £29 million for council tax damping to cover the impact of council tax increases arising from the disaggregation of budgets last year.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Will the Secretary of State confirm that, if local authorities increase their expenditure in line with the likely 4 per cent. settlement for public sector pay, do not spend more than the expenditure limits recognised by the Welsh Office, and do not raise their council tax by more than the rate of inflation, they will still have a shortfall of several million pounds—as in the case of the new Caernarfonshire-Merionethshire authority? That would inevitably lead to the closure of rural schools, the retraction of care in the community services, and even the closure of leisure centres for two or three days a week. Is that not inevitable with this settlement?

Mr. Hague: The pay awards announcement will be made separately. I must tell the hon. Member that the settlement level for each authority is the product of the standard spending assessment formula, which is agreed with the local authority associations, the actual level of total standard spending and aggregate external finance, which I am setting out here.

If the hon. Gentleman or other hon. Members say that the amount of support that is given to an individual local authority should be different, they must argue that either the SSA formula should be changed or the total amount of support should be different. The hon. Member for Caernarfon may well be able to do that, but no one has yet told me what is the right amount for local government if the amount that I propose is wrong. I must pose that question to Opposition Members.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Is it not rather disingenuous to say that the pay settlements are separate? They substantially impact on local authorities and on the amount of money available to them. For example, the Welsh Office has information about the effect of the previous teachers' pay settlement on teacher numbers. We know that the teacher settlement for the coming year is 3.8 per cent, which is bound to have an effect on the number of teachers in our schools. What estimate has the Welsh Office made of the likely reduction of teachers as a direct result of the settlement?

Mr. Hague: The total effect will not be 3.8 per cent., because of the way in which the Government propose to stage the increases. We are making a 3.1 per cent. increase in total standard spending and a 2.7 per cent. increase in the amount of money that the Government give to local authorities. That is more than the likely increase in the outturn of expenditure by the Welsh Office, which in turn is more than the increase in expenditure for the Government as a whole.

Local authorities are therefore receiving at least their full share of the increase in Government expenditure for the coming year. We are entitled to expect local authorities to make improvements and administrative savings that are similar to those made by central Government during the coming year, so that they can minimise the consequences for the council tax payer.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): The sophisticated presentation of the figures will not wash in Neath and Port Talbot, because the new authorities will have to make cuts of £7 million which have nothing to do with their own efficiency or attempts to reorganise services. This punitive, paltry and pathetic settlement will discriminate against the Neath and Port Talbot side of West Glamorgan, and will mean that some council tax payers—

in Trebanos village, for example—will pay £50 more than their neighbours across the road. The settlement has nothing to do with local decisions, and everything to do with the Secretary of State's failure to deal with the councils' complaints about this matter.

Mr. Hague: As the hon. Gentleman knows, Neath and Port Talbot is one of the authorities that benefit from the damping schemes that I have announced. The hon. Gentleman is an Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, although in this debate he speaks from the Back Benches. Opposition Front-Bench Members have not been able to say—we wait with interest to discover whether they are able to tell us in this debate—what the settlement level should be. The hon. Gentleman thinks that the level I have announced is paltry. We look forward to hearing what the right amount would be, and we look forward to hearing the Labour party committing itself to it.

In addition to the revenue package that I have announced, I am providing local authorities with £508 million for capital programmes next year, and with £42 million towards the transitional costs of local government reorganisation. In all, local authorities will receive £83 million towards their transitional costs over the two years, from 1995 to 1997.

The responsibility for setting budgets and determining council tax levels lies with local authorities. Capping exists to enable me to restrain public expenditure, and capping rules acknowledge that, historically, the majority of Welsh local authorities—not all—have chosen to budget above the standard spending assessment.

However, provisional capping limits are not spending targets that I lay down. Local authorities have the discretion to set their budgets below capping limits, although many authorities seem to want to set their council tax as high as capping limits permit. That is one factor that the Opposition must consider when they advocate scrapping capping limits altogether. There would undoubtedly be an impact on council tax levels.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Surely the Secretary of State recognises that many local authorities have no alternative but to set their budgets at the capping level. If Anglesey county council, for example, had a standstill budget—the same budget as that allocated to Gwynedd and Ynys Môn last year—it would have a budget of £63 million. Under the capping arrangement, the council is not allowed to spend more than £61 million. What alternative does that give the county council? Is it not inevitable that services will suffer?

Mr. Hague: It is not good enough for people responsible for spending public money to say that they have no alternative to courses of action, such as the maximum level of taxation available to them. All of us who are responsible for spending public money have to use that money as efficiently and effectively as we can. I have announced the measures that we are taking in the Welsh Office, and I will refer to them again in a moment. Local authorities vary greatly in how good they are at spending their money efficiently and effectively. I will refer to the record of one or two authorities in a moment.

It was because I was concerned by reports that a majority of local authorities planned to budget up to the limit implied by my provisional capping principles that I announced last week an additional targeted damping scheme. It will ensure that, excluding any increases in community council precepts, no council tax increase can exceed 25 per cent., and I expect the great majority of increases to be well below that level.

The sum involved in the scheme is additional to aggregate external finance. I want to direct the resources to where they are most needed. When taken with aggregate external finance, including the £29.1 million available for disaggregation damping, the total level of Government support for local government revenue spending is brought to £2.533 billion in Wales, which is an increase of 2.7 per cent. The figure is virtually identical to that in other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): Let us be honest. The Secretary of State knows by now that local government finance is not a science, and that it is a very inexact art. In this year above all years, with all the problems related to disaggregation, and with only notional sums being taken into account, should not the Secretary of State be far more flexible in relation to the capping limits? We may well find that mistakes have been made in the calculation, and that local authorities will have no alternative but to cut significantly services that, in the past, they would have been able to protect.

Mr. Hague: The capping limits this year are more flexible than they were in previous years. That is partly in recognition of the particular circumstances, although we are spending a great deal of money to fund the transitional costs for local government. The hon. Gentleman must remember that, when I make capping limits more flexible, the immediate response of local authorities is to say, "Right, we will spend all the way up to our capping limits, whatever that means for the council tax." I introduced an additional damping scheme in the light of that.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): Will the Secretary of State tell us something about the methodology used in the distribution of the extra moneys provided at the end of January, and tell us whether there was any consultative process to enable unitary authorities to make representations to him? Is it not unreasonable that no additional moneys remain available to the new Ceredigion county council, so that the band D council tax will be £508—£80 more than in Cardiff, which obtained an additional £3.6 million, even though the Ceredigion average income is far less? Is not the distribution extremely inequitable?

Mr. Hague: The decisions that I announced at the end of January 1996 were the result of a process of consultation on my original proposals. That consultation ended on 5 January 1996, so I announced the additional proposals when I had reviewed all responses to the consultation.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's argument. Historically, council tax levels are higher in the area of his constituency, but I have targeted the additional help to places where council tax increases threaten to be the largest, because the anxieties that were expressed to me were overwhelmingly about the level of change that might take place, not the level that existed for historic reasons

[Mr. Hague]

and because of previous spending decisions, which we cannot go back and unravel now. I allocated the additional money on that basis.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): As my right hon. Friend knows, I was a West Glamorgan county councillor for six years. During that time, I spoke to many people in West Glamorgan who were supremely grateful for the fact that the Government had capping in place, because the Labour county councillors were sweating with hope that, at some time, capping would be lifted, so that they could push spending through the roof. Yes, the people of Wales want their services to be protected, but we must do all we can to protect the people of Wales from high-spending Labour councillors.

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend's experience has too often been the experience of councillors throughout the country. It has shown that, if we did not have capping principles, council tax would be dramatically higher, without necessarily bringing improved services to local populations.

Mr. Don Touhig (Islwyn) *rose—*

Mr. Hague: I must make progress if we are to have time for hon. Members to take part in the debate.

I have been worried about reports of the possible closure of Theatr Clwyd, and I have carefully considered the case made to me and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), by the new Flintshire authority for additional help from central Government. I share its opinion that Theatr Clwyd should continue to provide the high-quality productions for which it is famous. I have decided to provide, via the Arts Council of Wales, a one-off grant of £1.3 million to pay off completely Theatr Clwyd's outstanding capital debt.

My offer is subject to satisfactory assurances from Flintshire and other successor authorities to Clwyd county council that they will give the theatre the support it needs to continue to operate on its present basis for the foreseeable future, and I need such assurances by 8 March 1996. That is a major contribution to securing the future viability of the theatre, and I hope that it will be welcomed by hon. Members.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): As the Member of Parliament representing Mold, where Theatr Clwyd is situated, I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement. Flintshire county council, my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) and I made strong representations to the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), about the future of Theatr Clwyd. I am sure that today's announcement will give a kick start to the local authorities adjacent to Flintshire to help with those contributions.

It is a first step. There remains a major shortfall of perhaps £300,000 to £400,000, and I hope that the door will not be closed. We also need to consider the ability of the Secretary of State to kick-start the Arts Council of Wales as a "next steps" agency.

Mr. Hague: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome. As he says, he and the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside made representations, as did my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) in the Whips Office, so there was concern on both sides of the House. The sum of £1.3 million in taxpayers' money to write off the theatre's debt completely is a major contribution. I now look to the authorities and others to ensure that the theatre continues to operate in the foreseeable future. That £1.3 million must be the limit of what the Government can provide.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) and the right hon. Gentleman and his Parliamentary Under-Secretary for receiving the deputations and considering the strong case that we made. How can the Secretary of State persuade the English local authorities very close to Mold to help meet the £300,000 shortfall? Does he agree that Theatr Clwyd is the jewel in the crown of Welsh theatre production?

Mr. Hague: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's last point. Local authorities in Wales and in England must make their own decisions about the support they give. However, I hope that the people responsible for the management and finances of the theatre will take every opportunity to market it effectively in the future, in terms of obtaining both support and custom. The Government have given the theatre an opportunity for the future, which we want to see it take up.

My settlement proposals give local government the resources it needs to maintain services in the first year of the new unitary arrangements. Inflation is low, and it is forecast to remain so. I acknowledge that difficult choices must often be made—that is true for all who are responsible for spending taxpayers' money. All councils must make every effort to use their resources as wisely as possible. Many councillors try to do that, but not all achieve it.

If we can believe what we read in the newspapers, one local authority—Rhondda Cynon Taff county borough council—proposes to spend more than £20,000 on a new mayoral chain. That is a large sum to spend when the mayor could make use of the regalia of one or more of his predecessors. When things such as that happen—albeit involving a relatively small amount of money—people are bound to question council priorities.

The same authority has ambitious plans for a new headquarters which will cost in excess of £20 million. Of course, the council needs a place to meet and the staff need a place to work, and the Government have assisted the council with accommodation for the time being. I recently announced support for six authorities which plan to build new accommodation or to upgrade existing buildings. However, those six authorities will spend less between them than that one authority plans to spend. Council tax payers have a right to ask for a more modest approach.

I do not want, or need, to single out that one authority: in some areas, leading councillors will be paid allowances as great as £23,000. The Blaenau Gwent county borough council is the 17th largest authority in Wales in population terms, but it has the fifth most expensive chief officers' structure. It has more chief officer posts than any authority, apart from Swansea county council, which serves three times the population.

Councillors in Blaenau Gwent have voted themselves allowances which are six times greater than those paid to the elected members of the old Blaenau Gwent authority. We are told that travel and subsistence will be paid in addition, but there is no requirement for councillors to turn up to meetings. That raises questions about the priorities of local government.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphiliy): The Secretary of State will recall my suggestion that he follow the example set by his counterpart for Scotland and introduce a mandatory scheme to stop any existing abuses. I urge him to introduce such a mandatory scheme. If he is so minded, he will have the full support of the Opposition. If he is not, upon their election, a Labour Government will take action to stop any such abuses.

Mr. Hague: That is an interesting position. The hon. Gentleman has said that there should be mandatory schemes because councillors are not fit to decide their allowance arrangements, but he believes that capping should be abolished so that councillors can freely decide on the impositions to be placed on everyone else.

The hon. Gentleman's approach is inconsistent. The Government should not have to instruct local authorities about such matters: they should have the discretion to make those choices. Council tax payers who hear their local councils ask the Government for more money should question whether the councils are spending money wisely, and whether the expenditure is necessary.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): Does the Secretary of State therefore disagree with the Leader of the House, who announced that an independent means of setting Members' salaries was the right approach? Is it not the same principle that my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) suggested should be carried into local government?

Mr. Hague: No, I do not think it is. We have a Welsh Office and a Secretary of State for Wales so that we can judge issues on their merits in Wales. That is what we are doing today.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hague: No, I must get on with my speech.

In the restraint of public expenditure, I am asking no more of local government than of other public sector borrowers. I informed the House in December of my plan to reduce my Department's running costs by 8 per cent. in cash terms over the next three years. Organisations that are responsible for large sums of public money have a duty rigorously to assess their spending priorities and their running costs.

Reorganisation has given Welsh local government a chance to improve management structures and strategies. Some new authorities have worked on establishing cost-effective management teams to provide taxpayers with better value for money, but others still have work to do. Preparing for reorganisation is a complex process. Much has been accomplished, but much remains to be done. In recognition of that, I am making more than £80 million available to fund transitional costs, but for reorganisation of local government to work, we need management discipline as well as financial resources from central Government.

It is clear that we are providing increased resources to local government, that we are making special allowances for reorganisation, and that local authorities are responsible for council tax levels. Only one thing remains unclear--the alternative to the size and shape of the proposed settlement.

Some people have suggested alternatives. To be fair to them, the local authority associations suggested that I should reduce the budgets of the Cardiff Bay development corporation and the housing associations to provide more money for local government. That could in no way have paid for the 19 per cent. increase in revenue funding they sought, but at least they suggested some alternatives, and I respect them for that.

Plaid Cymru Members, some of whom have intervened, will probably suggest the alternative that there should be more money for the Welsh block overall. They would not be able to make that proposition were Wales not part of the United Kingdom, but they will probably advance it anyway, and it is one point of view. However, not everyone seems willing or able to suggest alternative numbers to those in the reports. Opposition Front-Bench Members are conspicuous among those unable to do so, although they are free with their opinions about other matters.

Mrs. Clwyd: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hague: I should finish my point.

It is 10 weeks since we published the proposals. It is hard to believe that the Opposition have not thought about what the settlement should be. If they have not thought about it, we are entitled to ask what they have been doing in the past 10 weeks. If they have thought about it, it is time that public were told their conclusions. Tonight, at 7 o'clock, I expect that they will vote against the proposals. If they do that, they must prefer something else. If they prefer something else, we are entitled to ask what it is. Would council tax be higher or lower?

Mrs. Clwyd: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether the Government intend to make a statement, and whether the Secretary of State knows that, in addition to increasing council tax, they will also tax those who are sick. The Government have sneaked through a answer saying that they intend to put 25p on the cost of prescriptions. That is disgraceful.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): It is quite clear to me that this is not a point of order. It is a point of information that the hon. Lady wishes to get over, and she has not been able to do it in any other way.

Mr. Hague: I shall not be distracted from asking Members who are against the settlement whether they think it should be higher or lower. We do not necessarily need exact numbers. They could tell us whether it should be a bit higher or much higher.

Where would they find resources in the Welsh block? Would they come from the health budget that I have increased, the training budget, to which I have directed money, the Countryside Council for Wales, whose budget

[Mr. Hague]

I have increased, the Welsh Development Agency, which has received an increase in its grant in aid, or, as the local authorities have suggested, the Cardiff Bay development corporation, although that would stop the barrage halfway through its completion?

The problems of financing local government spending would be worse, not better, were we to introduce even a small number of the specific proposals to which Opposition Members have put their names.

Mr. Ainger: Will the Minister give way?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is quite clear the that Minister is not giving way; therefore, the hon. Gentleman must resume his seat quickly.

Mr. Hague: I have given way many times. I want to provide time for Members to take part in the debate, and for the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) to say what he thinks the settlement should be. I should point out that ending compulsory tendering, which is one Opposition policy, would worsen the problem of controlling local government spending. They could finance it by their other policy of ending capping, but that would undoubtedly mean that local authorities would choose to spend a great deal more, and council tax payers would have to pay for it.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hague: In fairness to all Members, I must continue my speech.

The settlement that I have announced gives local government a high priority within the Welsh block. It increases the resources available to local government, and it addresses the issues raised by reorganisation. The Opposition have presented no honest alternative, and on that basis I recommend it to the House for approval.

4.45 pm

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): The Secretary of State has been getting in some much-needed practice for his next job in opposition. He is far more concerned to talk about Opposition policies than about his own financial settlement. It is instructive that, although we are discussing a financial settlement dealing with the distribution of some £3 billion of public money, according to the Secretary of State the most important point is the cost of civic regalia in Rhondda Cynon Taff. That reveals his priorities.

The Secretary of State has tried to convey the message that the settlement is reasonable, that it will not lead to service cuts and that any unreasonable council tax increases will be the fault of local councils, not central Government. On all those counts, the truth is the exact opposite.

In reality, it is an unreasonable settlement at a time of economic slump. Despite their new responsibilities and a major reorganisation, councils in Wales will face a reduction in Government support. The settlement increases aggregate external finance by 2.2 per cent. Inflation for the year to December was 3.2 per cent. In real terms, therefore, authorities in Wales face a 1 per cent. cut in their level of support.

Resources for the police increased last year and the Secretary of State took credit for it. Perhaps he will also take responsibility for the fact that the number of serving police officers has fallen by nearly 200 since 1992 and fell by nearly 100 last year, when he took direct responsibility for funding police authorities in Wales. Yet again, the reality falls far short of Tory manifesto commitments and it is clear that we cannot trust the Government on law and order.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: No.

I would have liked to welcome the extra money for community care, but that increase, for which the Secretary of State claims credit, comes entirely from the budget of the Department of Social Security. When the number of elderly people is dramatically increasing—there was a 17 per cent. increase in the number of people aged 65 and over between 1979 and 1994 and it is forecast to increase further—not a penny more is being spent on one of the most vulnerable sectors in our society. That is not the whole picture. Excluding the ring-fenced money for police and community care, Wales faces a 2.6 per cent. cut in real-terms provision for such basic services as education, housing and social services.

Mr. Evans: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: No.

Mr. Evans: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Secretary of State gave way more than 20 times during his speech, yet the Opposition spokesman is not prepared to give way even once.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is entirely a matter for the hon. Member who has the Floor to decide whether to give way. It is not a point of order for the Chair, so that was a bogus point of order which has taken up time.

Mr. Davies: Perhaps I should take this opportunity to explain to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that a large number of my hon. Friends who represent Welsh constituencies want to represent the interests of their constituents today, so I shall make my speech as brief as possible to allow them to do that.

Education may be a matter of jest for the Secretary of State, because neither he nor his family nor his constituents have to live with the consequences of the cuts that he is imposing. Will he confirm that, as a result of the Government's decision today to increase teachers' salaries by 3.8 per cent., but not to make any more funding available for authorities in Wales, they will have to face additional burdens of the following order? The counties of Dyfed, Gwent and South Glamorgan, or their successor authorities, will have to find a further £4 million. The counties of Clwyd and West Glamorgan will have to find a further £3 million. The county of Mid Glamorgan will have to find a further £5 million. If the people whom the Secretary of State represents, or his family, were being condemned to the squalor

and declining conditions that our children face in their education, I put it to him that he would not be as complacent about this further imposition on Welsh local authorities.

There will be service cuts in these vital areas, and hardly an authority in Wales will be able to fulfil its plans for investment in the social and economic infrastructure which are needed to face the challenge of the new millennium. The capital settlement this year includes a cash cut of 5 per cent.—more than £34 million—and a real terms cut of 8 per cent.; that is £50 million less than what is needed just to compensate for inflation.

I acknowledge that the damping down grant has been introduced, but all that does is put a temporary bandage over the structural and financial crisis facing the poorer Welsh authorities as a result of the per capita redistribution of the former counties' disaggregated budgets. Overall, the Welsh block grant has not been increased, so the £45 million allocated to damping down will have to come from other cuts in Welsh Office expenditure: from the health service and from economic development, for example. Local authorities which this year are benefiting from the damping down grant—especially the poorer counties of Rhondda Cynon Taff, Merthyr and Blaenau Gwent—will face enormous difficulties next year, because no provision has been made for the continuation of the assistance.

It is what I would call typical Tory economics—sacrificing long-term strategic interests for a short-term political fix. That it is a short-term fix, the Secretary of State made absolutely clear in his press release of 30 January:

"I envisage this additional assistance as a one-off, giving authorities time to adjust service expenditure and bring it more in line with their standard spending assessments".

In other words, he intends to sack teachers, spend less on social workers and invest less in the future of our communities. As with so many other areas of Government activity, the problems of today's Tory Government will be left to tomorrow's Labour Government to sort out.

My hon. Friends will be interested to contrast the Secretary of State's press release entitled

"William Hague limits council tax increases"

with the facts. The facts are that average council tax increases across Wales will be 17.5 per cent. Twelve local authorities in Wales face increases of more than 20 per cent., and half of all Welsh council tax payers—more than 550,000 households—face increases of nearly 25 per cent.

The reason for this state of affairs is quite clear: following years of taking power away from local councils and concentrating it in the hands of central Government, the council tax is now a council tax in name only. Nearly 90 per cent. of local authority expenditure is set and met by central Government, so when the Government cut funds, the burden falls on local government—precisely what has happened this year.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) *rose—*

Mr. Nigel Evans: He is not giving way.

Mr. Davies: I shall happily give way to my hon. Friend, because he represents a Welsh constituency and I know that this is a matter of great interest to him.

Mr. Rowlands: On behalf of my constituents I should like to draw to the attention of my hon. Friend the fact that a standstill budget for the new county borough of Merthyr Tydfil will still mean a 25 per cent. increase in the council tax. So much for damping down.

Mr. Davies: That is precisely my point. My hon. Friend understands very well that 12 local authorities face increases of more than 20 per cent. The cuts mean that a total of £26 million in real terms—33 per cent. of what is necessary to keep in line with inflation alone—will be lost; and we need look no further than the Secretary of State to attribute responsibility for the crisis facing Welsh local government.

What I really do not understand is why the right hon. Gentleman is so reluctant to take responsibility. After all, this is a right-wing agenda and the Secretary of State is a self-confessed right-wing Minister. So why is he so coy? Why does he not boast of his achievements? It is part of a right-wing policy to cut public expenditure to fund a pre-election bribe. No matter that tax bribes are taken back at a stroke by council tax increases.

It is also part of the right hon. Gentleman's right-wing policy to force more public services into the private sector. No matter that the policy itself, like the ill-thought-out nursery voucher scheme, will undermine existing provision. It is part of his right-wing policy to reduce in absolute terms the level and quality of public services—in his own words, to roll back the frontiers of the state. No matter that the price for that is paid by communities whose collective future is made insecure, and by individuals whose private lives are blighted by misery.

I shall offer the Secretary of State just one example of how the life of an individual can be made a misery. On Saturday, the parents of a 15-year-old terminally ill girl came to see me. Her name is Jade Smith, and she lives in Bedwas in my constituency. The girl is mentally and physically handicapped and has been tube-fed for the past five years. At the moment, Mid Glamorgan county council enables her to attend a special school at Ysgol Ty Coch, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells).

As from April, however, the new Caerphilly authority, which I have the privilege of representing, because of the cash cuts imposed by the Government, will be unable to buy a place in Ysgol Ty Coch, so the authority has had to reclassify one of the homes in which it provides respite care for adults. As a result, my constituent has to go to Ty Gwilym adult respite care centre and share the facility with 30 to 40-year-old adults.

The first time Jade Smith went there, she had to share the reception area with middle-aged men, over 40, who were mentally disturbed and abusive. The next time she went there, the care assistants were committed to taking out the 30-year-old women who were there for respite care, so there was no one there to look after her except a sitter.

I offer that as a clear example of the impact that the Government's cuts are having on the quality of public services in Wales. The Secretary of State appears anxious to intervene. I would ask him to take the smile off his face just for a moment and, in his intervention, to tell me whether he thinks that the girl I have described is getting the sort of care that he would want if he were responsible for a 15-year-old terminally ill child.

Mr. Hague: I shall decide on my own interventions. The hon. Gentleman is clearly unhappy with the budget that I have set. Will he tell us, then, by how much he would increase it?

Mr. Davies: I gave way to the Secretary of State because I had a particular point to put to him. I am sorry that he does not think that the care of a 15-year-old terminally ill child is sufficiently serious to deserve a serious and responsible answer. It is because of such cases that there is so much anger at the Government. They are quick enough to preach to others about personal responsibility; it is a pity that they do not recognise their responsibilities with the same alacrity.

The current settlement has two essential flaws. First, the 2.2 per cent. increase in aggregate external finance from £2.4 billion in 1995-96 to £2.5 billion in 1996-96 falls £26 million short of what is required to keep pace with the 3 per cent. increase in inflation.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): How much extra would the Labour party give Wales?

Mr. Davies: Secondly, although total standard spending increases by 3.1 per cent., from £2.7 billion to £2.86 billion, the proportion met by AEF falls from 88.6 per cent. to 87.8 per cent., a 0.8 per cent. drop.

Mr. Bruce: How much?

Mr. Davies: In practice, that is the transfer of responsibility from central to local government that was slipped out in an answer to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris). In a letter to him last year, the Secretary of State said:

"I believe that over time local authorities in Wales should raise a higher proportion of their income from Council Tax. The 11 per cent increase is the result of this approach."

There are many local authorities in Wales that would relish the prospect of reducing their increase to 11 per cent., but far from protecting Welsh interests in the Cabinet the Secretary of State, like his predecessor, has set in train a deliberate policy of disadvantaging Wales vis-a-vis the rest of the United Kingdom.

Last year, Welsh council tax rose by 11.9 per cent.

Mr. Bruce: How much?

Mr. Davies: Council tax in Scotland rose by 5.7 per cent., and council tax in England rose by 5.2 per cent.

Hon. Members: Bye-bye.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not think that the debate is greatly helped by somewhat childish demonstrations, which are not confined to one side of the House.

Mr. Davies: Now that the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) has left, I am sure that the quality of the debate will improve.

This year, that unacceptable gap is widening still further. The Welsh average increase of 17.5 per cent. is much higher than the Scottish increase and more than double the figure that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury mentioned. We know, therefore, that it is now official Conservative policy to force council tax increases, and to force higher increases in Wales than elsewhere.

This year's average increase of 17.5 per cent. has more than wiped out the cut of 1p in the standard rate of income tax in the Budget. The council tax rises will cost Welsh taxpayers about £69 million extra this year. The Conservative party and Conservative party policies have failed Wales.

The dependency culture that has arisen under the Conservatives has placed increasing burdens on local authorities. Reliance on income support has increased by 81 per cent. That is the dependency culture, courtesy of the Conservatives. Reliance on housing benefit has increased by 54 per cent.—the dependency culture, courtesy of the Conservatives. Reliance on council tax benefit has increased by 107 per cent.—the dependency culture, courtesy of the Conservatives. Reliance on family credit has increased by 580 per cent.—the dependency culture, courtesy of the Conservatives.

Since 1979, Welsh local authorities have struggled valiantly to serve their communities. It is predictable that the settlement reflects the failure of Conservative policies, rather than Labour's aspirations for building for the future. Opposition Members hope that it will be a very long time before Wales is ever again served by such an incompetent and uncaring Government.

5.3 pm

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): The speech by the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) was more remarkable for what he did not say than for what he said. He was on the horns of a dilemma, because much of the speech was devoted to more spending and his approval of that, but at the same time he was not quite sure how that spending was to be paid for. The hon. Gentleman seemed to react with horror to the idea of council tax increases, and so one can conclude that the only remedy in his mind to meet the high spending that he proposed was an increase in the aggregate external finance. That, of course, is composed of grant from the Exchequer—in other words, taxpayers' money—and money that comes from businesses in Wales. Therefore, the only conclusion that we can draw from the hon. Gentleman's remarks, which we did not hear, is that commercial rates would go up in Wales.

We should appreciate the full extent of the support given by central Government and businesses to local authority spending in Wales. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to the fact that 87 per cent. of the total standard spending is provided by the Exchequer and business rate payers. That amounts to some £864 a person in Wales, compared with 79 per cent. or £732 a person in England. Council tax payers in Wales have a head start of £132, which should not be disdained. Of course, that advantage recognises the different circumstances and needs that prevail in Wales. That advantage will be maintained, if local authorities keep their total spending down to the levels set by the Government.

As well as that advantage, we have the capping regime, which is designed to protect the domestic rate payer against excessive demands. We in Wales are very favourably treated, and long may that continue. I wonder how long it will continue, because there is clearly a

change in the wind. During a debate on local government finance in England, the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said:

"The Labour party . . . would return the business rate . . . to local control."—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1996; Vol. 270, c. 1029.]

Some of us remember the days when that was the case. Business people complained bitterly about the rate burden imposed upon them by Labour local authorities. Of course, the business rate was increased, as it was so much easier to sting businesses than domestic rate payers, because business people had fewer votes to cast at local government elections.

We did not hear a commitment to the return of the business rate to local control in Wales, but it was implicit in the speech by the hon. Member for Caerphilly. I have to warn him that there would be dire consequences for businesses. We remember only too well how local control of the business rate had an adverse effect on employment in the past, and there is every prospect that that would happen again in the future. Every commercial rate payer should sit up and take note of what might be in store for them.

If the business rate were returned to local control, there would be enormous disparities throughout Wales. The industrialised areas would be enriched, and the rural areas impoverished, unless there was a very substantial change in the grant system or agricultural land was rated. That is an idea that has never been far from the minds of right hon. and hon. Members of the Opposition, so the farmers had better sit up and take notice too.

The return of the business rate to local control is not the only change proposed by the Opposition. Again, I refer to the speech by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, in which he proposed the abolition of compulsory competitive tendering. That can only mean, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State suggested, increased staff for local authorities and increased costs for council tax payers. That is what will happen. It is all spelt out in the document entitled "Renewing democracy, rebuilding communities", which was issued by the Labour party.

It is not surprising that Opposition Members are minded to change current council tax bands and to abolish the restraint on local authorities that is provided by the capping procedure. The Welsh electorate can contemplate council tax rates soaring under a possible future Labour Government to whatever heights our local masters think appropriate, subject only to the Secretary of State's reserve capping powers, which are to be used only when all else has failed.

I was interested when the hon. Member for Caerphilly made an offer to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to put a lid on some of the abuses by local authorities that my right hon. Friend reeled off. The hon. Gentleman offered to assist. What power does he think he has as an Opposition spokesman for Wales? He has no power, and local authorities in Wales can tell him to go to kingdom come.

Mr. Ron Davies: I suggested to the Secretary of State—it was noticeable that he did not respond—that he should follow the example set by his Cabinet colleague, the Secretary of State for Scotland. There is a mandatory scheme in Scotland. I told the Secretary of State that, if he were minded to introduce appropriate legislation, the Opposition would assist its passage through Parliament.

Sir Wyn Roberts: We are talking about directly elected authorities. Surely there is a tradition in Wales that our elected bodies are responsible, and primarily responsible to their electors.

Mr. Davies: Get away.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. Is he referring to the record of Labour local authorities in Wales? Is he not proud of that record? Does he think that there is a great deal to be criticised about the behaviour of his directly elected local authorities in Wales? Does he think that we must take mandatory powers to restrain them?

Mr. Davies: The answer is simple. If the Secretary of State is so concerned about abuse, why does he not do something about it? My party's position is clear. If there are abuses after the next election, Labour will act to stop them.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am glad to hear that.

There should not, of course, be the abuses that we have heard about. Local authorities are directly elected and they should behave responsibly. The hon. Gentleman and the Labour party clearly have in mind a considerable increase in local authority spending. They are doffing their caps to higher spending. I hope that council tax payers in Wales will take account of that.

We are discussing an important statement for local government in Wales, it being the first for the new unitary authorities. There should be a saving as a result of reducing two tiers of local government to one. I am sure that there will be a reduction in due course. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been able to increase the permissible spend by about £85.6 million, or 3.1 per cent., for next year. I am grateful for the transitional funding that he has provided. My guess is that the new authorities will do well and make a good fist of their responsibilities in time.

Unfortunately, the new authorities have a cloud on their horizon in the shape of the Welsh Assembly that has been proposed by the Opposition and confirmed last night by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the leader of the Opposition. If the unitary authorities are to have their financial allocations decided by the assembly, I can foresee endless troubles ahead. It will be devil take the hindmost—in other words, devil take the worst represented, sparsely populated rural areas.

The equality of treatment secured in Wales by the complicated formulae that are before us will disappear before the massed ranks of the assemblymen from the heavily populated areas. Couple that with the disparity caused by local control of commercial rates, and we have a scene set for civil strife such as we have not seen since the middle ages. If we in the north suffer too much in the proposed scenario, I am sure that we shall produce our Owain Glyndwr, who will take over Caerphilly castle and throw out the robber baron.

The mind boggles at the prospect of the proposed assembly dealing with local government expenditure throughout Wales. Unfortunately, however, the prospect is real enough, as is the unfairness that may result. My right hon. Friend and his officials at the Welsh Office

[Sir Wyn Roberts]

hold the balance between authorities. They are there to ensure fairness in the distribution of resources throughout Wales.

I ask a key question, which I hope the hon. Member for Caerphilly will answer: who will perform the function that I have described if we have an assembly to rule us? If the hon. Gentleman cannot answer the question now, I hope that he will at least give it some consideration. The assembly will be an extra tier of government, and extra tiers do not come cheap. It will have to be paid for in some way, probably with money that might otherwise be spent on local Government services, or perhaps on the health service. Both areas are major consumers of Welsh Office money.

If we are to have an all-Wales dimension to local government, there is much to be said for developing the role of the unitary authorities. We have already established by statute the consultative council that has responsibility for local government finance, with which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State discusses resource issues in advance of a settlement. Possibly these discussions need to be amplified. In that context, perhaps there should be greater scope to deal in more detail with specific responsibilities such as education or social services. That is one possibility. It would not be impossible to devise a similar forum for the health service.

We carry responsibility. Whatever happens in local government must be reconciled with our parliamentary system, which must always have ultimate responsibility to the electorate. We would be foolish to try to escape that responsibility by foisting it on others.

We shall hear a great deal about particular needs that should be met, and needs that will have to be paid for. I was delighted to hear the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about Theatr Clwyd. We must remember that those who demand more spending object to council tax increases in the same speech, and almost in the same breath. More expenditure seems to be fine providing that someone else is paying for it. I hope that that is not our approach in our private lives. Unfortunately, it is one that some of us seem to regard as acceptable in our role as public advocates.

The settlement is fair and as sound as we could wish it to be. It represents a challenge to the new authorities to secure good value for the money that the Government, through the taxpayer, have given them.

5.19 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I am glad to follow the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts), but I disagree with his master classes. My speech will be briefer than his.

There are many large aging council estates in my constituency and they need urgent regrading, upgrading, modernisation and repair. Built before and after world war two, they are in real need of investment. In the townships of Buckley, Saltney, Shotton, Garden city and elsewhere, windows, doors and roofs are rotting away. My constituents increasingly despair of the situation. Alyn and Deeside district council has a good housing record, but its problems, as I have seen when visiting the localities, are very real indeed, and the new Flintshire county council will inherit them.

The terrible cold and ensuing damp, and the mountainous snow and a chilling cold wind have turned my constituents' homes into iceboxes. The cold is literally making some of my constituents who are trapped in their houses ill. I know of distraught mothers who feel that they cannot let their youngsters sleep in bedrooms that are without central heating. The wind and frost penetrate their rooms. Mould grows on the walls of the bedrooms and ice forms on the windows.

Any youngster prone to asthma or any bronchitic disorder does not need those conditions, and neither do elderly tenants who are prone to arthritis. Hundreds of my most respectable constituents dread winter's advance, particularly after the terrible weather that we have had. They are in severe difficulties. In less serious conditions, I have received petitions from constituents in the townships.

Will the Secretary of State give serious consideration to the release of council house sales receipts that have accrued in my local authorities, as the authorities wish to invest them only to bring relief to the beleaguered families that I have described? It would be a powerful intervention if the right hon. Gentleman did that. If he does not do that now, will he do so in the near future?

In terms of the schools service, will the Secretary of State undertake to fund the teachers' pay settlement in full? If he were to say that he will do that, the new unitary authorities would be more confident that they could tackle the real problems that they know that they will inherit. I do not wish to see emergency meetings of school governors and parent-teacher associations desperate to bail out their local schools from the financial problems that they envisage. Nor do I want pupils with special needs to lose. I note the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) made. All of us could give examples of these problems.

I do not want any youngster with special needs to lose as a consequence of the defects of this settlement. I do not want even more pressure to be put on class teachers, who are groaning under the incessant demands of Ministers issuing their latest and ever more demanding curriculum fiats. It is time for Ministers to stop putting the pressure on class teachers. They do a good job. They are doing their best, and the Government have gone too far. Stability is needed and it is time for the Government to rest their case for further change. The morale of class teachers is very low, so the chance of our children getting the best start in life is diminished.

It is the fate of the new unitary councils to start their uncertain lives desperately short of money. It is a very cynical scene that they inherit.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jones: No, I hope to conclude shortly.

It is a cynical scene. Grants will be cut. The council tax is certain to go up, and will do so in a big way. Services to our constituents—the taxpayers—will be cut. Labour Members know that Ministers on the Treasury Bench have not delivered a top-class financial settlement. We believe that they must take responsibility for these serious shortcomings, and at the very least, to help our new councils, undertake to pay the teachers' salary increase in full.

In an election year—that is what we are looking at in the new financial year—the Government expect the councils to carry the blame for the large increases in council tax. In my view, the new Flintshire county council deserves better from the Government, and the large-scale increases in the council tax will surely be seen at home in our constituencies as the consequence of inadequate ministerial allocations.

5.26 pm

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): First, in reply to a point made by the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), who seemed to be following the precedent set by the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) in not taking interventions, I should point out that there is a clear trade-off between the level of teachers' pay and the number of teachers who can be employed. That is the economic reality of the education budget, and we ignore it at our peril and to the detriment of our education system.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly clearly believes that interventions can be accepted only from hon. Members who represent Welsh constituencies; yet he refused an intervention from me and subsequently took one from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, so there was a certain illogicality there. He then used my right hon. Friend's intervention to argue with something that my right hon. Friend had not said. By that stage I was becoming a little confused by the hon. Gentleman, and not for the first time.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly did not like my right hon. Friend's reference to a Labour authority wasting money on a new mayoral chain when the outgoing authority had a perfectly good chain that could have been used. Perhaps that performance by a new Labour authority—I suppose that they are all new Labour authorities these days—can be contrasted with the new Labour authority in Vale of Glamorgan, which is abolishing the mayoralty entirely. Meanwhile, the Leader of the Opposition appears to be espousing the concept of super-mayors. I am not quite sure whether it is new Labour to abolish mayors, buy them new chains or create super-mayors, but no doubt things will become apparent when Labour policy develops in due course.

With regard to rate support, I believe that the settlement is a very good one, against the background of the Government's determination to limit Government spending to a level that the taxpayer can afford. In Wales, we seem to be doing particularly well out of this: total standard spending is up by 3.1 per cent. in 1996-97.

As I am particularly concerned about the level of police funding, I am pleased to learn that the Dyfed police grant has risen by 4.9 per cent. since 1995-96, to £24.2 million. The Gwent figure of £31.3 million represents an increase of 4.5 per cent., and the North Wales figure of £34.7 million an increase of 5.1 per cent. I have saved the best till last: South Wales has been given £75.2 million, an increase of 5.4 per cent. The increases were even larger last year. The South Wales police benefited from a 15 per cent. increase, and the further increase of 5.4 per cent. is clearly good news, notwithstanding what was claimed from the Opposition side earlier.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): As the hon. Gentleman is talking about the police, will he give us his opinion of Government policies which have led to a reduction of 1,333 in the number of police officers nationwide since 1992, when an increase of 1,000 that year had been promised?

Mr. Sweeney: In my area, the reduction in real-terms spending on the police is attributable to the three Labour-controlled county councils which provide the membership of the South Wales police authority. Significantly, since the Government hypothecated spending on the police in Wales the police have received a substantial increase in funding. If those Labour authorities had complied with Home Office recommendations on police funding levels, police funding in Wales would not have fallen behind in that deplorable way.

As a general principle, I think it right for local authorities to decide their own spending priorities. However, because of the Labour party's woeful neglect of spending on the police in Wales—which was against the interests of all Welsh people and a good illustration of Labour's being tough on crime in its rhetoric but soft on crime in reality—the Government had no alternative but to hypothecate spending on the police to develop the improved police force that Conservative Members are determined to achieve.

Total standard spending in Wales this year is £984; in England, it is £922. The aggregate external finance is £864 in Wales, and £832 in England. That shows that the Conservative Government see spending in Wales as a priority if services are to continue to improve. It is unfortunate that so many of the local authorities are Labour controlled as the public are not receiving the full benefit of the money because the Labour party is more interested in mayoral chains and increasing councillors' allowances than in improving efficiency and the quality of services.

Although the council tax is likely to rise substantially in Wales, it will still be much lower than it is in England. That will be worth remembering when people receive their council tax demands.

Mr. Touhig: Does the hon. Gentleman share the apparent triumph with which the Secretary of State announced this afternoon that he would place a 25 per cent. ceiling on increases? Without the extra help that the Secretary of State has now offered, council tax in my part of the Caerphilly county area would have risen by 68 per cent. What sort of settlement is that?

Mr. Sweeney: The hon. Gentleman has made an interesting point. I infer from what he said that he would like central Government to impose a lower limit on council tax increases. That would considerably reduce Labour local authorities' freedom. I am surprised to hear such an argument from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Ainger: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sweeney: No, I have already given way three times—unlike some Opposition Members.

Let me make a political point about capping. In the interests of all the people of Wales who pay council tax, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has maintained a capping system. As a Conservative, I wonder whether

[Mr. Sweeney]

it might have been a better political move for our Government to do away with capping for this year only in the run-up to the election, thus demonstrating to all the electors in Wales how much Welsh local government spends when it is run by the Labour party. They would then have a good idea of what they could expect under a Labour Government.

My right hon. Friend, however, is too responsible to act in that way. He is intent on protecting the Welsh people against the profligacy of Welsh councillors. Having made my political point, I accept my right hon. Friend's judgment; but I hope that the Welsh electorate will give careful consideration to the implications of Labour demands for the relaxation or abolition of capping. If such action were taken, our council taxes would go through the roof.

The total level of standard spending is tough but realistic. When the poll tax was introduced, Labour local authorities used it as an excuse to raise spending, knowing that they could then falsely blame the Government for the increase in poll tax bills. That is why capping should continue. I would not like the Conservative Government's reorganisation of local government—with widespread cross-party support—to be used as something with which to bash the Government over the head. As it is, local authorities will be under pressure to be careful about how they spend and which services they support.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside rightly stressed the importance of education. I welcome local authorities' continued freedom to give priority to education spending. Returning to the subject of the police, I warmly welcome what my right hon. Friend said—

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): He has said that already.

Mr. Sweeney: It is worth repeating. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. There is too much running commentary from the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Sweeney: It is worth repeating, because I have another point to make about the police. The funding formula for police pensions has been changed: the Government have increased the allocation to 12 per cent. of available funding. That will help to allay police fears about their pensions. The new sparsity element in the funding formula will help the police to cater for the special needs of isolated, thinly populated rural areas.

More support for local government expenditure, which Opposition Members presumably ask for—although they have not been prepared to specify how much additional expenditure they advocate—would have meant cuts in other Welsh Office projects such as those on health. Presumably, Opposition Members would not have wanted any such cuts yet that is the logic of their request.

Changes in the draft notional amounts may have adversely affected the Vale of Glamorgan compared with Cardiff. I should be grateful for an assurance from my hon. Friend the Minister that nothing that has been done in amending those amounts will unfairly prejudice my constituents in the Vale of Glamorgan.

I congratulate the Government on today's statement by my right hon. Friend. He has produced an excellent deal for Wales.

5.40 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I offer you, Madam Deputy Speaker, what I hope you will agree is a sincerely felt apology for a kindly but inappropriate gesture as a Conservative Member was departing from the Chamber—a Member representing a non-Welsh constituency. There is, however, a good deal of frustration among Opposition Members at the efforts of Members who represent English constituencies to intervene in debates concerning Wales alone. Even the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), who has impeccable personal Welsh credentials, attempts to intervene as a Welsh Member of Parliament manqué in such debates. If he wishes to be not a manqué, but a real Welsh Member of Parliament, he should attempt once again to be elected to represent a Welsh constituency, although I doubt whether he would succeed.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carlile: Of course I will give way to the Minister's brief on the Front Bench.

Mr. Jones: I feel I have been promoted, but I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way. If he has an apparent prohibition on non-Welsh Members speaking in the debate, I am curious why he ducked last year's debate and sent the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) to substitute for him?

Mr. Carlile: The hon. Gentleman knows that, in these debates, time is at a premium and that it is extremely unhelpful if Back-Bench Members—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. As time is at a premium, it would be more appropriate if the subject in hand were dealt with rather than the question of whether Members of Parliament should or should not put forward their names. Everyone knows that all are equally free to do so.

Mr. Carlile: Of course I will not pursue the matter, Madam Deputy Speaker, save to say that it is extremely important that Welsh Members should have the first opportunity to speak in these debates. Those of us who catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, are those who are called.

I should like to discuss the position in the Powys unitary authority in the next 12 months. I hope that the Secretary of State for Wales and the Minister replying to the debate will agree that that authority is not smitten by political prejudices of one sort or another. It is politically independent and is attempting to do an honest job and to provide as good a level of service to its inhabitants as possible.

Powys unitary authority is a victim of the use of what appears to be an outmoded formula in the complex circumstances of the reorganisation of local government in rural mid-Wales. In real terms, the real loss to the

authority for the forthcoming year is £4 million. That money must be cut from somewhere. It will be from services that affect people. Will the Minister tell the House and the people of Powys why the Government are not only forcing a substantial increase in council tax—although, in Powys, that will be limited to about 20 per cent.—but accompanying that with a cut in services? What services will be cut?

The first thing that Powys county council has sought to cut is administration. It has succeeded in removing £2.5 million from its administrative budget. One's first reaction to that might be to say, "That is very good. We can do without a layer of administration. That is a real saving and it will not affect the services to people." But that is not true. A £2.5 million cut in administration costs in a rural county such as Powys means a significant reduction not only in jobs in local government, but, almost certainly, in the efficiency and response of services provided to local people.

It is one of the facts of political life that Welsh local authorities have little discretion. I do not applaud a position in which central Government give Welsh local government so high a proportion of its expenditure that they have local councils by the throat. I would much prefer a different local government financing mechanism.

We are faced, however, with the current mechanism. That means a reduction not just in jobs as a result of those administrative cuts, but in other services. In my constituency, there is a bridge that is used by school buses, agricultural vehicles and other traffic. Without notice, it was closed and, overnight, its weight limit was reduced. Now, neither lorries nor school buses can go over it. As a result, buses taking children to school must make a 21-mile detour twice a day. That has led to well publicised and not in the least surprising protests by parents of children who travel on those buses. Meanwhile, the highway authority says that it had to reduce the bridge weight limit to make it safe, but that it cannot give any idea of when the bridge will be repaired.

In the vicinity of Garthmyl, near Montgomery in my constituency, a metal Bailey-type bridge has stood for the whole of the 16 years that I have lived in Montgomeryshire and, I believe, for about 20 years before that. There is no answer as to when that will be repaired. The highways budget, which is extremely important for people's mobility in a rural area such as mine, should not face such privation.

I will give two further examples of services that are bound to be cut. The trading standards authority, which is extremely important in rural Wales because of the animal health provisions that it has to enforce, faces severe financial restrictions. Obviously, animal welfare and health take priority for that authority. As a result, virtually no money will be left for the other trading standards functions.

In education, it is inevitable that, as elsewhere in Wales, the increase in teachers' salaries, which teachers merit—many of them do not have the professional status that they deserve compared with other professions and occupations—will mean that class sizes will increase. As a result, schools will not be as good. We are lucky: we have good schools in rural Wales, but why—because the Government do not give them funding—should there be a reduction in education standards and an increase in professional dissatisfaction among teachers?

I do not want to take up any more time. I have merely given some examples of the sort of cuts that will have to be made even in a county about which no Minister can make accusations of political prejudice, or have preconceptions on political lines.

That is what is happening in Wales, as objective judgments show. That is what is happening in rural areas where politics plays no major part in the making of spending decisions. That simply is not good enough—for rural Wales, at least. Ministers must try to find a new and fairer formula which takes sparsity and rurality properly into account.

5.49 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this important debate, and also for what the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) said about my Welsh credentials. I do indeed feel fully qualified to make what I hope may be a useful contribution to the debate.

The most significant aspect of the speeches by Opposition Members was especially true of the speech by the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies). It was, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) pointed out, the fact that the hon. Gentleman signally failed to answer the simple question that the Secretary of State asked him—if the Labour party is unhappy with the settlement, how much more money would a future Labour Government provide?

That was a simple question, and although the hon. Gentleman did not allow me to intervene on him, I should be more than happy to allow him to intervene on me now, if he is prepared or able to tell a listening nation how much extra money Labour would give. Am I speaking slowly enough? Is the question simple enough? No.

The time that I spent listening to the hon. Gentleman's speech was one of the longest 18 minutes of my life, because in all that time he said so little. He carped a lot, but failed to answer the questions. I do not know whether he has ever been on "Question Time" on BBC television, but if he did appear on that programme it would be a dull affair, because members of the audience would ask the questions, but he would fail to answer them. He is not even prepared to come to the Dispatch Box now.

I was a county councillor in Wales for six years, and I also have a retail business in Swansea. I have lived 34 years of my life in Wales. When I was on the county council, we had consultation periods for business men to come to the local authority and plead with us to keep the business rates as low as we could. When business rates shot through the roof, those businesses, many of them operating at the margins, found it difficult to find the money from their profits.

What a farce that consultation exercise was for many of the business men. After they had made their plea and explained to the leaders of the local authority the problems their businesses faced, and the difficulty that they would have in finding extra money to meet the bills, the local authority put the business rates up through the roof. That was a tremendous slap in the face for local businesses in difficult circumstances.

I am delighted that control has now been taken away from local authorities, to prevent those businesses, which were making such great efforts and providing jobs in

[Mr. Nigel Evans]

Wales—and throughout the rest of the country—from being penalised. They are, of course, the lifeblood of many small villages.

A lot is said about levels of council tax, and we have heard much carping from Opposition Members. However, council tax rates are much lower in Wales than in England; they are certainly lower in Wales than in my constituency. It is also fair to say that, if areas were represented by Conservative-controlled local authorities, their council tax would be that much lower than if they were run by Labour authorities, as many now are. My advice to people in Wales is to reconsider what local authorities spend on their behalf, and at the local elections to choose Conservative councillors, who will spend their money efficiently.

I saw much wasteful expenditure when I was on West Glamorgan county council—

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Evans: No, I shall not, because I tried to intervene several times on the hon. Member for Caerphilly and others, and was told that I could not do so. I am simply doing exactly the same to Opposition Members. The sooner they stop carping, the sooner I shall finish my speech, and they will have the opportunity to have their say.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Evans: I shall not give way. The right hon. Gentleman—

Mr. Williams: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In interjections and during his speech, the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) has referred to the constituencies of my hon. Friends and myself. I am sure that you will agree that it is a normal courtesy that, when a Member refers to other Members' constituencies in the House, especially if he makes political points about them, he should then give way to one of the local Members.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That may be a courtesy, but it is not a requirement.

Mr. Evans: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker—*[Interruption.]* I tried to intervene several times during the debate. The right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) came into the Chamber only recently. He has not been here for the entire debate, although I am sure that he has good reasons for not having been here. I am not prepared to give way to him now.

We have heard some horror stories about local authority expenditure, and of course I saw what happened when I served on the local authority in West Glamorgan. Expenditure on chains of office, new buildings and councillors' allowances was appalling. Last year, I condemned the members of Mid Glamorgan council for trying to put their expenses up through the roof in a disproportionate manner. Their snouts were firmly in the trough.

The Labour party may talk about fat cats, but I can talk about the fat cats of Wales—and they are not in business but in Labour-run authorities. The Labour party should do all in its power to condemn local authority members for trying to increase their expenses.

Mr. Alan Williams: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I trust that this is a genuine point of order.

Mr. Williams: It is, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley is utterly misusing the procedures of the House of Commons by making snide and pathetic attacks on people who cannot defend themselves, and then being afraid to give way to those who seek to defend them.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Evans: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I hope that that was not the intervention that the right hon. Gentleman attempted to make before. If it was, I am delighted that I did not give way to him.

As for education expenditure, I hope that local education authorities will pass the money to the schools to spend, and not keep any of it back for central administration. It was instructive to hear Opposition Members talking about cutting services. They talk about front-line services, and about the customers who will suffer if they lose those services, yet not one of them talked about cutting administration and central bureaucracy.

My advice to Labour-run local authorities is to re-examine their internal running costs, as everybody has had to do, and to find ways of improving efficiency as much as they can. They should not make local service customers suffer simply to make a political point. There was a 45 per cent. increase in expenditure on nursery education between 1979 and 1994, and a 54 per cent. increase in expenditure on secondary education in Wales over the same period.

However, the increase in expenditure is not the only important factor. Also vital is the testing that goes alongside the education that young people receive. The Labour party opposed that policy, and also the introduction of the national curriculum, which is improving standards all the time.

I was pleased to learn of the extra expenditure on law and order. On top of the extra 11 per cent. last year, that is excellent news, especially considering the fact that, when the Labour party was in power, spending on the police was one of the categories that suffered greatly.

I hope that the extra expenditure will result in more police on the beat, particularly in rural areas, and the utilisation of new technology, such as closed circuit cameras, which are extremely useful in reducing crime. I hope also that there will be a continuation of the civilianisation of office posts, which will release policemen and policewomen and enable them to go back on the beat.

Compulsory competitive tendering in local authorities has made authorities far more efficient, and has resulted in those authorities being able to save money to spend on

services for local people. The Labour party is totally opposed to that policy, and would chuck out a policy that has saved many millions of pounds while providing excellent services to local people. Labour would replace the system with expensive in-house bids, from which the public would not benefit. That is a spiteful and dogmatic move by Labour that is not in the best interests of Welsh people.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy posed an important question about Labour's pledge to introduce an assembly. We know that there are no current plans to provide a Welsh assembly with tax-raising powers, such as are envisaged for the Scottish assembly. Labour Members who believe in the principle of an assembly ought to ask why a Scottish assembly will be allowed to raise tax, while the Welsh will not be trusted to do so. Having seen the way in which Labour local authorities operate in Wales, I can fully understand why the Labour party is scared of allowing a Labour-run assembly—as Opposition Members would probably see it—to raise taxes.

In conclusion—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am glad that Opposition Members are enjoying my speech. The speaker who follows me from the Opposition will have an opportunity to tell the House how much extra money he wants to see being spent in Wales, and where he would get that money from.

6.1 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): In reply to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), there are one or two things that my party would do to save money and put it into local government. We would not be paying for nuclear arms for one thing, and we would not be stuffing money into the pockets of people on quangos for another. We would review the operation of the standard spending assessment, which works to the detriment of many councils in Wales. I have no doubt that we would look at other matters over time.

The Secretary of State announced on 18 December:

"the revenue settlement for local authorities for 1996-7 is a fair one in the current climate".

In his press release—in the Welsh Office, government is by press release now—he said that it was based on his view of what the real needs of local government were at the appropriate level. I believe that either he or every single council in Wales is absolutely wrong.

In his apologia for the settlement, he prayed in aid—again by press release—the notion that there would be more use of the private finance initiative, with £360 million of capital investment being produced in the next three years. Where on earth did he get that figure from? If it was conjured up by his merry band at the Welsh Office, he should be circumspect about quoting it.

For example, the Welsh Office recently astounded the new Denbighshire authority by using an inaccurate measurement of the length of roads in the authority. That affected the authority's SSA, and the Denbighshire authority is currently £600,000 out of pocket. So much for a careful evaluation of the spending needs of Welsh local government.

The overall situation in Welsh local government is that authorities feel that they cannot make any further cuts. The latest settlement is again a substantial cut in real terms. It comes after four years of cuts, and authorities now have virtually nothing left to cut. Let us examine the evidence. I referred to Denbighshire, and that authority is very concerned that precepts from the new fire authority—imposed on Denbighshire by the Government—will be very heavy.

The authority is concerned about the spiralling cost of reorganisation. Those of us who served on Committee on the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 warned the Government that their figures for the cost of reorganisation were pie in the sky. Here we are again—1974 revisited. The new authorities are being burdened by crippling debts.

In a parliamentary answer, the Minister of State said that £41 million-plus was being allocated for 1996-1997 to cover

"a proportion of councils' expenditure on compensation, accommodation and information technology."—[*Official Report*, 5 February 1996; Vol. 271, c. 55.]

I do not know where the figure of £41 million comes from, but I hope it is not from the same person who worked on Denbighshire's SSA. The Welsh Office is now graciously saying that councils can spend £41 million of their own chargepayers' money to offset part of the cost of reorganisation. In fact, the Welsh Office does not have a clue about the total cost. It is in the dark—as is everybody else, unfortunately.

This is another abject display of the failure of the Welsh Office adequately to provide for the needs of Wales. The huge rise in the cost of community care has clearly not been adequately addressed by the Government. The increase in the 1996-1997 settlement on last year's is only 1.8 per cent., while the Government's own figures forecast that prices will rise by 2.5 per cent, resulting in a further squeeze on local authorities.

My authority, Caernarfonshire and Meirionnydd—soon to become Gwynedd—has been allocated £365,000 extra cash, leading the council to the inescapable conclusion that it must cut services substantially and impose large increases in council tax for 1996-1997. The current settlement is, in fact, a 1.3 per cent. reduction compared with the 1995-1996 budget. By applying the standstill budget—which comes into effect after four years of cuts—the budget exceeds the capping limits by £2.66 million.

Therefore, my local council has basically three operational choices. First, it can cut services. That will mean closing rural schools and leisure centres, and making teachers and those in social services redundant—workers in both those sectors, I might add, do splendid work, and are already at full stretch. Secondly, it could capitalise its revenue expenditure, and that could obviously entail the deferment of much-needed capital projects. Thirdly, it could use some of the balances. The amount available in Gwynedd will not be known until September, but in any event it will only defer the need to cut, and may give a skewed budget figure to work on next year. Incidentally, such a move would produce an artificially low level of council tax, and would defer the need for a more substantial increase.

There is no doubt that this council's dilemma is typical in Wales. Basic services are under threat, and no one should be under any illusion about who is at fault. In their craven urge to hold on to power, the Tory Administration are happy to cut services for the young and the elderly—

[Mr. Elfyn Llwyd]

and leisure, education, community care and social services, and public transport—while voting for a tax-cutting Budget.

Let no one forget also that the Labour party acceded to the cuts. By allowing the Tories to cut income tax, Labour concurred with the Government's local government cuts. Any fool can realise that these must be paid for, and it is a shame that Labour did not adopt a principled approach, like my party. When Labour councillors blame it all on the Government, they should think again about what Labour should have done—and perhaps, in days gone by, would have done.

Mr. Ron Davies: The hon. Gentleman will accept that the Labour party voted against the Budget that cut income tax last November.

Mr. Llwyd: A handful of Labour Members did, but officially Labour did not.

Mr. Davies: I want to make it absolutely clear that the Labour party officially voted against the Budget last year.

Mr. Llwyd: I beg to differ. The Labour party abstained on that vote—a few of the more principled Labour Members went through the same Lobby as I did. But I will leave it there for the time being.

Anglesey county council has had its planned spending capped at £61 million—a cut of £2 million on last year's budget. Again, there will be cuts. Carmarthenshire county council is facing a difficult future. The options being discussed include cutting the repair and maintenance of schools, increasing the cost of school meals, and shutting training centres. In addition, there is a real threat to teaching jobs. A 3.5 per cent. reduction, which is what they are facing, could mean cutting 68 teaching jobs. In Rhondda Cynon Taf, there is talk of increasing the cost of transport to schools and school meals, closing nursery schools, cutting the maintenance programme, closing small schools and reducing clothing and other grants.

So how can the Secretary of State honestly and sincerely state that his main priority has been to increase investment in schools? He says that Wales benefits from the success of our economic policy along with the rest of the UK, but how can that be, when the overall capital package for Welsh local government has been cut by £17.5 million, with cuts in housing, roads and transport, in strategic development schemes, and in personal, social and all other services? How can those cuts honestly relate to a so-called booming economy?

The paltry increase in the education budget will have no effect on the strangulation of local authority education. That disgraceful emaciation is made even worse by the fact that some £6.6 million is being allocated for the ideologically driven, elitist, popular schools initiative—in fact, £2 million more for that initiative, rather than an overall increase for the whole of the education budget.

That is where the Government's priorities lie. No doubt they will blame education standards on whichever political hue they target at the time. That the Government have set their face against local government is accepted by all. Surely the settlement is excellent evidence for that. I regret saying it, but I have no doubt that class sizes will increase, teacher numbers will decrease, public transport will be cut, and social services will undoubtedly suffer a hefty cut. Libraries will close, leisure centres close or be run part-time, and even residential homes will close. Those evils, and many more, will follow this settlement, as night follows day.

In Aberconwy Colwyn, for example, the story is much the same. I received a plea from the Aberconwy and Colwyn women's aid group last week. Despite the amount of work it is doing, and the huge and regrettable increase in demand for its work, that work is in peril, and its very existence brought into question.

The imposed cuts by the Welsh Office will risk the lives of some people. What is even more sure, they will affect the quality of life for tens of thousands of people throughout the length and breadth of Wales. The Secretary of State says that he has thought carefully about the settlement. I say to him, "Think again," and the people of Wales say, "Think again."

The settlement is unworthy, and an insult to Wales. It is small wonder that the Conservatives fared abysmally in the recent local government elections. They probably feel that they have nothing to lose by starving local government in Wales, but the people of Wales will not allow the wool to be pulled over their eyes any longer. The Government will pay heavily for their cynical approach to the delivery of vital local services. Of late, there has been talk of a Tory-free Wales. Surely that speculation must become a reality within the next 12 months.

6.13 pm

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I cannot follow the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) and allow him to get away with that. I served on the all-party Select Committee on the Environment, and when we considered standard spending assessments, we found a degree of objectivity in them and that they were not slanted towards the political control of any authority. The hon. Gentleman knows as well as I do that, in the past 20 years, local government has no longer been seen as being government locally, but as a method and vehicle for bashing central Government and, in many cases, as a device for entering this House. A look through the antecedents of many hon. Members will show that there has been a considerable rise in the past 20 years in the number who were councillors, including myself. Sadly, instead of serving their local communities as they used to do—they had a great and proud history—councils have become highly politicised branches of their local parties and are more interested in carping against central Government than in delivering high-quality services to their local council tax payers.

I am taking part in this debate because Welsh Members often argue that there should be so much lower council tax charges in Wales because of pay levels and the general gross domestic product in that area. I refer my hon. Friend the Minister to a written reply in column 118 in today's *Hansard*. The reply sets out—I do not know whether similar comparisons are available for Wales—the number of normal, basic rate and higher rate taxpayers in every county in England. He will not be surprised to learn that the Isle of Wight is at the bottom of that league.

Having had a lot to do with Wales, particularly when the Isle of Wight unfortunately lost a company which relocated there, I guess that the hon. Gentleman will find

that Wales is much higher up the list of averages than many areas in England. Indeed, we learn from the settlement tonight that there is almost a £200 difference for a band D property in Wales, compared with England. That is the subsidy that English taxpayers are putting into Wales. I do not think that that can be justified. Welsh Members regularly tell us that that reflects the lower price of property, to which I say again, make the comparison with the Isle of Wight. I do not think that that argument holds water either.

My hon. Friend the Minister who will reply to the debate may not know—it is probably a well-kept secret—that, until the advent of unitary authorities, the Isle of Wight used one of the Welsh authorities as a comparison, as a typical authority of a similar size for statistical purposes. In every case, we found that, by and large, the Welsh Office was doing better for Welsh authorities than we expected with our English settlement.

We have heard much from Opposition Members about capping, but Welsh Office expenditure on local government amounts to 45 per cent. of its total expenditure. That tells me that the Secretary of State for Wales is certainly not ignoring local government as the Opposition have suggested throughout the debate, but giving it a fair deal out of his total budget for Wales.

I hear the argument about capping propounded by hon. Members on both sides of the House these days, but hon. Members should remember that about a quarter of total expenditure in the United Kingdom goes on local government. There is no way that one could let that rip if one is serious about inflation and wants to keep it under control as this Government do.

With his experience of Wales, my hon. Friend the Minister made a very good case on the uniform business rate. Will my Front-Bench colleagues tell me why, when it was enshrined in the uniform business rate legislation that it was designed to help manufacturing industry and is required to do so, we do not continually stuff that fact down the throats of the Opposition? For years, all that we heard from the Opposition was, "What are the Government doing for manufacturing industry?" The uniform business rate has been one of our greatest successes, especially where, as around the borders of Wales, businesses in high-rate areas were often siphoned off into nearby lower-rate areas. That compounded unemployment. I know that from my experiences on the Isle of Wight.

One helpful thing about the uniform business rate is that it has created uniformity for businesses. More than that, it allows Welsh business men to plan ahead when they draw up their budgets. The sad fact is that rates are the one form of taxation that have to be paid whether the business is making a profit or a loss. That has always been the case. The other problem was that businesses always had to second guess what local councillors would do and could not properly plan their budgets. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced the business rate in his Budget. That is helpful, especially for small businesses that work on such tight margins these days because competition is so strong. They know precisely what their business rates will be and allow for them in their budgets.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) has left the Chamber, but he touched on a point about roads that rang a chord with me. I say to the Government that, as one gets to extremities of the kingdom, especially with local authorities that have no trunk roads and so do not get assistance from the Department of Transport, road surfaces tend not be as good as they are in other areas.

I bet any Welsh Member a tin of leek soup that he would find much poorer road surfaces on the Isle of Wight because of the way in which our transport supplementary grant has gone recently than he would find in probably any part of the kingdom. That is to some extent true as one goes from England to Wales. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will put forward in Cabinet the fact that we need to consider those authorities that find it difficult to maintain good road surfaces in sparsely populated areas.

Finally, I want to touch on allowances for councillors, a point which has been much vaunted in this debate. Can my hon. Friend the Minister tell the House—or place information in the Library about it—what precisely the allowances are for the new unitary authorities and what the councillors who have been elected to shadow bodies have fixed for themselves in allowances?

My understanding is that a number of councillors in Wales who have been elected to unitary authorities are already councillors on existing authorities. I hear from my friends in the valleys that they are drawing allowances on the old authorities and the new shadow authorities. They are getting a double dose of the taxpayers' money, which should be spent on the local community and not on them. If my hon. Friend the Minister cannot give me the figures when he replies, perhaps he could pop them in the Library or encourage me to table a parliamentary question so that we can discover how many hon. Members represent constituencies where councillors have their trotters in the trough of taxpayers' money.

Unfortunately, the hon. Member for Caerphilly is no longer here, but I have to tell my Welsh colleagues that he is known as Dai for diagnosis. He is all diagnosis and no delivery of the answers. Colleague after colleague has said to him, "Don't tell us how little, tell us how much you would give and how you would fund it." No answer came.

6.23 pm

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): I shall not follow the line of the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field). This may be a Great Britain Parliament, but there are Welsh Members who wish to speak about their constituency interests. If the Conservative party is so popular, why is their local council performance in Wales so abysmal? In my local council, three Conservatives were elected with 43 Labour members. We have had the acid test. The hon. Gentleman's philosophy has been tested in many parts of Wales and found to be dramatically lacking. I am sure that many Conservative Members with Welsh seats will find that that will come true at the general election.

I know that my hon. Friends also want to speak, so I shall make only a couple of points. I genuinely welcome the Secretary of State's movement on Theatr Clwyd. It was the least that he could do, given that the abolition of Clwyd county council caused the problem in the first place. The announcement will give a certain kick-start to the local authorities that neighbour Flintshire to enable them to contribute to the maintenance of this excellent facility in north Wales.

I pay tribute to Flintshire county council, which has immediately put £600,000 of local taxpayers' money up front to help support the retention of the theatre and to

[Mr. David Hanson]

the members of Clwyd county council, the governors and Patrick Gilchrist, the theatre general manager, and his staff. They have had a difficult time over the past few weeks but played a strong role with me in presenting the case to Ministers for assistance.

My local newspapers, the *Daily Post* and *The Chronicle*, have also played a magnificent role in generating public interest. I have been overwhelmed with letters of support for the theatre. A sackful of *Daily Post* clippings awaits the Secretary of State. They will arrive on his doorstep even though he has made his announcement, and show community support for the theatre.

As I said in my earlier intervention, there is still a shortfall of between £300,000 to £400,000 in Theatr Clwyd's funding compared with what was given by Clwyd county council. While I know that Flintshire will make great efforts to make efficiency savings and ensure that more people come through the doors of the theatre and welcome the movement on Theatr Clwyd's debt charges, there is still a major shortfall. I hope that the Secretary of State's initiative will support the local council to find the funding from other sources. I hope that there will be opportunities to raise the matter again because, although I feel fairly confident about the theatre's future, I would still like to ensure that the present funding continues.

The Secretary of State's statement does what Conservative party statements on local government normally do. The Government cut the grant to local authorities, force local authorities such as Flintshire to face massive council tax rises and shift the balance of spending from central to local government and then maintain, despite all that, the charade of the capping system, which mitigates against local democracy. My local authority was elected with certain mandates. It does not behove the Secretary of State to impose a capping limit on my local authority, which may mean real-terms cuts in local authority services.

The Government's grant statement has reduced Government spending still further. In 1993-94, 64 per cent. of local government spending was met by central government. In 1994-95, it was 62 per cent.; and in 1995-96 it is 58 per cent. The reduction continues. Central Government support is being cut and local government's contribution is having to rise. When the council tax bills go through people's doors in April, the increases that have been made to maintain services will be, in large part, because of reductions of central Government grant.

In a written answer to the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) on 30 January, the Secretary of State stated:

"inflation remains low and the Government have made it clear that pay increases should be met from efficiency savings and other economies."—[*Official Report*, 30 January 1996; Vol. 270, c. 682.]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Rod Richards) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Hanson: I see the Minister nodding in agreement. That is all very well, but if teachers are offered a 4 per cent. pay rise it will be a further burden on local taxpayers and will mean that rates are increased or services cut to pay for things outside local authority control.

The disaggregated budget in Flintshire is £113,729,000. Its SSA is £1.2 million less than that at £112 million. That is a dilemma for local authorities such as Flintshire. The current budgets of Alyn and Deeside district council, Delyn district council and Clwyd county council, which cover the new Flintshire authority, are more than what the Secretary of State has already said they should spend this year. What does he expect Flintshire not to spend money on that it is currently being spent on? Where will it reduce spending next year to meet the SSA target that the Secretary of State has proposed?

The SSA of our near neighbour, Denbighshire, is lower than its notional expenditure—£78 million as compared with £80 million. The SSA of another neighbour, Wrexham, is £98 million while its notional expenditure is £97 million. At current levels, in its constituent parts, my local authority is already spending more than the Secretary of State says that it should spend in the next financial year. That will present my local authority with difficult choices about whether to increase council tax, cut local public services or find alternative means. The problems will be the result of a poor settlement, which I shall be pleased to vote against this evening.

Those difficulties are fairly clear and straightforward. The county council at Flintshire will undoubtedly experience difficulties with its schools budget and its education funding for next year. I have already received representations from the North-East Wales Education Forum which has expressed grave concern over the potential for future funding of education next year in Flintshire. Local schools in my constituency have already expressed their concerns about education funding next year in Flintshire.

Flintshire county councillors are saying that, while they have the choice to determine their priorities and to spend as they will—as the Secretary of State and junior Ministers will no doubt say—they must deal with their notional expenditure level, which is £1.2 million more than the Government say they should spend. That shortfall will fall heavily on a number of services—of which education will be the most important.

Only this week I received a letter from a school pupil in my constituency who said that he had written to the Prime Minister to tell him that his school class is without paper on which to write letters or school material. That case was originally brought to my attention by a supply teacher in the school in Mold. If school pupils have no paper to write on, that is not just a problem for the local authority as it struggles with funding, but for the Secretary of State. It presents a genuine problem of the underfunding of local government services.

I disagree with the Secretary of State on the notion of capping. The idea of local democracy, of having local government reforms and of holding an election last year—where people from all political parties put forward their policies and programmes before local people—is negated by the idea that the Secretary of State, representing Richmond, Yorks, can protect my local ratepayers from the council that they have chosen to elect. That is a fundamental negation of democracy. Whatever the financial arguments about whether the council should or should not spend, the Secretary of State should do what the Conservative party preaches: trust the people. The people of Flintshire and the people of Wales have chosen certain authorities to fulfil certain election promises.

It is a negation of democracy for the Secretary of State to say that he knows best and that he will put a limit on the council services to which my constituents and councillors can aspire. In his statement, the Secretary of State mentioned a notional amount of £113 million for my local authority and an SSA of £112 million. He should cease the capping regime. I shall vote against the settlement tonight because I disagree with the underfunding of my local authority and the principle of capping.

6.33 pm

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): We have just had a major reorganisation of local government and the wholesale creation of unitary authorities. Many of the areas that are now designated as unitary authorities do not have the resources to carry out such far-reaching functions. It seems farcical that there are now five directors of education in Gwent, where there was previously one.

The local government reorganisation is expensive, but the Government have willed the ends and we are now entitled to say that they must provide the means. Instead, as my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) said, many councils now face increases of 25 per cent. in council tax despite the recent additional £16 million that the Welsh Office has provided. The local government finance system has not withstood the test of local government reorganisation.

The Secretary of State is allowing new councils to spend, and Government support for that spending is being distributed among the new councils in a way that does not match the expenditure on services inherited from the old councils. That mismatch is causing significant variations in council tax increases and will be difficult to explain to council taxpayers throughout Wales.

If Newport spends at the level at which the Secretary of State is minded to cap the authority, Newport's council tax will be among the lowest in Wales. In the borough, the council tax rate is estimated to be about £392 for a band D property. The Secretary of State is minded to cap the authority at its standard spending assessment, which is £117.5 million. But out of the 22 new authorities, 19 are now being allowed to spend in excess of their SSA before reaching their capping level. I am entitled to ask the Secretary of State why Newport has been discriminated against. The Welsh Office is well aware that the SSAs for the new councils are not an accurate reflection of their need to spend. I understand that the Secretary of State has admitted that the SSAs need to be thoroughly reviewed. On the evidence, Newport seems to be being badly treated.

I am sure that none of us would wish to underestimate the complexities of local government finance. One reason for Newport's low capping limit is that Gwent county council drew heavily on reserves in its last year to sustain expenditure on services that could not be sustained within its annual income. The Secretary of State must appreciate that if Newport is to keep its expenditure within the capping limit that he has set, services will have to be drastically cut, particularly education and social services. Surely those two vital services should not be cut—they represent more than three quarters of Newport's total budget expenditure. Will the Secretary of State consider Newport's peculiar and anomalous position?

We know that Wales is now the most deprived region in western Europe. The time has obviously come for change: we need the return of a Labour Government and the election of a Welsh Assembly.

6.38 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Labour Members have given an accurate account of the parlous state in which the underfunding of local government has left Wales—thanks to the Welsh Office. One thing that we know for sure is that everyone in Wales recognises that, despite the fact that total standard spending is to be higher this year than it was last year, once account is taken of inflation and the fact that last year's total made no allowance for factors such as the teachers' pay award, local authorities have already spent as much as the total standard spending that is allocated for the coming financial year that is to start in April. So, at best, there is a standstill.

Last year, local authorities dipped into their reserves to the tune of slightly more than £100 million. My hon. Friends the Members for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) and for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) have made a powerful plea for the Government to re-examine the settlement's impact on the services provided by local government in Wales. The one chink of light that we have seen—my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn paid tribute to it—was the action that the Secretary of State has taken in relation to Theatr Clywd in Mold, for which we are thankful. We only wish that he viewed all local government spending in Wales in the same positive and progressive manner.

My hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside pleaded with the Secretary of State to reverse the settlement's effect on teachers' pay. The Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards), said, in a written answer to me, that he expected

"pay awards in the public sector, including those subject to the recommendations of the School Teachers' Review Body, to be met through increased efficiency and other economies."—[*Official Report*, 18 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. 755.]

The Secretary of State ought to say where he believes those economies might be made. He knows that, during the past few years, local education authorities in Wales have cut their administrative expenditure by millions of pounds. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), who comes from Wales, should be better apprised of that fact. The Secretary of State also knows that every county council in Wales is currently giving more than 90 per cent. of its education budget to its schools. Councils are doing even better in that respect than the Welsh Office has asked them to do.

Mr. Richards: The hon. Gentleman mentioned that local government had been underfunded in Wales. Will he tell the House whether, in his view, the total standard spending should be higher—yes or no?

Mr. Griffiths: I shall return to that point at the end of my remarks. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall examine the issue seriously. After 17 years of disastrous Tory government in Wales, we have serious problems funding the work of local government and other public services. In the past few years, under the Tories, class sizes and pupil-teacher ratios have increased, following

[Mr. Griffiths]

a long period in which they decreased. The situation in relation to pupil-teacher ratios is deteriorating, according to answers from the Welsh Office.

Mr. Richards *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Griffiths: It is no use the Under-Secretary shaking his head. His own written answers have proved that that is the situation; he needs only to check *Hansard* to confirm it. The figures are marginal in both cases: an increase of 0.2 per cent. in primary schools and of 0.8 per cent. in secondary schools. If, however, we examine the impact of those figures on primary schools in terms of class size, we find that, between 1993-94 and 1994-95, there were more than 7,000 children in classes of more than 30, thanks to the cuts.

The truth about Tory rule in Wales during the past few years is a story of cuts all the way. Ministers' parliamentary answers also provide that information. In 1993-94, revenue support grant was 64 per cent. of local government spending. In 1995-96, it has decreased to 58 per cent. The truth was revealed in a letter to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris)—*[Interruption.]* It has been said before, but it is worth repeating because it is the truth, and the truth needs to be rammed home.

The right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) talked about a wind of change. The wind of change has come from the dales of Yorkshire. It is blowing hard into Wales, bringing easterly winds with the ice and the snow that people in the south Wales valleys are currently suffering. Metaphorically speaking, the world of finance—as my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) graphically demonstrated—is having an icy effect on the lives of people in Wales. The Secretary of State wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon:

"I believe that over time local authorities in Wales should raise a higher proportion of their income from council tax. The 11 per cent. increase is the result of this approach."

He said that; there was no doubt about it. He wanted and planned for a minimum increase of 11 per cent. He planned for local authorities either to cut their services or to raise disproportionately their council tax.

Mr. Richards: The hon. Gentleman referred to pupil-teacher ratios. Is he therefore saying that more money should be spent on education in Wales—yes or no?

Mr. Griffiths: I am very happy to answer that question: yes, I do believe that more money should be spent on education in Wales. However, Labour Members are not the people who are examining the books in the Welsh Office, although it will not be too long before we do—and then there will be new priorities. If the Minister is inviting me to come along to the Welsh Office to have a preview of the books, I shall happily take up the offer.

If we are talking about publicly available information about how the Welsh Office is cutting the money it makes available to local government, let us consider revenue support grant which, in constant value terms during the past couple of years, has decreased by more than £37 million. Local government renovation grants have, in the past year, decreased in real terms by almost £4 million. Housing capital provision has decreased by almost £16 million.

It is no wonder that my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside made an impassioned plea for the Welsh Office to release capital receipts so that councils with housing responsibilities—which they will all, of course, have from April—can modernise their housing stock and install central heating so that when the icy winds blow down from the Yorkshire dales, people will be warm. It is cuts all the way.

A Welsh Office press release of 13 December states that, this year, total capital provision in Wales will decrease by more than £17 million. The Secretary of State has tried to present himself as a latter-day Father Christmas by offering £29.1 million and another £15.9 million to dampen the effects of the redistribution of grant to the new local authorities, and by relaxing the capping criteria to enable authorities to raise more money locally.

The Secretary of State knows that if councils in Wales took full advantage of the generous offer and did not cut the services that they provide, but instead sought to fund everything as though there had been no change, seven councils in Wales would have to raise council taxes by more than 30 per cent. Another four councils would have to increase their council tax by more than 20 per cent.; seven councils would require increases of 10 per cent.; and only four councils would require increases of less than 7 per cent. My local authority, Bridgend, is caught in that trap. It will have either to make a huge increase—of more than 36 per cent.—in council tax or to make really serious cuts in services. There is no room for substantial administrative cuts.

I hope that the Secretary of State will look seriously at changing the formula. He asked where more money could be found. I remind him that it was only a couple of years ago that his predecessor returned money to the Treasury. I notice that, in one year, a £59 million underspend was shown in the accounts presented to the Welsh Office. Does the Secretary of State know whether, this year, he is on course for an underspend or an overspend? If there is an underspend, will he give the money to local authorities?

6.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): This afternoon, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales set out in detail our settlement decisions for 1996-97 and explained the considerations that have informed those decisions. Notwithstanding the fact that the settlement gives local government a real-terms increase in revenue spending, backed up by an aggregate external support package that covers about 87 per cent. of spending, and notwithstanding the fact that, on a per capita basis, the support is 8 per cent. higher than that proposed for England, we have had a predictable barrage of complaints and criticism from the Opposition.

The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) was brave enough to give way when he was asked whether he would increase the local government settlement, yes or no. I shall have to read his speech carefully to try to find the answer. He then criticised my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for enabling local government to raise

more of its money locally. That is a peculiar criticism when my right hon. Friend is responding to local government requests to be able to do exactly that.

What I noticed particularly in this year's debate, which is being held a year to the day after the previous one, is the change in the Opposition. What has happened to the laughable, bumbling, clueless Ron we remember from last year? Today, he was still clueless—that does not change—but last year he was at least able to include two welcomes in his speech. He welcomed the increase in total standard spending and he welcomed the increase in spending for the police. This time, he gave a tired, jaded, sour performance.

There may be a clue to the decline of the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) in his speech last year. He had barely got a paragraph into it when he was pressed by one of his hon. Friends to increase the shadow budget for Wales. Amazingly, he claimed:

"There are no restrictions on our shadow budget".—[*Official Report*, 8 February 1995; Vol. 254, c. 361.]

Throughout his speech, then as now, he told us nothing about the shadow budget. Doing one thing and saying another has become the hallmark of the Labour party; in the hon. Member for Caerphilly we have someone who will take it to the nth degree. He is capable of saying one thing, and then another thing, but no one understands what on earth he means. I shall let everyone into the secret. He does not understand either.

The greatest problem arises when the hon. Member for Caerphilly says something positive. Few have failed to notice that his friends in the BBC have been running a campaign to promote a Welsh Assembly. Only this week, a whole programme was devoted to the subject. It tried to claim that a Welsh Assembly would cost less than £15 million.

How much the hon. Gentleman's friends in the BBC must regret it when his loose cannon goes out. Last week, he admitted that a Welsh Assembly would mean about another 500 civil servants. Such bureaucracy creation would take place before a Welsh Assembly did anything. Taking an average salary with the on-costs, I can easily calculate that, with £40,000 per civil servant, £20 million would be spent before the Welsh Assembly did anything.

Mr. Ron Davies: So that the record is accurate, my statement was that it was my estimate that the establishment of the Assembly in Cardiff would create an additional 500 jobs outwith the civil service.

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman has confirmed the warning as given. He has blown what his friends at the BBC were trying to do out of the water.

I appreciate how difficult it is for the hon. Gentleman when he comes to the Dispatch Box. It is an occasion when he is on the record; such occasions are embarrassing for him. I must, however, try to deal with the points of substance that he raised. He claimed that the inclusion for community care was nothing but a transfer from the Department of Social Security. That is not correct; the money being provided is new money. The additional £25.2 million this year takes the figure to £149.6 million additional money for community care. Next year, the figure will be £190.3 million.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly claimed that the damping provision would mean cuts in the national health service. Again, he was not right. The extra money that has been provided for damping is from unallocated resources. In view of his point about cutting the national health service, the hon. Gentleman will not and cannot come clean. "How much more?" is the question that the Opposition constantly face. Where will it come from? They cannot say. However, if they are to be credible when they go into a general election, Labour Members must buy a large sign for the hon. Gentleman. They should hang it in his office where he cannot miss it. The sign should read, "It's the money, stupid." That is the only way in which the point can be brought home to the hon. Gentleman.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been able to announce £1.3 million for Theatr Clwyd, subject to certain provisions. I am grateful for the welcome that the hon. Members for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) and for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) have given that announcement. My right hon. Friend and I had very great regard for Theatr Clwyd, and we were much reinforced in that by the lobbying by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) and especially by my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards). I am sad that the situation of Theatr Clwyd was precipitated by local government. My right hon. Friend has given the theatre the way forward and it is now for local government to respond properly.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) for his contribution. I cannot do better than use the words of the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside, who described it as a master class. My right hon. Friend's concerns were well expressed. He explained the threats Labour represents in terms of the effect on the business community and the rates that business would have to pay if local government took over business rates. That point was rightly emphasised by my hon. Friends the Members for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) and for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field).

Equally, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy asked, would farm land be made rateable? What would the farmers have to fear? What would be the price of ending capping? It is impossible to put a price on all the threats in the unspecific policies of the Labour party. My right hon. Friend did not exaggerate when he talked about the possibility of civil strife in Wales as the consequence of Labour's policies.

Mr. Ainger: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jones: No, because there is too little time left. The hon. Gentleman has not been here for the whole debate anyway.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside referred to housing. I am sure that he welcomes the substantial provision we have made for housing spending—£1.2 billion for private sector renovation since the current grant regime was introduced and an 84 per cent. higher real-terms spend on capital and revenue for repairs on council housing.

My hon. Friends the Members for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) and for Ribble Valley welcomed our increase in police spending. I know that that was dismissed by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) in his usual elitist way. It is, however, the case, as my hon. Friends said, that the police in south Wales have had to have an approximately

[Mr. Jones]

22 per cent. increase in just over a year because of the appalling underfunding when the figure was decided by the Labour-controlled councils in south Wales.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan asked about the changes made in the notional amount figures for the Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff unitary authorities. The changes arose from the provision of more accurate data by South Glamorgan council for the disaggregation of its spending on education to the new authorities. The Vale of Glamorgan authority knows the reasons for the change and accepts the greater accuracy of the new data. The council is understandably disappointed by the reduction in its base position, but it can increase its budget by 3.9 per cent. in the coming year.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) mentioned road mileage lengths being taken into account in calculating Denbighshire's standard spending assessment. The non-financial data that we use in calculating SSAs are carefully validated and verified with all local authorities. They provide the information. We have not received representations from Denbighshire or any other local authority on road lengths. I am surprised that the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) feels that the settlement disadvantages Newport county borough council. It enables the council to increase its spending by 5.6 per cent.—the second highest percentage increase of any authority in Wales.

The most noticeable aspect of the debate was the absence of any positive policies from the Opposition. I say to the House and to Wales that we should always remember that council taxes are decided by councillors. It is as that rueful expression says—"We get the councillors we deserve." My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State rightly mentioned some of the crazier spending decisions that have been made, and I warn Opposition Members that they treat the public with contempt at their peril.

Last Saturday's *South Wales Echo* showed the fat cheques that have been paid out to Labour councillors in back pay for the amounts that they have awarded themselves. That has gone down very badly in Cardiff. The mood is changing in Cardiff which, regrettably, is a one-party state, and it is changing elsewhere in Wales.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 268, Noes 196.

Division No. 47] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts'shr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve

Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Derek Conway.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Henderson, Doug
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Touhig, Don
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mrs. Bridget Prentice.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Local Government Finance Report (Wales) 1996–97 (House of Commons Paper No. 141), which was laid before this House on 1st February, be approved.

Resolved,

That the Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Notional Amounts) Report (Wales) 1996-97 (House of Commons Paper No. 142), which was laid before this House on 1st February, be approved.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation).

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Business Tenancies (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 15th January, be approved.

CONTRACTING OUT

That the draft Contracting Out (Management Functions in relation to certain Community Homes) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 16th January, be approved.

AGRICULTURAL HOLDINGS

That the draft Agricultural Holdings (Fee) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 17th January, be approved.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

That the draft Leicestershire (City of Leicester and District of Rutland) (Structural Change) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

Question agreed to.

Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 5

PUBLICATION AT DIRECTION OF EITHER COMMISSION

7.13 pm

Ms Hilary Armstrong (North-West Durham): I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 4, line 5, at end insert—

'(1A) The relevant body may publish the information in accordance with a Code of Practice issued by the Secretary of State under section 2(2) of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 6, in page 4, line 8, leave out from '(3)' to end of line 9 and insert 'The relevant body'.

No. 7, in page 4, leave out lines 14 to 25.

No. 1, in page 4, leave out line 19 and insert

'distributed to a number of separate dwellings in their area at least equal to the circulation of the newspaper(s) printed for sale and circulating in their area, in which the information would otherwise be published in accordance with subsection 2 above; and'.

No. 2, in page 4, line 25,, after 'to', insert 'at least 80% of'.

Ms Armstrong: We have reached Report stage of the Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill. We had a series of interesting debates in Committee and we have brought these amendments to the House in an attempt to make the Government see sense.

The amendments address the issue of how and where local authorities will publish their performance indicators. Last year was the first year in which performance indicators were published and we learned many lessons from that experience. It is one of the reasons why the Bill is before the House this evening. However, I believe that we have learnt more lessons than are addressed in the Bill, so we are seeking to amend it.

Amendment No. 5 seeks to approach the issue in a different way. Local authorities are obliged to publish their performance indicators properly so that the majority of local people can read and understand them. They should not be complicated and they should be easily accessible. I am sure that every hon. Member shares that objective. The information must reach as many people as possible and be easily understood. Tonight we are debating the mechanism which will achieve those ends. I do not believe that the Bill has got it right, and that is another reason why we have tabled the amendments.

Amendment No. 5 seeks to give the Secretary of State power to issue a code of practice to prescribe the way in which local authorities must publish performance indicators. In other words, the Secretary of State will have the power to issue a code of practice so that he can be absolutely sure that local authorities are not using oblique methods in an attempt to avoid meeting the objective. We have taken methods of practice from other pieces of legislation, which we believe will better achieve our aims, and applied them in this case.

Under section 3 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, the Secretary of State may make regulations to enforce the provisions of such a code of practice. There is an existing code which ensures that the objective is met. I am sure that the Minister knows all about it so I shall not take up the time of the House tonight by going through it. However, I believe that the current provisions in the Bill will not meet the objective.

The provisions of the 1980 Act were introduced by the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), when he was Secretary of State for the Environment, to ensure that local authorities published the information that the Government thought necessary at that time. That included information to accompany local tax demands, annual reports, staffing levels, information on planning applications, information on land holdings and so on. The amendment would bring performance indicators under a similar regime.

I appreciate that performance indicators must be published separately and that specific attention must be drawn to them. However, as I understand the code of practice, that would not be a problem under existing legislation. The provisions of the 1980 Act specifically permit

"any such Code to be prepared by some other person on behalf of the Secretary of State.

any such Code to specify the steps which authorities are to take to inform the public of the availability of the information".

In Committee, the Minister interpreted the wording of the Opposition amendment as requiring authorities to distribute the information to every household and business. He thought that it would put authorities at risk of legal challenge and

"would be too hard on local authorities".

He was anxious that authorities did not abuse the publication of performance indicators to produce partisan material in a local authority publication.

We pointed out in Committee that if local authorities did that, they would be breaking the law as set out in the Local Government Act 1986. Notwithstanding that, the Minister sought to make it one of his concerns.

The Minister objected to our amendment asking authorities to distribute the information to every household and business as he thought that would be too difficult. The Bill requires authorities to "take all reasonable steps" to ensure that a free newspaper is distributed to each dwelling and business. That could be equally onerous and create other difficulties.

We discussed the problems involved in the distribution of free newspapers in great detail in Committee, so I shall not do so today. However, the wording of the Bill may lead to demands that some local authorities are unable to meet.

The amendment would permit a wide range of practice in publishing performance indicators. We are asking the Government to reconsider the matter. If the amendment were agreed, the Government would retain every possible means of preventing abuse. I know that the Minister is concerned to stop abuse and to ensure that local authorities are not tempted down that road. The amendment would give him the necessary powers, so he and his right hon. and hon. Friends should be reassured that it is not an attempt to make sure that people do not find out about performance indicators, but to give more people access to them.

Clearly, a code should be used to encourage best practice and to give authorities maximum flexibility in the publication of performance indicators. It could also incorporate such safeguards as requiring a statutory notice in a paid-for or free newspaper publicising the authority's arrangements for distribution of the material and telling the public where additional copies were available.

Taken with the Bill as presently drafted, the amendment would present authorities with a menu of options for publishing performance indicators in accordance with a code of practice that would permit own newspapers, leaflets, the use of a paid-for or free newspaper or a combination of those options. It is our responsibility to give local authorities the opportunity to develop means that are appropriate to their areas and meet the objectives set out in the Bill.

It is also important to provide for diversity. In Committee we discussed the diverse nature of local authorities. Although one newspaper may be distributed throughout an entire city area, that is not always so. In order to uphold the proper relationship between central and local government, there should be a balance between diversity and the adherence to a minimum national standard. The amendments give the Government the opportunity to achieve that balance.

The other amendments in the group would put amendment No. 5 to into effect. Amendments Nos. 6 and 7 aim to delete the distribution conditions for free newspapers so that they are treated in the same way as paid-for newspapers when placing a statutory performance indicator advertisement.

In Committee, there were two main concerns with the Bill's provisions permitting the use of a free newspaper for the statutory publication of performance indicators. First, clause 5(4) places the burden on authorities to ensure that a free newspaper is distributed to dwellings and businesses. The Bill sets a test of reasonableness, but that is not much help to authorities that might need to test the circulation claims made by the publishers of a free sheet. The Minister acknowledged:

"The local authority, in deciding which free newspaper or other newspaper to select, must be reasonably satisfied that the paper is delivered throughout that area."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 23 January 1996; c. 48-9.]

As I have already said, that cannot be assured throughout the country as the distribution and availability of free newspapers is variable. The Bill is likely to deter authorities from using a free newspaper for the statutory advertisement and could effectively vitiate the purpose of clause 4.

Secondly, the Bill puts paid-for newspapers at a market advantage. Contrary to the Minister's words, no distribution condition applies to paid-for newspapers. A paid-for newspaper with a very small circulation would suffice for the statutory performance indicator advertisement, but a free paper has to meet a very stiff test of being delivered throughout the authority's area.

The Bill leaves whole issue confused and does not meet our objectives. As it incorporates a minor barrier to free trade, the Bill does not seem consistent with the philosophy and the policy that the right hon. Member for Henley purports to support. The Government seek to make the performance indicators more accessible to the electorate and the council tax payer, but they have drafted the Bill in such a way as to make that objective much

[Ms Armstrong]

more difficult to attain. The amendments give the Government a way through and I hope that, even at this late stage, they will consider rethinking the wording of the Bill.

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): I shall not detain the House for long, but I want to express my complete support for what the hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) has just said. In particular, I agree with her request that the Minister look at this whole matter again. I also agree with her that the Government have not got it right at this stage. Fortunately, however, there will be discussions in another place which will give the Government time to ponder their previous decisions and what has been said tonight. They will also be able to reflect on what is said in another place before the Bill finally reaches the statute book.

7.30 pm

I am speaking on my own behalf this evening, but I also want to echo the concerns expressed to me by Portsmouth city council. Just to show that mine is not a party political point, I might add that, over the past few years, the council has been controlled by all the main parties in succession. So I am describing the view of the city.

Portsmouth city is disturbed by what was intended to be an extension of freedom and widening of opportunity. Whereas in the past it was specified where notices had to be published—in paid-for newspapers—the widening of choice to include free advertising, give-away newspapers was meant to give local councils greater say in how they distribute information. In Portsmouth, however, this idea does not produce more competition or choice. There is only one paid-for newspaper, and that paper also owns the free, give-away newspaper. So the city has no choice but to use the services of that newspaper—and it does not take kindly to that.

I hope that I will not embarrass the hon. Member for North-West Durham if I say how strongly I agree with what she said about local authorities being able to publish their own broadsheets. Portsmouth has an excellently printed and published broadsheet which gives information about all the council's activities in an entirely proper, non-political way. It has done that under the control of successive parties. Certainly, it would be illegal if the city council presented the information in such a way as to advance the interests of one political party. That is against the law; it would have serious repercussions, including—rightly—the surcharging of those responsible.

The information can be published by the city of Portsmouth and be attractively presented, on art paper, for instance. It can be illustrated with charts and diagrams. It is of course possible to pay for such services in newspapers, but the cost has to be borne by the city's funds. I am quite sure that Portsmouth is not the only place capable of producing a satisfactory statement that includes performance indicators and tables, and of guaranteeing distribution to every door. After all, the council already distributes information about elections; it distributes the registration forms necessary for voting. It puts them through front, side and back doors—when that is necessary, such as in houses in multiple occupation. This is probably the most efficient distributive system imaginable.

Portsmouth is also capable of varying the size and type in which the information is presented. Statutory notices in Portsmouth's evening newspaper—from the Queen's harbour master to mariners, for instance—are typed in small print because they need to be read by only a handful of master mariners. But the whole idea of publishing performance tables for the public is that they should be read by the man and woman in the street, not the expert on local government. They are for people who want to know what is going on and who welcome a format that is clear and easily understood.

It is possible to do all this by paying a newspaper, but that is very expensive. I therefore suggest that the ideal wording for the clause would be along the lines that local councils should be "responsible" for the distribution of the information. The Bill should not specify how they do it; they should simply be responsible for getting the information to every door, in the manner of their choosing. If, in so doing, they break the law: so be it—they must take the consequences.

The problem remains that, in the absence of competition, the cost of advertising and printing performance tables of this size and on this scale runs into thousands of pounds. That is a heavy burden; hence, I hope that the Government will consider allowing efficient local authorities to produce their own broadsheets in their own way. That will allow them to present information to the very people who will, in time, express their views on the performance of their councils. That is the most democratic way to go about the job.

I have a great deal of sympathy with amendments Nos. 1 and 2, which the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) may discuss later. Given that there is an all-party consensus on the matter, perhaps the Government will now treat it with care and consideration.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I am delighted to follow that speech, which seems to show that there is concern in all parties about the wording of the Bill and the Government's way of trying to ensure that performance indicators are given wider publication than hitherto.

The Bill is somewhat lopsided as between the way it treats paid-for newspapers and those which are free. I want to speak, not so much along the lines of the previous two speeches, which have dealt generally with the widening of the ways in which these performance indicators are made known to the public, but more specifically about what I believe are faults in the wording of the Bill which mean that, in practice, the Government will not achieve their aims.

It is clear that any publication in any paid-for newspaper, however small its circulation, meets the requirements of this Bill. On the other hand, if publication is done in free newspapers, then, as the Minister said in Committee, that will meet the requirements of the Bill only if the free newspapers are available to be distributed throughout an entire area. That may happen in some inner-city or inner-town areas, but it will certainly not happen across large parts of the country. That is why the clause is inadequate as it stands.

In my area, the *Newbury Weekly News* is the main paid-for newspaper. It covers a large part of the district, but certainly not all of it. It makes no attempt to cover a significant part of the eastern end of the area. So if publication is to be, as it has been hitherto, in the

Newbury Weekly News, it will be positively difficult to get hold of the performance indicator information in large parts of the district.

There are also free newspapers in the area covering large parts of it. Between them they may have a larger total circulation than the *Newbury Weekly News*. Still, they do not attempt to cover the entire area.

Equally, the *Newbury Weekly News* has a small circulation inside north Hampshire, so technically it would be possible for Basingstoke and Deane council to publish its performance indicators in the *Newbury Weekly News*—and only there. That would mean that the indicators were published to a large number of people with little interest in them and a small number of people with a considerable interest in them, and leaving out a large number of people with an interest in them but not living in the circulation area of the paper. That is the kind of difficulty that the current wording would produce. The two amendments that I have tabled would, to a large extent, overcome that difficulty.

The Bill should maximise the circulation of performance indicators. In practice, in many areas including my own, the wording of the Bill would make no change to the present situation. In other words, district councils would have to publish their performance indicators in the local paid-for newspapers, because there are not sufficient free newspapers to ensure coverage of the whole area. The Minister made it plain in Committee that many areas would see no change. That might mean that circulation was smaller than it could be, and people who live in those areas might get worse value for money in the information they get about their district councils. We might gain better value for money by ensuring publication in free newspapers that perhaps cover only part of the area, rather than publishing in a paid-for paper which could cover a smaller area.

The Minister made the point that, if councils are forced to publish in paid-for newspapers, the information is at least available to everyone in the area. That is partly true, although in some districts paid-for newspapers may be quite difficult to obtain. People sometimes have to travel some way into the circulation area of a newspaper. However, free newspapers are also, in almost all cases, available in the local town, if someone is determined to get hold of a copy. So the Minister's point falls, because the free newspapers are as available to those determined to get hold of them as paid-for newspapers.

Amendment No. 2 makes the point that, as far as possible, the papers containing the relevant information should be distributed to businesses. The Bill, as it stands, suggests that, unless all the business areas are covered by the free newspapers, the publication will still have to be in paid-for newspapers. The amendment would increase the chance that district councils had the opportunity to publish in free newspapers, even if those free newspapers did not cover every business in the area.

The point of the Bill must be to widen councils' opportunity to publish information in free newspapers as well as in the paid-for newspapers. The Bill does not do that at present. If the Government accepted my amendments, the Bill would do what they want it to do.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): There is clearly a huge cross-party consensus on this subject. The overwhelming majority of hon. Members believe that local residents have a right to have delivered, through their letter boxes, a proper analysis of what services their councils provide and how well they do so in comparison with others. That is what the performance indicators are all about. The Audit Commission's various publications are clear and simple to understand. They usually have bar charts so that people can see how their local authority is performing against a comparable local authority serving a similar area.

I wish to speak especially in favour of the amendments which would introduce a real code of practice. Whereas the vast majority of the 450 local authorities operate reasonably honourably and straightforwardly, a small handful of completely corrupt, dogmatic and arrogant local authorities will abuse any system that is placed in their hands. For that small minority, a real code of conduct is necessary. It will come as no surprise to the House to know that my personal experience of what happens in Brent prompts me to speak forcefully about the need for a code of conduct. The Opposition are offering the Government more powers: that must surely indicate the depth of concern that we feel.

I shall give a couple of examples of the way in which Brent council manages, in effect, to avoid the commitment to reporting their performance indicators to their local electors. Like many local authorities, Brent is not well served by local papers any more. The local papers that we have do their best, but the money is not there, compared with 25 years ago when I was first elected to a local authority. They no longer have long-standing members of staff or a substantial staff who are able to report what is going on in detail. Those papers have had to make so many economies and they are far too reliant on handouts from local authorities.

7.45 pm

In my own local authority area, the council has chosen to report performance indicators by giving the local free sheet a special deal. The paper appears with a wrap-around bit, like the wrapping around fish and chips, which one immediately discards and moves on to the real fish in the middle. The long-standing local paper, which has been published for more than 100 years, does not get the benefit of that deal because it is often slightly critical of the local authority.

If the council buys the service, it is able to dictate the format of what is provided. When, once a year, I get my copy of the *Brent Recorder*—which Brent council has paid to report the performance indicators to every household in Brent—it thuds through the letter box. I pick it up and instead of the usual colourful cover there is what looks like half a dozen pages of *Hansard*—dull, dead type that nobody would bother to read unless they had a severe case of insomnia. I can hear what happens all over Brent. The paper thuds through the letter box, and that is followed by a scrunching-up noise which works its way through the borough as everyone tears up the so-called performance indicator report and dumps it in the bin so that they can read the contents of the real newspaper. Other than people such as myself, who pore over the report to see where the corruption and fraud have been hidden, nobody else in Brent has any interest in it whatever.

The council is prepared to discharge its duty to report in that most minimal way, but it can find thousands of pounds to produce a nice glossy magazine with colour

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photographs and endless pictures of the leader of the council. Given what he looks like, that is not necessarily a good idea. The magazine contains wonderful stories about the joys of living in Brent, which imply that everyone in Brent is living on some wonderful tropical island where nobody ever has to work and everyone has a life style like the old Greek gods.

People in Brent pick up that rubbish every few months and they cannot believe the descriptions of the town that they see around them, with garbage in the streets, and so on: we never see a street-sweeper because, as the performance indicators show, that is not Brent's strong suit. The magazine is an attempt to bypass any real duty to report the performance indicators that Parliament has required, with agreement, to be made available so that local residents can monitor their council's performance.

Brent has two local papers—the *Kilburn Times* and the *Willesden and Brent Chronicle*, which are part of the same group. Because they report things such as the ombudsman's reports, they are under constant pressure from the local authority. The system cannot operate if the council puts completely unacceptable pressure on well established local newspapers not to report anything that the council does not want reported. I have found it especially offensive that the chief executive of the council has written to each local department head to tell them not to advertise in those papers because they write critical stories about the council.

There are bound to be critical stories about the council. If out of 32 London boroughs, a council spends less on education and social services than every other borough, it will occasionally get a tad of criticism. If, out of the whole of south-east England, including Greater London, Kent, Surrey, and East and West Sussex, a third of all complaints to the local government ombudsman are about one council, that will occasionally get into the local press. I should like to see the code of conduct that we are putting into the Government's hands improved to stop intimidation of the press.

Many local newspapers are always struggling. The threat is issued that advertising will be withdrawn if they print unfavourable stories. That makes a mockery of any suggestion that there can be fair and honest reporting for local people about the performance indicators that the Audit Commission has produced, which no one questions are good guides to relative performance.

The process can be taken one stage further. The current chief executive at Brent, a guy called George Benham, circulated a memorandum—this is no wild, manic rumour of the sort that might be read in *Socialist Campaign Group News*—to all departmental heads in the borough. I should explain that they are called business units now. There are about 140 such units. I write to what used to be the director of education asking, "Can you get little Johnny into a school?" The reply refers to "the customer". We are dealing with little Johnny, not a customer, and little Johnny wants to go to a school.

We have business units with advertising budgets. George Benham writes to the units telling them, "Mr. Livingstone keeps attacking the council." The atmosphere is fetid. He, George Benham, suggests, "It would be useful if Mr. Livingstone were not invited to any function at which councillors might be present. Mr. Livingstone's presence is embarrassing to them." That is the climate in the borough. It is one that puts pressure on local newspapers not to report issues such as performance indicators.

What happens if an authority gets away with what I have described year after year? I reflect on the past five years. There was a Conservative minority administration, which still hangs on by a casting vote. It has managed to hang on to power. It is helped if it can manipulate information. If an authority gets away with that for five years, it becomes extremely arrogant.

The ombudsman is undertaking an investigation. Indeed, 17 investigations are being undertaken by the fraud squad, the ombudsman and the council's internal audit. That is going some when there is a Tory group of only 33. Some of the investigations are multiple. Some councillors are being investigated by the fraud squad, the ombudsman and the internal auditors. Everything is being examined from £75,000 grants being handed out in exchange for support in a local government election down to the small stuff such as local builders being employed to clean a councillor's windows. All this stuff builds up.

At the same time, arrogance increases. There is the example of the AdShop. The issue was discussed in Committee and I was grateful when I was not criticised for raising it. There was no word of support for Brent council from anyone on the Government side. When I reported activities taking place in Brent, no Conservative Member was prepared to stick his neck out by saying, for example, "I am sure that's not true," or to say one word in defence of Brent council. I congratulate the Minister and Conservative Back-Bench Members on their perspicacity and good sense.

I return to the AdShop. A business unit showed a loss of £400,000. Amazing things were going on. The staff decided that they wanted a meeting. It was thought that it would take an hour. It was decided that everyone should fly to Schiphol international airport at Amsterdam. The VIP lounge had been booked for the staff meeting. Of course, after the staff meetings, the rest of the day was available. These happenings are not reported too well when there is the level of intimidation that I have described. We are offering the Government a code of conduct to enable them to clamp down on abuse. If the code were implemented, local reporting would not be stifled.

When these matters were raised in council, the committee chair concerned was approached by a reporter from the *Willesden and Brent Chronicle*, Miss Kamala Hayman. His response was, "If you publish any of this, I shall take you out of the back of the town hall and break your legs." What chance is there of honest reporting of performance indicators when a leading member of the Conservative administration, in front of witnesses at a full council meeting, turns on a young woman reporter and says, "I am going to take you out of the town hall and break your legs"? I rest my case.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): The nicest thing about listening to the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) was to note that the tables had been turned on him. I remember reading the *Londoner* and gnashing my teeth—that is probably an appropriate description—at the gobbledegook and biased propaganda.

When I reflect on the propaganda, as the hon. Gentleman describes it, that emanates from Brent council, it is almost always eminently fair, straight and above board. If the hon. Gentleman feels that he is living in the Bahamas, perhaps we should get a psychiatrist to help him.

I understand the thinking behind the amendments. At one stage I was tempted by amendment No. 5. We share a common objective to ensure that local authorities publish information about performance that is unbiased and informative. The Bill achieves that by providing that publication must be subject to independent editorial control. I understand that the approach of Opposition Members might be used to the same ends. However, my memory does not have to go back too far to when I was in local government.

That leads me to baulk at what they propose, which would land local government and the Government with more regulation. There would be more intervention. We would need yet another code of practice. That would have to specify what information would be included and what might or should not be included. How could we deal with editorial bias? Would we need a stand-alone document, which would mean more expense for local authorities? I do not think that anyone in this place wants that level of interference.

The Government's approach is preferable. Local authorities and Parliament will be in no doubt about the publication requirements and will not face the possibility of changes to those requirements from year to year.

Ms Armstrong: The amendments offer a range of options. If an authority were using the most expensive option, it would fall foul of value-for-money and other regulations that are already in place. We are offering a menu of options to enable each local authority to choose the most effective and appropriate approach in its area. That gives force to the amendments. I urge the Minister to think again. If the amendments are agreed to, the options set out in the Bill could still be implemented by a local authority if that were appropriate.

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Lady has outlined why there was temptation at an earlier stage, which I am now resisting.

I suspect that amendments Nos. 6 and 7 are tied closely to amendment No. 5. At the same time, they are surprising. The removal of the distribution requirement flies in the face of arguments previously advanced by Opposition Members and would worsen the various situations highlighted in Committee by the hon. Lady, especially that regarding her father. Local authorities would be given complete discretion on distribution and they could satisfy the requirement simply by using a free newspaper that had only a limited distribution. That would undermine opportunity for those who wish to seek a newspaper and to seek the information within it.

Amendments Nos. 1 and 2, tabled by the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), adopt a different approach to distribution. I understand the hon. Gentleman's reasons for tabling amendment No. 1, but it strikes me as being impractical. How do we assess the number of people who will be reached by a paid-for newspaper? Amendment No. 2 is more onerous than the existing clause in respect of business premises. The amendment would force local authorities to reach 80 per cent. of the business community, whereas the current wording leaves such matters to the judgment of the authority.

All the amendments illustrate a misunderstanding of the meaning behind clause 5. That leads me to stress two points from the outset. First, the publication provisions are no more than minimum requirements. That answers my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths). It may be that, given its local circumstances, an authority believes that some additional publication over and above the minimum requirements would represent value for money in terms of effective accountability and communicating with its citizens. That was touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North.

If my hon. Friend reflects on the words of the hon. Member for Brent, East and those of some of the authorities that he and I would care to name for having the expertise to get round legislation and codes of practice, for example, he will understand the Government's thinking. In such cases, it is open to an authority to provide such additional publication—for example, including performance information in its own in-house journal delivered to its citizens—and we believe that it would be right for it to do so, particularly in Brent.

Secondly, there is a simple principle underlying these minimum requirements: whatever forms of publication are chosen by an authority, information about its performance, as measured against the Audit Commission's indicators, is at least available throughout its area in a publication that is wholly independent of the authority. We attach the utmost importance to that information being readily available to all who wish to obtain it, and in a context where an authority cannot seek to put its own gloss on the objective measures of its performance. The hon. Member for Brent, East made that point.

8 pm

The Local Government Act 1992 requires publication of an authority's performance information in a newspaper circulating in its area. Such a newspaper is available in shops in the area; it is thus available to anyone who chooses to purchase it, even if they have to travel some distance to do so, as is the case in some rural areas. Such a newspaper is also edited independently of the authority, and the requirement to publish in a newspaper circulating in an authority's area therefore satisfies our underlying principle.

We now believe that, in the light of the representations that we have received from the Audit Commission and local government, this underlying principle can equally be satisfied in certain cases by publication in free newspapers delivered to dwellings. These cases are where the free newspapers are wholly independent of the authority concerned, and where the free newspapers are distributed throughout the authority's area.

Where a free newspaper is wholly independent of the authority, it is edited independently of that authority just like a paid-for newspaper. Equally, where free newspapers are distributed to dwellings throughout the authority's area—the situation that the distribution requirement in clause 5 seeks to describe—these newspapers can be seen to be generally available, even though they might not be available in the shops. I have deliberately referred to free newspapers in the plural; if an authority chooses to go down the free newspaper route, it is immaterial whether availability throughout its area is achieved through one or

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several such newspapers. We therefore seek in clause 5 to extend the ways in which an authority can fulfil the minimum publication requirement.

There remains the established way of using paid-for newspapers. We are now seeking to introduce a new option, as requested by local authorities, of using free newspapers in the circumstances that I have just described, where the use of such newspapers would be consistent with our underlying publication principle. The modest increase in flexibility as to how the minimum publication requirement can be fulfilled is all we seek to achieve.

I trust that Opposition Members will feel that they can now accept the assurances that I have given and withdraw the amendments.

Ms Armstrong: I am not entirely content with what the Minister said. I hope that the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) is right and that the matter will be dealt with in the Lords. I do not wish to press the issue at this stage for that reason, and therefore I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

8.3 pm

Mr. Livingstone: One could probably talk about Brent until 10 o'clock without a note, but as I raised most of my points on Second Reading, there remain only a couple to which I wish to draw the attention of the House.

The Bill is a missed opportunity. We all welcome the steps forward in social services and the chance to have joint investigations and so on. I make a plea only that the Minister makes it clear to the Audit Commission that we would like it to start with Brent, because out of 32 London boroughs, Brent spends the least on social services, although there is massive need in my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) that is as bad as anything in the east end. I hope that the Bill will allow us to examine that. In any investigation about Brent, what we see is major neglect. An independent assessment was made of social services—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that on Third Reading he must refer only to what is in the Bill.

Mr. Livingstone: I hope that the Minister will ensure that we have a rapid investigation of the social services department of Brent and the studies and joint studies that have been mentioned, and that the Bill will give the Audit Commission the power to get involved. The closest that we have come to any comparative investigation was last year. An independent expert in social services was brought in, and discovered on examining the case files in the register of children at risk that 10 per cent. of all the files were illegible. How can Brent social services department be functioning adequately? I hope that we shall hear from the Minister that he shares that concern. Nobody can be proud of that record. How can one defend children at risk when in 10 per cent. of cases one cannot even read the files?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is trying hard, but he is not being successful. He must stick to what is in the Bill, or I shall have to rule him out of order.

Mr. Livingstone: I made that point because the powers already exist, and I want them used in Brent, which, of all social services departments in Britain, has the most urgent need. I do not believe that any hon. Member would be other than horrified to discover that the constituents whom they represent had to suffer in such circumstances. How does one create such a complete air of neglect? The comparative studies that are now possible and the strengthening of the Audit Commission in social services must give it the ability to step in. Even if it cannot take control, it can at least draw attention through the new powers to areas were one borough council is performing dramatically worse than others.

As I mentioned in Committee, the question of reporting should have been in the Bill. I shall not repeat on Third Reading everything that I said about it in Committee, but this is a tremendous missed opportunity. I hope that the Bill will be strategically amended in the other place to strengthen the powers that will be given to the Minister. If it is, I hope that the Government will the accept the proposals, because what we have is not adequate.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) made it clear that we are not happy with what we heard from the Minister. If the Bill is amended in the other place, he will have the support of the House to use tougher powers to stop the abuse of the system of reporting on performance indicators. If cannot be right if those indicators are reported in such a way that nobody is interested in looking at them.

Who would produce an election address of just solid, turgid type? No one would read it. We have nice pictures of ourselves. We have pictures to illustrate local topics. We have graphics. If a council refuses to use those options and just produces dense acres of type, people will not plough through it.

I hope that, when the Bill goes to the other place, Government amendments will be tabled to strengthen it along the lines suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Durham. If he did that, he would have the support of the Opposition and, I suspect, the Liberal Democrats as well.

8.8 pm

Ms Armstrong: I do not wish to detain the House for much longer, but hon. Members should be reminded that the Government were given an opportunity to clarify their wish to use the Audit Commission more effectively to secure probity and the delivery of high-quality services in local government.

The Bill deals with two fairly minor matters. It proposes that the social services inspectorate should be able to work with the Audit Commission to inspect whole social services departments, an important new power which I welcome. I have always considered it nonsense that no power to ensure both effectiveness and value for money is enshrined in legislation. I also welcome the

Government's recognition that the current regime for the publication of performance indicators does not meet its objectives. However, I still do not think that the Bill has got it right.

The Government have not faced up to the problems that local government has asked them to tackle. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) talked about Brent and, on Second Reading, my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) spoke of the delay in solving Lambeth's problems, which was due partly to the fact that the auditor had not the necessary powers and partly to a lack of consistency. In Committee, we had a short debate about the importance of consistency among district auditors, and ways of ensuring that were suggested. I am sorry that the Government did not take the opportunity provided by some of our amendments.

On Second Reading, my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras also mentioned Brent and Westminster. He pointed out that in those boroughs, as well as in Lambeth, the public could not feel confident about the way in which matters had been handled, and that the district auditor had continually been thwarted. It is our responsibility to ensure that government at every level is as open, honest and responsive to local people as the House can make it. I am sorry that the Government did not tackle that issue in the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third Time, and passed.

Edgware General Hospital

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

8.12 pm

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on this topic. As I raised it in April last year, it may seem strange that I have raised it again tonight, but significant developments have taken place in the intervening time. I make no apology for bringing up the subject again, as there is still great public concern about the future of Edgware general hospital.

The issue must be examined again very meticulously: although it is a local issue, it impinges on all the services provided by the NHS in the neighbouring areas of north and north-west London, and, indeed—as some patients are referred from parts of greater London that are a long way away—on services north of the river generally.

I thank my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health for his attendance. I hope that he will be able to reassure me. This has been a long campaign: it began when the last Secretary of State for Health made what we regarded locally as a tragic, unnecessary and unjustified decision to allow local agencies to proceed with the closure of the hospital's accident and emergency unit, and it continues in full force.

It is interesting to reflect on the panoply of local campaigns, which seek numerous objectives. I suppose that nothing is more important than the provision of health services—the services of hospitals, GPs and clinicians, and all the other facilities that are provided by a national health service in which we still take enormous pride. Health is one of the most crucial issues, especially for older people.

Experience suggests, however, that—logically and understandably—once a decision has been made, even local people who disagree passionately with that decision may drift away from their previous strong position. Although their arguments retain their validity, they may say, "There is nothing that we can do. The authorities are determined to go ahead, and we must accept their decision even if we still disagree with it."

In this case, however, that has not happened: if anything, feelings are stronger than they were before. That is a remarkable phenomenon, which I cannot recall observing before in many years of becoming involved in local issues. The passions aroused by this unwise decision are still extremely powerful, and the mass campaign continues—supported by most local politicians, both councillors and Members of Parliament. That must be borne in mind; but it is even more important to bear in mind the tangible underlying reasons why the proposed closure is a mistake.

It was in that spirit that, along with other hon. Members from all parties, I tabled an early-day motion on 22 January. The composition of those who signed the motion reflected approximately the percentage of referrals from constituencies in the area surrounding the hospital. The motion asked the Department of Health and the Ministers concerned to ask Barnet district health authority and the other bodies involved, including the Wellhouse trust itself, to look at the matter again.

In early November, in the House of Lords, my noble Friend Baroness Cumberlege—speaking on behalf of the Secretary of State—repeated emphatically that, in a

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process of extensive and thorough consultation, Barnet health authority and the Wellhouse trust had consistently sought to involve the public in their deliberations through a series of public meetings and the distribution of leaflets and articles in the local press. My noble Friend went on to say that the Secretary of State would not be reversing decisions made by his predecessor.

I can understand that. That is the normal basis on which a new Secretary of State takes over a portfolio, which will include all the adjustments that have been made in hospital policy. Conservative Members need no lectures from the Labour party, which many years ago, when it was in government, either closed or savagely cut some 60 hospital units per annum.

It is normal, and natural, for Secretaries of State to say, "I cannot go back on the decisions of my predecessor." Officials present the position in those terms when the new Secretary of State takes over. Dossiers are examined, but there is no suggestion of reconsidering closure proposals. That is understandable, but I nevertheless feel that a fundamental mistake has been made in this instance. Given the importance of the issue to local people, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will listen to the details sympathetically.

I was grateful for the opportunity to raise the matter in the lengthy Adjournment debate that took place on 5 April. Once again, tonight's debate has begun before the time when public business normally ends in the Chamber. Let me reassure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker: that does not mean that I shall speak at excessive length. I believe that my hon. Friend the Minister has an engagement, and I shall be speaking at a dinner if I manage to arrive on time.

In the previous debate on the Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, the hon. Member for Brent East (Mr. Livingstone) was, for various reasons, obsessed with the state of Brent council. With even more justification, I am obsessed with the future of Edgware general hospital, although, I hasten to add, it is on the other side of the road shared equally between myself and my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North (Sir J. Gorst).

I remind my hon. Friend the Minister of a number of important considerations that, once again, point powerfully to an unusual and demanding position that can irritate any Government, Ministers and officials who, once they have reached a decision, believe that they cannot go back on it. In this case, there are reasons for reconsidering the matter carefully.

I reiterate what I said on 5 April during the previous Adjournment debate. When the accident and emergency facilities at the Royal National orthopaedic hospital in Stanmore were closed about 12 years ago, it was reiterated repeatedly by the local agencies—the Minister will recall that there was a different structure then—and by Government spokesmen—and I can give chapter and verse on this any time the Minister cares to ask for it—that the local public did not need to be concerned about that, because the A and E facilities at Edgware general, which was just down the road, would take care of any substitution.

That important factor persuaded a number of local people reluctantly but gradually to accept the closure of the Royal National orthopaedic hospital's A and E unit—a successful unit, and one close to the M1 motorway. That closure was also a mistake, but it happened a long time ago, and we cannot go back on it.

In that Adjournment debate, if I may quote without taxing the House's patience, I said:

"I am worried about all aspects of the closure proposal. That is why others and I will be fighting hard and relentlessly to persuade the Government to change their mind. I am especially concerned about traffic congestion. It is an extremely congested area. If people are obliged to go to Barnet, Northwick Park"—

the main district general hospital in the middle of my constituency, and located alongside the town centre—

"or the Royal Free Hospitals, their journeys will take a great deal of time."—[*Official Report*, 5 April 1995; Vol. 257, c. 1792.]

There has been no significant reassurance by anyone that I care to recall—unless the Minister can disabuse me tonight—that that would not be so. The local public are extremely worried about that.

The hospital's A and E services are needed as much as the Barnet hospital must be expanded. Because it is in another region, I shall deliberately refrain from commenting too much in detail on Barnet hospital and its build-up, which I also welcome. No doubt there will be some referrals from my constituency to that hospital, although obviously not many. That would be welcomed by the local public, but it does not negate or reduce the primary requirement for Edgware general to remain a major multi-department medical facility in its own right, and not to be truncated drastically and tragically by closing its most important section—the accident and emergency facilities.

There is no reassurance so far on that point. It remains to be seen what the Government and others responsible for the decision will say in detail about these matters. Traffic congestion is one of the main issues that will arise again and again when these matters are considered.

There is no diminution in the force of the local campaign—I emphasise that. I am not at all reassured by any statements so far from the Wellhouse trust, London ambulance service representatives, other people involved and Department spokesmen. There has been no significant tangible reassurance about the provision of the necessary ambulance services that would take care of additional journeys to the other units instead of Edgware general. That is a glaring gap in the range of information that is needed to reassure the local public as the campaign forges ahead, trying to persuade the Government to change their mind on this important issue.

I referred to that matter last June, when there was a further development in the local campaign. There was an enormous expansion in public anger and resentment that the authorities would in no way reconsider the decision. As I mentioned in that Adjournment debate and elsewhere, the local public consultations, including those of the regional health authority, were extremely inadequate and people did not feel that their points were listened to with care and responded to in any way. They were brushed aside—that is the glaring truth of this sad saga.

After a further stage in the campaign, when a number of meetings took place, I suggested In my June statement:

"we have to stick together to try and persuade the Department of Health to change its mind. This is a gigantic task. We should be firmly united, not seeking narrow Party advantage."

The campaign is of the whole of the people, and has nothing to do with political parties in that direct detail.

The statement continues:

"It needs to be a sober campaign not an historical and emotional one."

In that campaign, local politicians should aim to achieve the central objective of persuading the Government to change their mind on the A and E facility, not seek to score points off each other or indulge in gesture politics, which will not save the accident and emergency facilities.

In that spirit, there were various questions from me and hon. Members in the summer months, seeking to get the Government to persuade Barnet health authority to change its recommendation and to reconsider these matters, as it could within its own powers, but we did not succeed, as is well known.

Autumn came. After continued campaigning, there was still no significant response from the Department to, for example, my question in a letter to the Secretary of State for Health on 21 July about traffic congestion and the excessive time needed for ambulance journeys Northwick Park hospital even with the blue light operating. Some informal tests have been done of those journey times, which were disturbingly long.

I again show to the Minister the local map produced by the Canons Park residents association campaign in its newsletter, an effective document. It produced a series of articles about the issue, continuously, up to the latest editions, showing again how congested the area around the Edgware general hospital is, how relatively uncongested the area around Barnet general hospital is, and the difficulty of those various journey times.

In July last year, the Prime Minister was kind enough to reply to my letter to him. I thought it was right to make some of these points to No. 10 Downing street. At the end of his letter, he confirmed that it was necessary to retain "significant" hospital services at Edgware. He did not go into detail—rightly, he left that to the Department and to his colleagues—but it is what "significant" means that is of major concern.

All the medical experts that I have talked to say in some detail say that, if we excise anything other than just the marginal A and E services in a modern A and E unit such as that at Edgware hospital, we inevitably undermine the provision of services in that hospital and its ultimate rationale. We could turn it into a sort of bucket hospital—if that is the right phrase, without alarming people excessively—that just starts running down.

I am sad to say that there are a few examples of the running down of facilities already as people psychologically start preparing for the ominous moment in May 1997, the scheduled date for the closure of this significant facility. They are starting to think of it as a much truncated unit offering a limited range of services.

There is still time, however, for all this to be reconsidered, without anyone being humiliated into a drastic climbdown or a change that is beyond all reasonable expectations. It would be absurd for anyone to expect the Government to say that they are completely reversing a decision that was taken after, I presume they would suggest, considerable thought, but it is the way in which the issue is reconsidered to try and achieve the right solution for the modern A and E facility that we still want at Edgware hospital in 1997 and beyond that is important. That is the key to what the Government can suggest to Barnet health authority and the Wellhouse Trust on how they should handle the matter and reconsider. None the less, I am aware of the absolute need to support the new managers of Wellhouse trust and not to humiliate or embarrass them, or to make them think that their role is being betrayed by a change that goes beyond their expectations for the detailed range of services that the modern hospital will offer.

I acknowledge that Barnet, with its expanded, modern, high-technology facilities, is vital, especially for people in the northern part of that borough. Again, I shall deliberately refrain from annoying my colleagues, if they read my words in *Hansard*, by commenting too much on what is happening outside my borough of Harrow.

Of course, Northwick Park hospital is central to our requirements in Harrow town centre. It also serves Brent, and takes patient referrals from as far as away as Ealing and beyond. However, Edgware general is in the middle of all those areas, and it should still be a significant major hospital for them, rather than being reduced, as it might be, to a low-facility unit.

The campaign continues. I pay tribute to the enormous power and effect of the Hands Off Our Hospitals campaign, and to all the people who have organised it. They have not given up; they have not reduced their activity and efforts. I shall bring to the Minister's attention information that we received recently through the campaign supporters' newsletter. There will be a campaign consultative meeting on 22 February, and another major rally, to engage the attention of all of the public in that area again, on 19 March, right in the heart of the Edgware general hospital area.

I understand the temptations for Ministers, bureaucrats and officials. If I were in their position, I should probably feel the same, and hope that attrition would account for the campaign, and that there would be a diminution in the intensity of feeling. But that is not happening. I must emphasise that to the Minister as strongly as I can. People want those significant facilities to remain. They want much more than the suggested replacement—that is, the minor accident treatment service now officially proposed by Wellhouse.

The consultations that the trust management said would be undertaken do not seem to have added up to much yet, although my colleagues and I have been offered several meetings. I do not decry that in any way, but I am not sure the trust is doing what it should for the local public.

There was an arresting headline in the local press recently. I hope that I am not showing too many exhibits tonight, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as if we were in a court of law, but we are dealing with a vital issue for the local population, and I am grateful for your indulgence. I should be happy to let the Minister have a copy of the 1 February edition of the *Edgware and Mill Hill Times*, whose headline is "Closure plans may be illegal".

I have been dealing with many other matters this week, so I have not had the chance to find out whether that charge has been refuted, from whatever quarter, so I quote it subject to those inevitable reservations. Underneath that startling headline is another: "CHC threatens legal action over lack of consultation on Edgware General". The article says:

"Barnet's patient watchdog has accused health chiefs of acting illegally over plans to close Casualty"—

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that is, the accident and emergency facility—

"and has warned it could take the matter to the courts.

Barnet Community Health Council . . . believes that Barnet Health Authority . . . is breaking the law by obstructing it in its duty to be consulted over health care changes."

Much more follows, and what the newspaper says must be of significant concern to the Department of Health when it considers what would be the only drastic reduction or elimination of a major facility in a significant NHS hospital on the outer London fringes. That, among other reasons, is why we feel so steamed up about it.

One reason why I have deliberately raised the subject now is that there are now rumours of possible second thoughts from the Department of Health, and of a possible reconsideration of some aspects. The Wellhouse trust management may be trying to engage the attention and sympathy of local GPs, by holding various consultations to try to find possible ways through the problems.

Provided that the present A and E facilities are to be retained in their basic and major form, any suggestion would be considered fairly and fully by the patient representatives, by the representatives and spokesmen of the Hands Off Our Hospitals campaign, by the local parliamentary representatives, by local councillors and by the many thousands of other local people involved.

It is now for the Government to take on board the serious fact that the campaign will not go away. The campaign has no narrow political axe to grind; it represents literal common-sense reality, and what the local public feel, aided by their medical advisors and by a range of powerful voices from GPs, surgeons and consultants, all of which say that the decision must be reconsidered.

A basic mistake was made. The profound consultation necessary was lacking. There was an unwillingness—possibly inadvertent but, unfortunately, probably deliberate—on the part of the regional health authority and the district health authority to consider the many and voluminous representations of local protestors.

Those people were not simply indulging in the normal knee-jerk reaction, without any consideration of the details, when medical facilities are threatened. The very location of the hospital provides the main reason for the continuing concern. There is an overriding need for the Government to think again and to work out how they can accommodate the demands from Members of Parliament and from the local public.

The campaign will not go away. It will continue. If the Secretary of State and his ministerial colleagues can give us comfort and say that the services will be maintained, the public will be reassured, even if there are to be some changes. I am speaking theoretically, because I do not want to raise the subject of change deliberately.

For obvious reasons, I refrain from making any specific suggestions tonight. But even if the main high-technology equipment is to be located at Barnet—one can understand the investment priorities of its new programme—none the less, despite that small reduction at the margin, the whole range of existing A and E facilities could be maintained.

There must be a way forward, a way in which the Government can meet the demands of the local public. If not, the campaign, the agitation—I use that word in a respectful sense—and the massive force of the combined voice of the people will continue, and I shall give it my full support all the way, as is my duty as a Member of Parliament.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can say something that will help, because the local press will be waiting for the *Hansard* report of the debate. I did not suggest that, but that is what I was told. This is a most important occasion. There is still more than a year before the fateful decision is to be made, and before there will be any further damaging rundown of the hospital. Alarming stories are already coming out. I hear messages about them every week, with examples of services that are just beginning to be reduced at the margins, because of the low morale of everybody involved and the plight of the staff, for whom I have much sympathy.

The Government now have a marvellous opportunity to seek to reassure us and to put a new dynamic into the future of the Edgware general hospital, by saying that the important A and E facilities will be kept—because, as I have explained, they make sense. So I look forward with great anticipation to my hon. Friend's words.

8.38 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) on his success in the ballot, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to debate what is undoubtedly an important matter. As always, my hon. Friend spoke forcefully and with eloquence in advocating the best possible health care for his constituents. He has, if I may say so, conducted a long and skilful campaign on the matter.

I should mention in passing that my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), who has also been assiduous in this matter, unfortunately cannot be here this evening. I know that he has also played a part in the long-running campaign.

I acknowledge the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East made forcibly about the strength of local feeling on the matter, which is probably running as high as it has been at any stage during the whole lengthy business. I can assure him that the Government are concerned about the matter. Ministerial colleagues and I have devoted a great deal of time and attention to the subject in recent months, and we want to ensure the best possible balance for the future provision in the area. I hope that my hon. Friend will take those commitments and assurances in the spirit in which they are given.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has recently met deputations about the future of Edgware hospital—including one led by my hon. Friend—and the matter has been the subject of debate in this House and in another place on a number of occasions. I also assure my hon. Friend that the Government's first priority, and that of the Secretary of State, is to put the interests of the patient first. As decisions are implemented and new decisions are taken, our guiding principle will be that the quality of service should be at the very least maintained, and wherever possible improved.

The changes already agreed at Edgware are designed to provide the people of Barnet and Edgware with a high-quality, improved clinical service for patients. The present split-site arrangements at the Wellhouse

NHS trust, with the inevitable duplication of facilities between the Barnet and Edgware sites, are not only inefficient, but significantly detrimental to good patient care. That is despite the dedication and hard work of the excellent medical and nursing staff at the Wellhouse trust. To ensure that the best health services possible are provided, patients need modern facilities in hospitals large enough to ensure appropriate levels of staffing and expertise. That is precisely what the development at Barnet general hospital is about.

The changes due to take place at Edgware and Barnet hospitals are part of a long-term programme of improvements to health services provided at the Wellhouse trust. They have been finalised only after an extensive and thorough process of consultation. Barnet health authority has been exemplary in involving the public in its deliberations through a series of public meetings, the distribution of leaflets and articles in the local press. It has gone to great lengths to explain how patients will benefit from the planned changes, and why change is necessary.

Inevitably, when change comes to much-loved local hospitals such as Edgware, there is great public concern. It is also unavoidable that, when changes to any local health services are determined, there will be some who find the new arrangements less convenient. I fully understand that. I say again, however, that we believe that the changes at Edgware and Barnet will lead to an improvement in patient care.

I now wish to refer to the implications for Edgware hospital, which are of such concern to my hon. Friend. Despite any change to its status that may ensue, Edgware hospital will continue to be a significant provider of health care in the area. I note the point that my hon. Friend made about a letter from my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, which stated that the hospital would be a significant provider of health care. He rightly asked what exactly was meant by the word "significant" in that context.

The Government mean that there will be an extensive provision of out-patient clinics, day-care services, a breast-screening centre and mental health services. These will ensure that the hospital continues to provide an extremely wide range of services. In addition, an accident service will continue at Edgware. My hon. Friend knows that the MATS centre—to use the jargon—was opened by the chief nursing officer in November 1995, and the majority of patients who currently look to Edgware for their health care needs will continue to find them there.

Decisions remain to be taken on the final pattern of services at Edgware. Consultation is under way on various proposals, including the treatment of the elderly and children on the Edgware site. The decisions that have already been taken—never mind those that may be taken following consultation—mean that around four out of every five patients currently attending Edgware will continue to be treated there.

I must also emphasise—quite apart from what I have said about existing and potential services—that the changes at Edgware hospital will not happen immediately. They will only take place once any redevelopment of Barnet general hospital and the expansion of services at Northwick Park and the Royal Free hospital have been completed, and improvements in the ambulance service have started to be delivered. All this is part of a coherent plan, and we must ensure that nothing happens until we are perfectly certain that all the other elements are in place.

The House will be aware that the redeveloped Barnet general hospital will provide the full range of acute services. I can assure the House that the facilities being developed there will be of the highest quality. The £29 million first phase of redevelopment work started in November last year. The second and final phase, costing £33 million, can now go ahead. Once this work has been completed, we will in effect have built an entirely new hospital, which will allow local people access to the highest quality specialist acute facilities. The new accident and emergency department at Barnet will be one of the most up-to-date in the country, capable of treating 70,000 patients a year to the highest clinical standards.

As Edgware hospital changes its role and becomes more of a local hospital, so local primary services will need to adapt to the different circumstances. It is an essential element of the plans that primary care services will be developed. Local GPs will need time to develop human and financial resources to manage the shift from secondary to primary care, and will need to be closely involved in the development of services on the Edgware site.

My hon. Friend did not mention the fact that, in order to facilitate these changes, the local primary health care development fund plans to invest £17 million over a five-year period to improve local primary care services. My hon. Friend knows that the Government believe that the health service should be primary care-led, so we attach great importance to bringing together hospital and primary care.

Projects at present under way include the extension of nursing in the home for the terminally ill, improvements in GP surgeries and an outreach ophthalmology clinic. Projects planned for the future include increases in community nursing staff, further training of GPs to carry out minor surgery, and the introduction of community physiotherapy to improve the care of diabetics. I believe that these developments provide an excellent framework in which to ensure the success of the new Edgware hospital.

My hon. Friend also referred to the problems of transport in the area. I am aware that specific concerns have been expressed about the problem. I do, of course, acknowledge that some patients from the Edgware area will have great difficulty in travelling to Barnet. For this reason, a free NHS bus service will operate between the sites for those patients who require services that are being concentrated at the Barnet site. Special arrangements will be made for elderly and infirm patients who are less mobile. It must be recognised, however, that the majority of the services currently provided at Edgware will remain.

Particular concern has been expressed about the problems of transport in relation to accident and emergency provision. To address these concerns, the health authority intends to provide additional investment over and above the significant increase already agreed this year. Two additional ambulances and crews will be funded at an extra cost of £320,000.

As a former Transport Minister, I have considerable sympathy for my hon. Friend's point about traffic congestion in the area. He said that that was a serious matter that had not been fully addressed. We take that

[Mr. John Horam]

point seriously, and understand local concern that problems could be caused at the congested bottom end of the M1. I will look at that point.

Mr. Dykes: We are concerned about the specific length of the journey from Edgware general to Northwick Park. The actual time would be a minimum of 45 to 50 minutes in normal traffic conditions, and that is far too long.

Mr. Horam: I hear what my hon. Friend says, and that adds to my concerns about traffic congestion. I will look at that point.

We believe that the proposals approved for the development of hospital services for Edgware and Barnet will lead to improved health care for the local community. They are being brought forward after lengthy consideration and consultation—which has not yet been completed—and will allow Barnet health authority to meet its statutory duty to ensure that residents of the area are provided with a comprehensive health service meeting the full range of their needs.

Some of the current facilities are below the standards that we believe patients should be able to expect. We are engaged in an effort to improve conditions for the people of the Harrow and Barnet area. We believe, therefore, that, if the plans are properly and fully implemented, taking into account the additional consultation, which is in train, that part of London will have facilities that will match the very best in the national health service.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eleven minutes to Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 9 February 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Rail Privatisation

9.34 am

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Let me open the sitting first.

Mr. Skinner: My Dad used to say, "You're on the plate before the meat."

Madam Speaker, I wonder whether the Government have made any request of you to indicate that at 11 o'clock—the usual time that statements are made—they will make a statement on the humiliation of the rail position this morning, now that the London-Tilbury-Southend line appears to be at the centre of a massive scandal due to the privatisation of British Rail. Surely the humiliation should stop. Can we demand that the Minister will be here to account for himself, and abandon that daft process of privatisation? I have just been informed that my hon. Friends on the Front Bench are making a similar request.

Madam Speaker: I have not heard that the Government are seeking to make a statement at 11 o'clock, but of course there is still time for a submission to be made to me.

Orders of the Day

Employment (Upper Age Limits in Advertisements) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.35 am

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second Time.

It gives me great pleasure to move the Second Reading of the Bill. First, I thank Age Concern—particularly its parliamentary officer—which was extremely helpful when I was preparing the measure.

I want to make age discrimination as unacceptable in jobs as race, gender and disability discrimination. My Bill deals with only one aspect of age discrimination—upper age limits in job advertisements.

I entirely accept that age discrimination would not disappear simply as a result of this measure. Employers who are determined to discriminate over age will continue to be able to do so. Nevertheless, although the Bill is limited and modest, I believe that it will undermine the type of blatant discrimination that continues to exist. It will follow developments that have taken place in some other countries, and will, moreover, show legislative disapproval for the first time ever of age discrimination, as previous Acts of Parliament have done with race, gender and, since 1995, disability.

Everyone, including everyone present in the Chamber, knows of the acute difficulties that confront many people in middle age who, having been made redundant, find that, time and again, however well qualified they are, the door is firmly closed because they have reached their mid-40s, let alone committed the crime of being over 50. It is almost unbelievable, but true, that, in some cases, discrimination begins even in the late 30s.

The Select Committee on Employment, in a report published a little while ago, was left in no doubt of the difficulties that confront middle-aged people. The Select Committee found that such discrimination over age was widely practised by people who are themselves in that age group. That is not true, I suppose, in the main, about the other types of discrimination that I mentioned. To that extent, it is interesting to note that people who say, in effect, that, if one reaches one's 40s, let alone one's 50s, one is not really able to do the job are often themselves in that age group and would not dream of saying that they are unable to undertake their senior responsibilities because of their age.

Indeed, as we know, and as the Select Committee mentioned, Cabinet Ministers and permanent secretaries in the Civil Service rarely reach those positions before their late 40s.

That is certainly true in general of the business and commercial sectors. When I returned to the House after some years absence, I was approaching 46. Whatever Conservative opponents may have said about my politics—they may have expressed displeasure at my return—one thing was certain: no one suggested that I was too old for the job. That is not done in politics, any more than it is done in relation to senior positions in the commercial and business sectors.

[Mr. David Winnick]

The references to age in job advertisements vary. The favourite age range when an upper limit is mentioned tends to be between 27 and 38. Advertisements, certainly those in serious newspapers and job supplements that regularly appear, often state that the ideal candidate should have various qualifications and fall within the age range that I mentioned. I find that unacceptable.

Let us suppose that, instead of mentioning an age range, an advertisement stated—if the law permitted it—that the ideal candidate should be white or should be non-Jewish or should be a man, when there was clearly no reason why a woman should not do the job. An outcry would rightly occur, and I would be among those protesting.

We know that discrimination on the grounds of race and gender has become unacceptable as well as unlawful, but at present it seems perfectly in order to state an age range and consider it acceptable that anyone over that age will not be considered, even where there is not the slightest reason to believe that someone over the age of 40 could not do the job. The time has come for us, as a House, to give protection to our fellow citizens who consider themselves qualified to do a job and do not believe that age should be a barrier.

Everyone should be considered on their merits. It is surely wrong to say that people cannot even be considered and their curriculum vitae will not even be looked at because they are over a certain age. Surely we should not continue into the next century with an increasing number of people in their 40s and 50s being discriminated against in that way.

A survey carried out by Labour Research—I am sure that Conservative Members know that that organisation is not connected with the Labour party—found that more than 40 per cent. of job advertisements of all sorts in the national, regional and local press and other media outlets, excluded applicants in their 40s. A survey that has since been taken of national papers, including *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Telegraph*, found that the number of discriminatory advertisements of the sort mentioned in the Bill amounted to between 14 and 17 per cent.—a minority, but still far too many. As I have said, if the law permitted the advertisements to mention not age disqualification but other forms of discrimination, we know what the reaction would be.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has done any research. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman's decision to introduce the Bill has had a dramatic effect on the figures. Yesterday, I counted the number of advertisements in *The Daily Telegraph*, which is probably the most popular national newspaper in terms of job advertising, and found that 18 out of 554—3.2 per cent.—mentioned an age. Half those advertisements stated that they preferred a certain age range rather than stipulating an upper age limit.

Mr. Winnick: The hon. Gentleman has made his point, and the fact that *The Daily Telegraph* carries fewer such advertisements is welcome. I am bound to welcome that, as I am against such discrimination in the first place. But other recent surveys show that, if one considers the papers together, and does not single out just one, the figure is between 14 and 17 per cent., as I have just said. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will look at other papers, not just *The Daily Telegraph*.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Cheryl Gillan): The hon. Gentleman has just mentioned research carried out by Labour Research. Will he acknowledge the research that was carried out in January 1995, to which I think the hon. Gentleman referred in his article in *The House Magazine*, which showed that, of the 5,368 job advertisements, only 217—4 per cent.—specifically excluded the over-40s? Some 96 per cent. of those advertisements had no age limit.

Mr. Winnick: I shall be interested to see how the Minister will respond to what I have to say. I doubt whether Conservative Members will deny the seriousness of the situation and the fact that age discrimination continues. I shall quote the hon. Lady's predecessor, and I think that the Minister is indicating that she recognises the seriousness of the situation—she is nodding in agreement. Consideration of the serious papers with job supplements shows that the percentage of discriminatory advertisements is along the lines that I have suggested.

The seriousness of the position was made clear by the then Minister when she replied to an Adjournment debate on 23 May last year. In that debate, the then Minister of State, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), who is now at the Home Office—I do not think that anyone would describe her as wet or liberal—said that about 40 per cent. of employers openly admitted to practising some form of age discrimination. She went on to say that that figure included only the employers who openly admitted to such discrimination.

I am sure that the present Minister will not disassociate herself from what her predecessor said only last year, on 23 May. That figure illustrates the degree of age discrimination that continues in this country. Nearly 30 per cent. of those aged between 45 and 59 have been unemployed for more than one year. Some 18 per cent. of unemployed claimants in that age group have been out of work for more than four years. Those are high figures, and the position would have been different some years ago.

I wish to mention another factor. In doing so, I hope that I shall not antagonise the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), who I think has come to support my measure—the last thing I want to do is antagonise Conservative Members who have come to offer their support.

It is disappointing that appointments within the European Union reveal acute age discrimination. The European Union has suggested that it opposes age discrimination and would like steps to be taken against it, if not legislative action. But age restrictions are regularly placed on vacancies in most grades in the European Union—35 is the age limit in the open competition for jobs. As I look around the Chamber, I see few people present who would be able to apply for such jobs.

In order to qualify for one job—an assistant administrator based in London—the applicant must have been born after 1 July 1963. The same is true of a number of jobs in the European Union, which brings me back to my earlier point: those who discriminate often fall within the age group being discriminated against. The present

President of the Commission was 57 when he took office in 1995, one of his predecessors was 52, and his immediate predecessor was 60 when he took office in 1985. The present Commissioners are aged 60, 60, 52, 52 and 55. They do not seem to believe that, because they are above a certain age, they cannot hold the most senior and leading positions within the European Union.

It is an odd state of affairs when, on the one hand, someone who has turned 35 is considered to be over the hill and apparently unable to do the job mentally, physically or for some other reason, while, on the other hand, it is perfectly all right for the most senior positions to be held by those aged 60 or over. That is a contradiction and a form of hypocrisy—which, in fairness to the European Union, is not confined to that institution, as I have said.

I know—not because of any private conversations that we have had, but because of a parliamentary reply that I have received—that the Minister will argue against the measure today. Like her predecessor, she will say that the Government oppose age discrimination, and I do not question that fact. I question a great deal of what the Government say, but I do not dispute the fact that the Government oppose age discrimination.

The argument between the supporters of my measure and the Government is not based on the fact that one group supports age discrimination and the other does not: it is a question of how we will address that problem. I anticipate that the Minister will say that voluntary persuasion is required. She will say that we do not want more regulations and more legislation: the Government want to persuade employers that they are wrong to discriminate on the basis of age.

I do not believe that that approach will work. If I did, I would not have introduced the measure. The competitive nature of the media is such that newspapers and magazines will be most reluctant to refuse to publish such employment advertisements if they believe that their rivals will pick up the lost trade.

I can understand the explanation that advertising directors at some of the leading newspapers and magazines will give for their decisions. They will say that, although it is rather unfortunate and they do not agree with such discrimination, their rivals will pick up the lost trade if they take a unilateral decision to drop the advertisements. They are in a very competitive business, and I can understand that point of view—however much I disagree with it.

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): I agree that an awful lot of work must be done to persuade employers not to indulge in age discrimination. Given the hon. Gentleman's position, I wonder why his Bill has such a narrow focus. It refers to only one small aspect of a much wider problem. I have some difficulty coming to terms with the Bill's extremely narrow focus.

Mr. Winnick: It is rather strange for me to be accused by Conservative Members of not going far enough in my political actions. Perhaps it is the first time in my political life that the Conservatives have not accused me of being too extreme. I do not know whether that will improve my political image or lead to deselection—fortunately, I have already been reselected.

I take the hon. Gentleman's point very seriously. When I won fourth place in the ballot for private Members' Bills, I had already decided what I intended to do. I knew that, if I tried to introduce more comprehensive legislation, the Government would automatically say no. Ministers would refer to the cost of bringing discrimination issues before tribunals, and an open season would be declared on my Bill.

Therefore, I decided to concentrate on one aspect: advertisements. I have already acknowledged that it is a limited and modest step. However, as a Back Bencher, one must often limit oneself to a very modest legislative first step.

I assure the hon. Gentleman—I am sure that he will believe me—that my measure has met with general approval around the country. Some people have adopted the hon. Gentleman's attitude, which I understand perfectly. Others have taken a different attitude: they have realised that it will cost hardly any public money to deal only with advertisements, and they believe that the Government should support this reasonable and necessary measure. I do not believe that I am wrong in dealing with the problem in that way.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Temperamentally, I support the hon. Gentleman's Bill, and perhaps all hon. Members should declare an interest in its passage. However, can the hon. Gentleman inform the House whether we would be leading or trailing comparable countries by introducing a legislative requirement of that kind?

Mr. Winnick: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's intervention. He has anticipated my remarks, and I shall come to that question in a moment.

I am sure that the Minister is aware that one magazine has taken unilateral action. *People Management* magazine has not carried any age discriminatory advertisements since the beginning of this year. I welcome that fact, and I congratulate the magazine. However, it cannot be said that voluntary action has worked, because that is the only example. If my Bill does not become law as a result of the Government's action, I doubt whether, next year or the year after, any hon. Member will be able to say, "*People Management* took the first step in 1996, and look what has happened since." Although it is good news in that instance, I do not believe that voluntary action will work across the board.

People Management magazine did not base its decision on the percentage of age discriminatory advertisements that it carried—which may have been only 3 or 5 per cent—it decided that it was a matter of principle: it is wrong to discriminate. People should be considered according to their merits. I wish that other publications would take similar action, but I doubt it.

The Confederation of British Industry will no doubt be referred to in the debate. However, I have a letter from the Federation of Small Businesses, which represents some 85,000 small firms. It states that the federation does not oppose my Bill, and it does not believe that the action that I am proposing would impose any burdens on small businesses. It goes on to say that the legislation may provide a watershed in changing attitudes. I am pleased about that response, as it shows that the commercial and business sector is not as hostile as some might think.

Turning to the point raised by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), Ministers are eager to play down the effect of anti-age discriminatory

[Mr. Winnick]

legislation in other countries—particularly the United States. The standard response—which was given in the Adjournment debate last year—is that such legislation has not worked elsewhere, so why should it work here? The discrimination that we are debating today is outlawed in the United States. However, Ministers continue to state that such legislation has not done much good—I am not sure that the present American Administration, or previous ones, would take the same attitude.

In its booklet entitled "An International Overview", the Employment Service concedes that there is some evidence that the potential exists for legislation, such as that in the United States, to have a positive effect. It states that the legislation is

"causing employers"—

obviously, those in the United States—

"to reconsider job evaluation and descriptions in order to use objective criteria—rather than arbitrary age criteria".

Although Ministers and the Government are determined not to follow the United States example, the Employment Service has conceded that point. Many in the United States agree that the legislation has not worked wonders—middle-aged people continue to be discriminated against—but that discrimination is much less widespread than it would be otherwise. Moreover, those in their 40s or early 50s are not the first to be made redundant. That is a positive step, and I believe that we should follow suit.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Has not the precedent been set by introducing sex and race discrimination legislation in the House? That legislation has not eliminated sex and race discrimination, but it is symbolic of where we stand on the issue.

Mr. Winnick: My hon. Friend's point is most important, and I was just about to deal with it. I entered the House at the same time as he did, and I was there in the mid-1960s when we were considering extending the legislation. The Labour Government had at first passed a mild Act on race discrimination. But before that, when the Conservative Government were in office, they argued time and time again against any form of legislation to deal with racial discrimination.

When Fenner Brockway, before my time, tabled repeated ten-minute Bills, the Government's response was, "Yes, race discrimination is wrong and unacceptable, and causes pain and injury to those involved. It should not be part of a civilised society—but legislation is not the answer." They asked, "Why should people go for jobs where they are not wanted?" But look what has happened since then.

Let those who are against legislation think what things were like in the 1960s, when employers in my then constituency said to me, "We have no prejudice ourselves, Mr. Winnick, but our customers do, when they come into our banks, insurance offices and so on." But now, if we went to any bank, insurance office or building society, the idea that someone in the queue might say, "Oh no, I refuse to be served by that person because she is of Asian origin; she is black," would have us sending for the men in the white coats. See how attitudes have changed.

Could anyone, no matter how much he or she opposes legislation, say with hand on heart that, even with all the difficulties that remain, we would have made the same progress on race without legislation? Would voluntary action have worked? We know the answer, do we not?

The same applies to gender. Fortunately, women now have more opportunities in the work force. There is a changing pattern in the work force—

Mr. Ian Bruce: I see that the hon. Gentleman is coming close to the end of his speech, so will he tell us how he sees the Bill as being defined? Will words such as "junior" and "senior" be outlawed? How does he see the technicalities? We all heard recently that someone who advertised for a "paper boy" was pulled up under sex discrimination legislation even though he already employed girls and boys in exactly the same way. It is important to understand how the hon. Gentleman would treat the words "junior" and "senior". I shall certainly touch on that aspect in my speech.

Mr. Winnick: To some extent that is a Committee point, but it is an important one. If the hon. Gentleman reads clause 2, he will see that the Bill

"does not apply to any advertisement for employment where there are physical, medical or other similar grounds on the basis of which it would be reasonable for any person to conclude that the job in question could not adequately be performed by persons who had passed an age limit".

If the hon. Gentleman wishes to be constructive—I am sure he does—and if he says that he agrees with the Bill in principle but perhaps it needs tightening up, he will know that that is what the Committee stage is for. If I am fortunate enough to secure a Second Reading for my Bill, I am sure that we can have many interesting and constructive arguments about how to change clause 2 and add to it.

However, even as it stands, clause 2 shows that, as with race and gender, I accept entirely that, for certain jobs, such as those in the armed forces and the police, no one will suggest that we start recruiting people in their early 50s. Common sense dictates otherwise. I do not want to create bureaucratic difficulties where they are not necessary. I want to undermine age discrimination, but obviously I work on the basis that for certain jobs, with age as with race and gender, legislation should provide exemptions.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I hesitate to interrupt the flow of my hon. Friend's powerful and moving speech, but as he already been interrupted, and as he referred to Fenner Brockway, I cannot resist. I was there at the time, and Fenner Brockway was widely dismissed—not only on the Conservative side of the House. That reinforces my hon. Friend's point and shows how such actions can influence attitudes, perhaps not tomorrow, but certainly the day after tomorrow.

Mr. Winnick: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We all have the highest respect for Fenner Brockway. If I may be party political for a moment, I pay tribute to him as a lifelong socialist, dedicated to the cause of working people at home and abroad. So appalled was he by the fact that anyone could be discriminated against on the ground of race, and especially that it should happen to so many people, that he took action that may, for all I know,

have undermined his position in his constituency and led to his defeat in 1964. Fortunately—although I am normally no upholder of the House of Lords—he continued to play an active role in public life. Long may he be remembered.

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, especially as he has allowed so many interventions in his important speech. He has the sympathy and support of many Conservative Members. But why has he not been much more positive in his proposed legislation? He could require advertisements to declare that experience would be valued, which would affect people with experience—older people, perhaps. Why has he not taken that on? Why does he not challenge the people who practise blatant discrimination in advertisements by saying that, if they want to exclude older people, they must declare the reason? No one would admit to blatant discrimination, so that would form an effective ban, and would be positive.

Mr. Winnick: The hon. Gentleman may have a point, but how one would write it into legislation is another matter. All that I would say to him and to the Minister is, just give me a Second Reading, and I shall be responsive to constructive ideas in Committee. I shall be more responsive than any Minister in any Government could hope to be.

However, I suspect that there are already one or two Members—certainly not the hon. Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth), and probably not anyone who has already intervened in my speech—preparing to oppose the closure and to go in for all that business organised by the Whips. In saying that, I do not mean be offensive about the Government Whip who is here at the moment, the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway). Indeed, he initiated the Adjournment debate.

All I say is, give me a Second Reading and everyone will see what a responsive and constructive attitude I shall take to all those suggestions.

Mr. Ian Bruce *rose—*

Mr. Winnick: I shall give way for the last time, and then I must conclude.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman is being very tolerant. He answered a question very well, but it was not the question that I asked. I suspect that he will not get a Committee stage for his Bill, so it is important to discuss such matters on the Floor of the House. What I was saying, in a constructive manner, was: what about the words "junior" and "senior"? Will the legislation affect only people who specify an actual age in their advertisement, or will people have to start becoming very politically correct in their language? Such measures are often damned in the detail.

Mr. Winnick: I do not want to be too politically correct, but the most blatant form of discrimination is that exercised by the upper age limit. Let us deal with that. If the hon. Gentleman is one of those who will try to ensure that the Bill receives a Second Reading today, and if he comes into the Lobby with me if there is a vote on the closure, as I suspect there will be, I hope that he will be a member of the Committee arising from his participation. Then we shall see if we can reach agreement.

I have two more points to make before I finish. The first is about the changing pattern of the work force. My Front-Bench colleagues will touch on the fact that the number of people in their 40s and 50s is increasing; that fact should not be overlooked. There are more now than there were 10 years ago, and the numbers will continue to rise into the next century.

I can cite two examples that I have come across in the past week. Someone in my constituency, who is on the opposite side to me politically, said that he had been made redundant after 26 years. He is an accountant, and he said that, when he lost his job very recently, he knew what the problems would be. He knew that, however qualified he was—obviously he is highly qualified after so many years' experience in his firm—he would have difficulty simply because of his age.

The other example arose yesterday, when I was doing a television interview at Millbank. When it had finished, the cameraman said that he was interested in what I had said, because he had been made redundant from another company at the age of 52. He now does freelance work, but he would like another permanent job. Time and time again, because he was over 50 when he was made redundant, he has found out the difficulties, to his cost.

In the interview I had mentioned the effects on pensions, and he took up that point, because the problems are only too real when those who have been made redundant and are out of work for years on end reach retirement age. What sort of pension can they expect?

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle) *rose—*

Mr. Winnick: I said that I had given way for the last time, but as the hon. Gentleman is bound to oppose my Bill, let us hear his point of view.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman has made some powerful comments about age discrimination, but he has not addressed the weak spot of his argument. If an employer is determined to discriminate against age, how will mere regulation of advertisements stop him? Is the measure warranted, given the small number of advertisements to which my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) referred? Is it philosophically right to regulate good practice? Does not such regulation lead to more unemployment, as in Spain and France?

Mr. Winnick: I said at the beginning that, if my Bill becomes law, that will not itself stop age discrimination—but that is not a criticism of the measure. If my Bill were enacted and age discrimination continued regardless, that is a strong argument for more comprehensive legislation. Whether the hon. Gentleman would support it is another matter. He certainly will not be supporting my Bill, because we know his political views.

I am a realist, so I know that, if the Government are absolutely determined to destroy a private Member's Bill, they have the means—if not on Second Reading then on Report, when hon. Members can speak endlessly, and the measure runs out of parliamentary time.

[Mr. Winnick]

Whatever the outcome today, we have begun a debate on a main form of discrimination. Race, gender or disability discrimination is protected against in law. We are left with the fourth main form of discrimination, which penalises and punishes many people who have reached their 40s and 50s, and who have no protection in law. The time will come, I hope not too far into the future, when the House will acknowledge its responsibilities to those people, and will pass the necessary legislation to give some protection to those who have as much right to work as we do.

10.11 am

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) made an eloquent and interesting speech. If one were to take 100 different political issues, most people would bet against the hon. Gentleman and myself being on the same side on more than a handful. However, the hon. Gentleman has always been a hard man on terrorism, so consequently I have always had a soft spot for him. Many of us could make a speech on either side of today's argument, but I will speak in support of the hon. Member, not least because I have a soft spot for him.

I am temperamentally unsympathetic to the politically correct. I take the view of the Scottish judge that the phrase "a change for the better" is a contradiction in terms. Just as constituents say that they disapprove of Members of Parliament in general but like their own Member of Parliament, or disapprove of the ways of education but approve of the school that their children attend, in this instance I have some limited experience, so I am able to discount the politically correct.

For better or worse, I was the first headhunter in the United Kingdom. I was not the architect of headhunting, because it had been practised in other countries before—just as I was not the architect of the national lottery. One could staff a pretty good practice with the people who claim to have been the architect of the national lottery, but I can claim to have been the master mason in both cases.

Headhunting started in this country 35 years ago, and the industry now has a volume of £100 million. That is a much slower rate of growth than the national lottery, but we started the headhunting industry with £2,000 of equity capital and a £2,000 loan. On the strength of that acorn, the oak has grown to a reasonable size. That experience is not strictly relevant, because headhunting primarily involves approaching individuals direct rather than recruitment advertising.

When we started that business, assignments would almost certainly be handled by the client company's chief executive. Over the past 35 years, the centre of gravity has gradually shifted to the personnel department, which would now let many such contracts. I can understand the attraction for a personnel department—here I touch on advertisements—of a Procrustean sieve to specify an age limit and to discount and discard applicants who fall outside it. I am not suggesting that the Institute of Personnel Management would be a foe of the Bill, but I acknowledge that the present practice affords employers a certain convenience.

I spent some of my time in a headhunting firm in the United States. My recollection of that era is that one could not even put one's date of birth on a curriculum vitae, because that was potentially agist. That was a narrow point, because one could always work out from the arithmetic the person's likely date of birth—just as one can use the arithmetic of a CV to demonstrate fraud when someone claims that they have done more than they have.

We live in an era in which the relationship between employer and employees has visibly shifted. There was a time when an individual could join a clearing bank, for example, in the belief that, if he kept his nose clean, he would have a job until retirement. As the climate and competitive nature of banking has changed, that unspoken contract has changed, too.

It is a disagreeable experience for people who joined a bank in their early 20s to discover in their 40s or 50s that they are being made redundant, when their own sense of the contract was that they would remain employed until retirement. The hon. Gentleman's Bill responds to the climate of the time, and the uncertainties that have been bestowed on employment practices.

The circumstances are as the hon. Gentleman described. It is worth dwelling on the perception of people who are made redundant in terms of the particular characteristic that he is seeking to outlaw. I once had some ambitions to join the Army, but my knee was damaged in national service, and I spent a long time recovering. I have no difficulty understanding the debilitating effect of that which Tennyson described:

"To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!"

The experience is made worse if the individual feels that society is conspiring against him through advertising of the kind that the hon. Gentleman described.

There is a practical and positive point to be made about the hon. Gentleman's measure, which exists at national and micro-economic local level. A colleague in my former firm took the view that one should listen to the client, write it all down, then decide for oneself what the client needed, and locate the individual who would fulfil one's personal specifications. One needs a strong personality and a remarkable success record to sustain that way of working, because one would clearly not be delivering the kind of individual for whom the client had asked. However, my colleague demonstrated on a number of occasions how successful his approach could be.

As each of us grows older and passes the years at which Keats, Mozart and Raphael died—all under the age of 40—we must wince at the scale of their achievements in comparison with our own up to that age. On the other side the balance sheet, we know that Sophocles, Titian and Thomas Hobbes all lived to the age of 100, and the scale of their achievements was spread over a much longer canvas.

When Madam Gorbachev visited Chequers for the first time, she went into the library and said what a great privilege it was to be in the country of Hobbes and Locke. Those of us who heard that story thought how extraordinarily well informed she was on the affairs of the Surrey county cricket club. However, I think that she was in fact thinking of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke rather than of Tony Lock and Jack Hobbs.

Having said that, Jack Hobbs can be adduced in support of my argument. Those of us who are cricketers and are coming towards the end of our playing careers take constant encouragement from the fact that, of the 197 first-class centuries that Hobbs made—the largest number ever made in the history of the game—99 were made before the age of 40 and 98 were made after.

I said that I was uneasy about the politically correct, and I can see the slippery slope down which we might find ourselves going.

Mr. Leigh: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the main purport of Locke's philosophy was that virtue must grow within the individual, and that it cannot be imposed on him from outside by the state or by another person?

Mr. Brooke: I give my hon. Friend an exceptionally good mark for the quality of his intervention. However, we could be moving down a slippery slope in terms of this type of legislation.

On the rare occasions when I ran advertisements myself, I always included the sentence, "A sense of humour would help". I once sat on an Air Canada plane next to a man who was writing letters, and his letterhead bore the title "professional humorist." I was tempted to engage him in conversation to discover whether his conversation was different from that of other men. I can see that, if there is such a thing as the society of anti-humorists, the phrase, "A sense of humour would help," might well be banned from advertisements as well.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North has made a persuasive case for his Bill. As an olive branch to personnel departments, I shall say that, if anyone were ever to produce a private Member's Bill to standardise the preparation of curriculum vitae in this country so that one could read all of them against a common last instead of having them go all over the place as they currently do, it would be a considerable contribution to national productivity, and I would support that Bill. In the short term, in the interim and in the meantime, I shall support the hon. Gentleman's private Member's Bill.

10.22 am

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you called on me to speak, you might have said, "Follow that vignette of a speech made by the right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke)". Let us note that it was a strongly supportive speech, for all its charm and erudition. The right hon. Member used the expression "Procrustean sieve". I do not pretend to be any authority on Procrustean sieves, but I must tell the Whips, if they have Procrustean sieves: for heaven's sake, let the private Member's Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) trickle through it, and nip in the bud any objections at 2.30 pm today or whenever these things happen. This Bill will not cost money, and it is a step in the right direction.

There is another consideration. If private Members' Bills that have come high up the ballot are rejected almost as a matter of course, it brings this form of parliamentary procedure into some disrepute. People who come high up the ballot and produce Bills that are of good will and limited—as my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North sensibly and eloquently said—should be given the benefit of any doubt. It would be a great pity—I shall put it no higher—if this Bill did not see the light of a Committee stage.

I should like to voice the concerns of Age Concern Scotland in this sphere. Age Concern Scotland is a very serious and sensible organisation, which has said that one job in every 10 advertisements in local and national newspapers is likely to bar older people. It believes that that discrimination should be outlawed, and has asked Scottish Members of Parliament to help.

Because many of my colleagues would have liked to be here but have prior commitments, I am authorised to speak on their behalf. I should say that I have spoken to them about it, and that I am not speaking only on my own behalf in this matter. We support, strongly and out of conviction, the private Member's Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North.

Age Concern Scotland has written in a letter to me:

"The Government estimates that 40 per cent. of employers discriminate on grounds of age. A Gallup survey carried out on behalf of Brook Street employment consultancy found that 70 per cent. of workers aged over 50 believed they have been turned down for a job because they were too old, even though they had the right skills . . .

Older people in employment are faced with early retirement and voluntary redundancy to get them out of the work place. Age discrimination makes it extremely difficult for them to get back into work. Nearly 50 per cent. of men over 60 are now"—

in the Scottish context—

"unemployed. They may face years on a low income, using up any savings that they may have put aside for their retirement, and unable to build up adequate pension entitlement. This also wastes valuable skills and experience which otherwise could be contributing to the country's economy."

In our constituency work, time and again, we see people's sad and often pathetic reaction to the belief that they no longer have functions for their skills. My hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) knows very well—much more than I ever shall—about the shipbuilding industry. There are people, not only on Clydeside but in other yards, who have built up considerable skills. This Bill could certainly help them.

Legislation outlawing age bars in job advertisements would provide a positive sign that discrimination is unacceptable. It would encourage employers to rethink their policies, and accept that, irrespective of age, every person should have the right to be considered for work in relation to their needs, capabilities and wishes. Business can easily adjust to job advertisements that exclude age limits, in the same way in which they have adjusted to job advertisements that do not discriminate on the grounds of race or sex.

This will cost little or nothing to implement. A *Financial Times* editorial of 11 November 1995 noted:

"little harm and some good may result from banning job advertisements which include age ceilings."

If that is the considered view of the *Financial Times*, surely the Whips can give my hon. Friend the benefit of the doubt.

The Government's overall policy is to continue to oppose any legislative proposals, favouring instead voluntary codes of practice that seek to change attitudes. This Bill is more likely to achieve a change of attitudes. There is a need for this Bill, which the right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South has eloquently described. Again I ask the Whips: call off those hounds and do not object.

Age Concern Scotland continues:

"The Carnegie Third Age Programme has promoted a voluntary initiative with many of Britain's biggest companies to prevent age discrimination. In co-operation with the CBI, major employers such as Tesco, Nationwide Building Society, John Laing, WH Smith and

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

other large and/or public companies have committed themselves to address age discrimination. A total of 93 of Britain's largest employers—90 per cent. of those who replied to a Carnegie questionnaire—committed themselves to not using age limits in advertising. But Age Concern still believes that as well as the carrot of a voluntary code, a legislative stick is also needed to ensure that attitudes amongst all employers change. A Bill outlawing age limits in job adverts would start to challenge attitudes towards the recruitment of older people, and allow employers the benefits of keeping older workers in employment."

I shall not make a long speech, but I should like to end with a passionately felt thought. The right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South and my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North were both personal, so perhaps I may be forgiven for being so.

My director of studies when I was a student, the then young Noel Annan, decided, because of staff shortages, to send four of us to be supervised by the late Sir Frank Adcock, professor of Greek, who was nearer 80 than 70 at the time. Despite that, his mind was still as acute as it had been when he was the editor of the "Cambridge Ancient History"—and when, in the view of his contemporaries, he was arguably the best decrypter at Bletchley during the war. He thoroughly enjoyed this job: he was worth a guinea a minute.

I asked Sir Frank later why he had taken so much trouble with us. He answered, "What else have I got to do at my age? Teaching gives me a function; it adds value to going on living." I suspect that many others would echo that. Perhaps I was privileged to have such a distinguished supervisor. It is noteworthy that people in their late teens—in my case, because of national service, my early 20s—often take more easily to someone of their grandfather or grandmother's age than to those who are younger. That is why these people should be used.

When I was elected to this House in 1962, Her Majesty the Queen sent 200 telegrams of congratulation to those who had reached their 100th birthday. The other day, the Queen's private secretary, Sir Robert Fellowes, told me that 3,000 such telegrams were sent out in 1994. Clearly there has been a major change in work and life expectancy.

There is a widespread feeling that people can and should be used far beyond the time when their chronological age might dictate otherwise. In any case, I am not a great believer in chronological age. I know some Members of Parliament who are scarcely over 30 but whose real age appears to be nearer 70. *[Interruption.]* We are not going to indulge in names today—that would be dangerous. There are others near the chronological age of 70 whose general liveliness makes them seem less than half that age—

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Like my father.

Mr. Dalyell: My hon. Friend's father is nearer 80 than 70, but anyone who talks to Hugh McCartney will realise that he is as subversive, irreverent and lively as he ever was.

Mr. McCartney: He is making a comeback.

Mr. Dalyell: Many people make comebacks, but it is important to keep them fully in use as well.

Professor Knops, who teaches mathematics in Heriot-Watt university at Edinburgh, runs a project concerned with special tutorial facilities for those who find difficulties in this increasingly esoteric and complex subject. The same is done for chemical engineering students. Older people, in short, can build up the confidence of students. Although it might be argued that that is not directly related to advertising, I am concerned to change the atmosphere.

Last night I was invited to a meeting that included seven fellows of Peterhouse in Cambridge. Knowing that my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North intended to present his Bill today, I discussed it, and discovered that there was overwhelming support for it. Indeed, there is strong support for the Bill at every level in teaching.

The hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) is pointing to his watch, telling me to shut up. Obedience, of course, is my great quality, but I would plead with him and other Conservative Members to get hold of their Whips and keep them silent at 2.30 pm.

10.37 am

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I certainly hope that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) did not think I was being discourteous. If he did, I apologise—it was just the usual Friday morning problem of everyone wanting to speak.

I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me early in the debate, because I must ask for the indulgence of the House. I have to go to another appointment later, so I will not be here for the end of the debate. In return for that indulgence, it is my duty to be brief. My other appointment will find me opening some new operating theatres at the Royal National orthopaedic hospital in Stanmore. Hospital units are being opened by this Government and the agencies responsible. That is good news, and it is a perfectly respectable reason for asking the House to forgive me for not being here later.

It is a great pleasure to support this Bill and the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). I agree with the three speeches we have heard so far. My right hon. Friend the Member for the two cities referred to the daunting and discouraging definition by the Scottish judge. That put me in mind of the remarkable utterance by Elliott, who was first headmaster and then provost of Eton. In about 1938, he poured cold water on the entire institution and on all young people, by saying that he distrusted enthusiasm of any kind. Such an all-embracing assertion would certainly be very off-putting nowadays.

One of the features of modern society is the much greater enthusiasm for people doing things irrespective of their age—that includes very elderly people. That is why I am delighted to sponsor this Bill, and I thank the hon. Member for Walsall, North for inviting me to do so. The Bill has three or four Conservative supporters, which shows that it has all-party support.

We live in an age when old people have just as powerful rights as younger people. That represents a significant change of attitudes. Since we are indulging this morning in definitional assertions, I am reminded of the classic definition of true optimism. It concerns the 97-year-old man who, on getting married for the fifth time, deliberately chose to buy a house near a school. I am proud to be one of the enthusiastic supporters of a local university of the third age. It is a large organisation

in Harrow, I am pleased to say. I shall shortly be addressing the students on the virtues of European monetary union. I hope that they survive my outburst. It is remarkable to see people of extreme age, which is how they would have been described in the old days—it is no longer a valid description—learning things that they did not have the opportunity to study earlier in life. These people are well into their 70s, 80s and sometimes 90s.

Not in my local U3A but at one in west London, the students of which I addressed some time ago, I came across a 94-year-old lady learning Spanish. When I said, "What a marvellous language. I am glad that you are learning it. I speak it as well," she said, "I am learning Spanish flamenco as well as part of the course." That is the age in which we live. That is important in the context of employment and that is why I wholeheartedly support the Bill. I applaud the way in which it has been drafted, which I consider to be realistic and modest. So much so that it must tempt all fair-minded observers to say that it should be considered in Committee.

I agree with the hon. Member for West Lothian—

Mr. Dalyell: Linlithgow.

Mr. Dykes: I was thinking of the West Lothian question.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow was right to say that it would be sad if my hon. Friend the Minister and the Government Whips were to decide not to allow the Bill to be committed to a Standing Committee and, as a result, block it, if the House did not succeed in bypassing their will. It would be a good idea for the Bill to be considered in detail in Committee. By that process we could iron out some of the difficulties, including those of terminology.

Having tested the Bill against quite a few experts on drafting, however, I am not sure that it contains that many textual weaknesses. The clauses have been drafted carefully. The promoter took a great deal of care in taking advice on drafting. There are some reflections of other discrimination legislation, and that should be reassuring.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I hope that the promoter, the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), will consider whether the title might be changed to Employment Deregulation. If the Bill is enacted, those who might want to apply for a job will not feel disqualified. That would be fully in line with the Government's deregulation policy.

Mr. Dykes: I am glad that I gave way to my hon. Friend. He has made an interesting observation. The sponsors might indicate whether they would agree to such a change.

Once again, I wish to express my wholehearted and enthusiastic support. I agree with what has been said by the previous three speakers. That being so, I do not wish to go into detail. I shall conclude by referring to Age Concern. We must thank it for the initiative that it has taken in supporting the Bill and for the letters that it has sent to Members through its able parliamentary officer. I hope that it will not be tedious for the House if I quote a paragraph of the letter that Age Concern sent me in mid-January. Before doing so, I pay tribute to the extremely active, lively and dynamic Age Concern group in Harrow, which does a fabulous amount of work for local people.

The second paragraph reads:

"Age Concern supports the bill because we believe it would provide a positive sign to older people that age discrimination is unacceptable and encourages employers, both large and small, to rethink their employment policies so that every person has the right to be considered for work in relation to their needs, capabilities and wishes, irrespective of age."

That is a powerful sentiment and I am pleased to support it. As my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) said, there is nothing more discouraging than realising that one is being blocked for a reason that is arbitrary, artificial, discriminatory and unfair. Nothing is more irritating, by the way—this happens in companies large and small—for the aged chief executive or chairman to be dismissing people at early forced retirement age for all sorts of so-called reasons, such as rationalisation and modernisation internally, when he has no intention of stepping down, even though he might be well over 75.

Against that background, I renew my plea to the Minister. I know the Government's intentions. At least I think that I guess them correctly. I believe that they intend to block the Bill. That would be a mistake. I think that parliamentarians of all parties wish Governments of all hues to be much more open minded towards sensible private Members' Bills in future. I know that more parliamentary time is being made available to consider them. I acknowledge that that is a step forward. There are occasions when the Government can and should say, "Yes, we shall let the Bill go to a Committee, where it can be examined." I am sure that the promoter would say, "Let the Government's administrators, officials and technicians take over the Bill and draft it properly." That happened a few years ago when the Government moved in, having originally opposed my Bill on heavy lorries, and said, "We shall draft it correctly and let it go through."

This is an excellent Bill. I congratulate the promoter on introducing it. I hope that it is given a Second Reading. I am sorry that I will not be present to see what happens. I hope that the Government will give the Bill a fair wind.

10.45 am

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I shall begin by making some declarations of interest that I think are important. I have been—technically I still am—the owner of an employment agency. My work within employment agencies has continued for about 20 years. On many occasions, I have acted as an advertising agency for recruitment. I have recently been asked by the Federation of Recruitment and Employment Services to be its parliamentary adviser. In the past few weeks, as I have been trying to get up to date with current legislation, I have been able to get my thoughts together so as to be ready for this speech, even though I did not realise that I would make it until about 24 hours ago.

There is strength in the idea of Members being advisers to organisations. It ensures that Members keep in touch with organisations with particular interests. So often while we are advising an organisation, we are learning and finding out what is happening. In advising, Members are helped to focus on what is taking place. People do a great

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disservice to the House when they attempt to misrepresent what happens. Opposition Members are sponsored by trade unions, which helps them to focus on what those unions or interests want to know about Parliament.

Mr. Ian McCartney: I am becoming confused. Is the hon. Gentleman declaring an unpaid or paid interest?

Mr. Bruce: A paid interest. I am happy to make that clear.

I shall talk briefly about my qualifications to participate in the debate.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): How old is the hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Bruce: I am 48 years of age. I was going to mention that a little later in terms of the age of those whom I employ. I am, however, 48.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman must have had a hard life.

Mr. Bruce: Indeed. The facelift did not really work.

I began my working life as an apprentice. I worked in engineering and then work study. I was a factory manager for a period before starting my own employment agency. That agency ran in Yorkshire for 12 years. I do not claim to be the first headhunter or to have established the first employment agency, but I believe that in Yorkshire my agency was the first to have an equal opportunities approach to those whom I employed. It had a proactive approach in getting those who had disadvantages in securing employment into employment in Yorkshire.

I am completely opposed to the Bill. The Whips do not often see me in the Chamber on a Friday because I consider that it is the day when I should be in my constituency. However, I was so incensed by the Bill—it will reverse what has already been done—that I decided that it would be right to come in and make a speech. People should understand that the Bill, if enacted, would take us in the direction that we want to avoid. The knowledge that I gained during those years has been extremely important in forming my reasons why I believe that age discrimination is wrong.

I wish to put on record why it is totally wrong for companies to discriminate against older people. I do not say this from a moral standpoint, as we politicians often get ourselves in a complete muddle if we say simply that it is morally wrong to decide not to take on people who are older. It is so much more persuasive to tell companies that it is not in their interests to discriminate against people who are over a particular age. Let me demonstrate that I am not someone who says one thing and does another. When I first came to the House, I employed my first secretary, who, I think, was 52. I apologise to her for mentioning her age, because ladies do not like people to mention their age—

Mr. Tony Banks: Sexist.

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): Agist.

Mr. Bruce: I suspect that I am being sexist and agist, but it has been my experience that ladies do not like people to mention their age, so I apologise in case I upset my secretary. She was probably the oldest person who applied to be my secretary in Weymouth, and she had the longest experience. She was absolutely super at what she did. Anybody who ever came into contact with her would say what a wonderful job she was doing. I had to struggle like mad to stop her retiring early, but, unfortunately, at the age of 60, she retired, just a few months ago. Just to demonstrate that she still has it in her, she is back working for me today, because my other secretary, who is also over 50 and who took over the role—again, she is doing a super job—is injured from trying to get to work through the snow.

I am absolutely convinced that the older worker is someone who will provide the services that an employer wants. That is self-evident when one looks round the House. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) mentioned the chronological age against the age that people accept. It is so wrong for people to focus on a chronological age when thinking about taking someone on.

Why am I so against the Bill? We heard a good speech from my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), who spoke about the way in which employment agents are often proactive in listening to what the client says and then providing what the client needs. If anybody does an analysis of what is advertised, what is on spec for somebody, versus what is taken on, they will see that they are often diametrically opposed. The attitude that an employment agent must have is to listen to what the client says and then determine what is for real and who will fit the bill. The fundamental point is whether one mentions age. If we legislate and say to employers, "You will not be allowed to advertise a particular age range," we are almost saying to them, "You had better not mention to anybody, even if it is in your mind or on a piece of paper back at the company, that you want to discriminate."

The great advantage of knowing when a company is discriminating, particularly if one is an employment agent or a headhunter, is that one can say to oneself, "I know that this person is saying something that is illogical, not sensible and not good policy for the company, because I am not convinced that the job needs a particular age limitation on it." We all know that there are 70-year-olds who can run the marathon and that there are 20-year-olds who cannot. If one knows that a company is discriminating, one can start to ask oneself how to get the message across to the client to demonstrate that the person can do the job, that he or she has the experience that is asked for and is not too worried about age. That is extremely important. People say that life begins at 40, but most people do not want to have to wait that long for their lives to begin. The Bill is wrong for many reasons. We should look at what is really happening.

I received the briefing from the Library, as did other colleagues, and it is quite good. It demonstrated that, in recent years, the number of people including age limitations in their advertisements is going down. I am afraid that I am one of those who never really believes the people who do the research, so I did some myself. Without any real selection or deciding which newspapers to look at, I got hold of yesterday's edition of *The Daily Telegraph*. In terms of national newspapers, it is renowned for carrying the most job advertisements. In my employment agency, I specialised in sales recruitment. That is one of the areas in which *The Daily Telegraph*

specialises. Indeed, my experience is that it is one of the areas where advertisements from companies that specify the ages of sales reps as between 25 and 35 are most prevalent. I was surprised at how many of the 554 advertisers in yesterday's edition mentioned an age range—18. About half the advertisers said "preferred age range" and the other half simply implied that there was an upper age limit.

Mr. Winnick: I know that the hon. Gentleman does not like to rely on briefs, but we can usually rely on the Library to provide information that is pretty impartial. Page 7 of the Library's brief says that a survey carried out among the Institute of Employment Consultants found that, between December 1994 and January 1995, 60 per cent. of current vacancies contained an age-related restriction, and the Employment Service conducted surveys and found that some 28 per cent. of all vacancies carried age restrictions, so the situation is much more serious than shown in yesterday's edition of *The Daily Telegraph*.

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, but he makes my point, not his own. What he just quoted was the age discrimination that is contained in the requirements that are given to employment agencies and to the Department for Education and Employment, not what is contained in advertisements, which is what his Bill is about: prohibiting the use of upper age limits in advertisements for vacancies, so that people will know that they are being discriminated against. That is so important, and I shall deal with that a little later in my speech.

I did not stop with *The Daily Telegraph*, because that would demonstrate that I was simply being insufficient in my studies of what is happening in advertising. I asked my good lady wife to get out the *Dorset Evening Echo*, our local newspaper, which is distributed six nights a week. She took the most recent week as being the most relevant to the case. The hon. Gentleman might have cured the problem simply by getting the point across to people that it is foolish for them to say publicly that they are thinking of discriminating against people on age ranges.

Mr. Winnick *rose—*

Mr. Bruce: I shall make this point and then I shall gladly give way to the hon. Gentleman.

In the *Dorset Evening Echo*, there were 195 advertisements. Three of the jobs advertised had an upper age range. There were more advertisements with a lower age range—taxi companies and so on—and advertisements that said "mature" than those that tried to include an upper age range.

Mr. Winnick: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way to me a second time. In a survey on 21 and 27 January this year, the *Financial Times* found that some 16 per cent. of advertisements mentioned an age restriction. In *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Telegraph*, the figure was 15.2 per cent., and in *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* it was 14.6 per cent. Yesterday's paper may have been an exception. Is the hon. Gentleman seriously questioning the figures established recently by Age Research? They are far higher than those given by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Bruce: Are those figures for 1996 or 1995?

Mr. Winnick: They are for 1996.

Mr. Bruce: I have been quoting from material that I had immediately to hand—yesterday's *The Daily Telegraph* and last week's *Dorset Evening Echo*. I also have a copy of *Computer Weekly*. I do not know whether *Computer Weekly* has adopted a policy of not specifying age requirements, but it is interesting to note that, among the hundreds of advertisements that it contains, there is not a single advertisement—

Mr. Donald Anderson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wish to raise a matter that deserves grave and urgent consideration.

As you will know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, last night the Government's rail privatisation programme—once described as the poll tax on wheels—suffered yet another humiliating descent into shambles as a result of a decision by Mr. Roger Salmon, the franchising director. He ruled that the awarding of a franchise to the company running the London-Tilbury-Southend line should be disallowed. We fear that the Government are so blindly and dogmatically determined to press on with rail privatisation—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. What is the hon. Gentleman's point of order?

Mr. Anderson: Given the Government's track record, they are likely to press on with their programme without the House being able to make its views felt on, for example, the likely exclusion of British Rail.

Let me remind hon. Members that, when the House dealt with the matter on Monday, the Secretary of State gave a pledge, which can be found in column 19 of *Hansard*. He said that, if any changes took place, a further statement would be made. Given the seriousness of the issue and the shambolic nature of the Government's programme, surely the Secretary of State should be present to make a statement to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am aware of the commitment that was given, but I have not heard any Minister express the intention of making a statement this morning.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you will know, when we kicked off at 9.30 am I requested that a Minister come to the House to answer a serious charge. It appears that the House was misled on Monday. The Secretary of State gave the impression that there was no chance of the franchise collapsing; now that it has, I think that Ministers have a duty to be present. They are treating the House with contempt—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Skinner: And I would suggest—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have got the message.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

As the hon. Gentleman well knows, the Chair has no power to force Ministers to come and make statements.

Mr. Skinner: In your heart of hearts, you know that it is right.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is for the Minister concerned to decide.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I realise that you have no powers to force Ministers to come and make statements if they are too ashamed to come to the Chamber, but you have a duty to look after the rights of Back Benchers. Surely, once a Minister has made a pledge to the House—as a Minister did on Monday: he said that he would come back and make a statement—you at least have a duty to find out whether the Minister will make his statement at 2.30 this afternoon, or will sulk over the weekend and then come to the House on Monday.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has been here a long time, and he is a wise politician. He knows that there are other ways in which he can deal with the matter.

I shall take no more points of order on this issue. I have dealt with it. I have said that I know that commitments were given—[Hon. Members: "Yes."] Order. I have heard nothing to suggest that a Minister intends to make a statement. The Chair can go no further.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I will take points of order on any other subject, but not on this one.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that it is a different point of order.

Mr. Prentice: It is indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I speak as a member of the Select Committee dealing with the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill. I read in today's press that another inquiry is being launched into the activities of Union Railways, which apparently involved irregular processes. Surely that is another reason why Ministers should come to the House and explain the position.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a matter for the Chair. No doubt Ministers will have noted what has been said.

Mr. Skinner: Where are these Ministers?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Dalyell *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman wish to raise a different point of order?

Mr. Dalyell: It is a point of procedure rather than a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You chose your words very carefully. You will confirm that a precedent has been set: Ministers often come to the House to make statements at 2.30 in the afternoon.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have not heard that any Minister intends to come to the House at 2.30.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will be aware that this week the usual Wednesday morning debates were replaced by debates on two Select Committee reports. One report, produced in April 1993, has never been debated in the House—a distinguished report by a Committee chaired by the late Robert Adley, in which he christened rail privatisation "the poll tax on wheels", and forecast that it would be—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I heard the hon. Gentleman make the same points in his speech the other day, and I do not need to hear them again.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I am somewhat surprised to see that Labour Members have suddenly appeared in force to try to talk out this interesting Bill. I hope that I have not lost track of my speech. [Hon. Members: "Start again."] I could start again, but I shall not yield to the blandishments of my hon. Friends.

I was talking about a survey that I had carried out, and referred to *Computer Weekly*. Computing is supposed to be a young man's job, but I was pleased to note that the industry seems to have stopped specifying age requirements. It is possible, however, to adopt the wrong approach in deciding what should or should not be included in advertisements. Almost one third of an advertisement by Luton borough council is devoted to telling people what a wonderful organisation the council is because it takes employees from ethnic minorities. It refers to the Race Relations Act 1976, which enabled the council to discriminate in favour of such people, and also gives a guarantee that disabled people will be interviewed.

I do not criticise Luton for having such excellent policies. The problem is, however, that if we start making regulations about what advertisements should and should not contain, organisations that are funded by ratepayers' money will pay a high price. Such advertisements do not come cheap. It is possible that people in Luton are having to pay 30 per cent. more for an advertisement that attempts to be politically correct.

Mr. Booth: Surely the Bill's promoter is making an entirely different point. He merely suggests the deletion of one item. The advertisement placed by Luton borough council involved the inclusion of an item.

Mr. Bruce: I take my hon. Friend's point, and it is correct in that I was trying to demonstrate to the House that there is no requirement in current legislation for people to put so much information in an advertisement, but there is a requirement, especially among public bodies, constantly to be aware of whether they are discriminating. That is one of the problems and why the Government are against regulation for the sake of regulation. People spend all their time worrying about whether they are breaking this rule or that regulation.

Many Conservative Members and, indeed, some Opposition Members have started businesses and they have suddenly come upon all the regulations that they must learn about. If we investigate who has been prosecuted under equal opportunities legislation or race legislation, we find that, generally, it is people who were ignorant of the requirements. The people who want to discriminate are not ignorant: they know how to get around the legislation. So often, legislation simply drives discrimination underground and that is a real problem.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) mentioned the percentages that surveys had found of companies that tried to discriminate.

Mr. Ian McCartney: Given the hon. Gentleman's opposition to the principle of age discrimination, do his companies, as a matter of course, refuse to accept employment opportunities if the clients have an age discrimination policy?

Mr. Bruce: I shall cover that point in a moment. I do not currently run an employment agency. I am technically an employment agency and I had a licence until the Government deregulated, but I do not actually recruit people. I would not refuse to accept a vacancy, just as nobody else in the employment agency industry or the Government's jobcentres is refusing to accept jobs with an age requirement.

Mr. McCartney: Will the hon. Gentleman give way again?

Mr. Bruce: Perhaps I may answer the hon. Gentleman in my own way. I am trying to make the point that if I tell individual employers that I will not try to find out whether they are discriminating, I can do nothing to persuade them not to discriminate.

Mr. McCartney: I accept that the hon. Gentleman is between engagements with his company. If, as he has said, he is so strongly in favour of a voluntary system, why does he refuse the opportunity voluntarily to do something about the situation? Does not that prove that a voluntary system would not work?

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman is completely misrepresenting what I said. In my own company, someone under 50 could say that all the employees whom Mr. Bruce has taken on in his private capacity have been over 50, in the past few years since I became a Member of Parliament. I am not one of those people, as I told the House earlier, who says one thing and does another. The team around the Leader of the Opposition are all young, sprightly people. The Leader of the Opposition clearly has his spokesman say one thing and he does another. I would be impressed if I saw a member of the Leader of the Opposition's team with grey hairs, but we know that that is not the case. It is good to see the hon. Gentleman at 42, as he admitted—

Mr. McCartney: Forty-four.

Mr. Bruce: It is good to see the hon. Gentleman holding his position at 44.

I am not saying that it is wrong for companies to have a policy of age discrimination. The Bill would put them on notice that if they put that information in the public domain, that could be seen as an advertisement. If a company writes to an employment agency giving an age limit, in libel terms, it is publishing that fact. We think that we are talking today about advertisements, but the Bill does not say that. The Bill may drive underground what is happening in reality. We must tackle what is happening in reality, not by legislation. We should not tell people that they are not allowed to decide age limits, but we should persuade them. We should tell employers what is good about employing older people.

Mr. Tony Banks: With great respect, the hon. Gentleman is using precisely the same arguments that were advanced against legislation to outlaw racism and sex discrimination. He probably used the same arguments then. Surely he is not saying that we should not have legislation to ban racism and sexism in employment.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman is wrong in believing that there has been any advantage from the legislation on sex discrimination.

Mr. Banks *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman laughs, but the evidence is available. The Conservatives introduced legislation to prevent discrimination against women and to bring their wages into line with men's wages. The statistics are clear: until we passed that legislation, the gap between women's and men's wages was shrinking; after we passed the legislation, the gap started to widen. That is in the statistics and shows that the effect of the legislation was negative, not positive.

Mr. Spring: Does my hon. Friend agree that the problem of discrimination against people with disabilities and of different races, which the House sought to address in legislation, went far beyond employment and the labour market? That is the essential point to which the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) did not allude.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) tried to suggest that what happens in reality is related to what we do in the House. I ran an employment agency in Yorkshire, and most people know that there are many people in Yorkshire who would be described as being from the ethnic minorities. The House will not be surprised to know that no employers ever indicated to my employment agency that they discriminated against coloured people. They knew that legislation existed under which they could be prosecuted if they made that declaration. Yet a private employment agency very quickly understands that if it sends people to a certain company, and no brown faces get taken on, only white faces, there is a real problem. My agency was so proactive that it tackled those problems in sensible ways—by persuasion and approaching other directors if one manager in a company was discriminating. We ensured that we were making positive change in those companies. That was all done not because of the legislation but because it was sensible for companies to take that attitude.

[Mr. Bruce]

Capitalism has always been colour blind. Opposition Members constantly say that it is terrible that international companies take jobs overseas and employ people outside the United Kingdom. They do not recognise that if there is a labour pool around a factory, the directors will ensure that they are getting the best from that community.

Mr. Tony Banks: How can the hon. Gentleman say that capitalism has always been colour blind, when slavery used to underpin capitalism?

Mr. Bruce: I hope that my comments will not be taken the wrong way, but clearly capitalism was at least employing and utilising those people. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman makes my point for me. He is saying that capitalists got the cheapest possible labour, which was slave labour. I do not say that slavery was correct: I am saying that capitalism had been trying to find the cheapest possible labour and determining its availability. If the hon. Gentleman has ever employed people, he will know that.

When I took the first West Indian lady into my office, I did so because of her abilities. However, I needed to ensure that the attitudes of people within my office were non-racial and I had to persuade people that employing that lady was right. The history of the labour movement shows that organised trade unions have been used time and again to stop coloured people getting into the workplace. Examples of employers attempting to employ people from local communities and finding resistance from trade unions, shop stewards and in the workplace itself because people wanted to discriminate against those coming into the workplace are legion.

The blinkers should come off. People in organisations must understand that it is in their best interests to ensure that people with talent are employed. It is not that problems have not occurred. The whole marketplace has been working towards solving them, and to my mind legislation has not helped.

I shall now return to the subject of the Bill. You have been very tolerant during interventions on other matters, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Bill seeks to make it lawful for employers not to tell people that a discriminatory policy operates in their organisations. I should like to see a system whereby every time an advertisement that made unreasonable age claims was spotted, someone would get hold of people on the telephone and say, "What is this all about? Why are you doing this?" Private employment agencies, the jobcentres and others already do that.

It is interesting to ask why employment agencies should put age criteria on their job specifications. The regulations relating to the Employment Agencies Act 1973 were introduced by, I think, a Labour Government. The Act was passed by a Conservative Government because a Conservative colleague foolishly thought that it would be a good idea to regulate employment agencies as it was thought that that would make some difference to the way in which people carried on their businesses. I do not think that it has ever had that effect.

One of the requirements under the regulations was an inspection by the Department of Employment to ensure that the details of the job, such as age and salary criteria and other matters, had been taken down properly.

Mr. Ian McCartney: As there seems to be a historical perspective to the matter, may I remind the hon. Gentleman that under the last Labour Government the majority of over-50s were employed? There has been a fundamental change and the deterioration continues. That is the real difference in terms of the time gap. Those over 50 have been driven out of the labour market whereas under Labour they were encouraged to stay in it.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman is incorrect about unemployment. The percentage of those who are unemployed in the 50 to 60 age group is lower than the national average, although only by a small amount. That is not to suggest that people do not encounter problems in getting work. While older people may tell people in a jobcentre, "I cannot get a job because I am too old," young graduates tell me, "I cannot get a job because I am too young and I have no experience." Of course people find it difficult to get back into work when unemployment is much too high.

When an employer is faced with a pile of 200 application forms and wants to interview X number of people, he may say, "I will take out the forms of all those who are over 50 and throw them in a heap." I am not suggesting that employers should do that. The Bill suggests that people should put advertisements in the newspapers and get people over the ages of 40 or 50 to send in application forms. Nobody will write to people who have been rejected saying, "Sorry, you are too old and we will not take you on." Such people will be told, "Sorry, you were not suitably qualified for this vacancy." That is the standard letter so people will not know that they are being discriminated against on the ground of age.

Mr. Booth: In the context of the intervention by the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), does my hon. Friend agree that the labour force survey has shown that the largest increase over the past two years is in the employment of those over the age of 50?

Mr. Bruce: I am obliged to my hon. Friend for having read the briefing better than I did. I did not see that important fact. Even in recent times, people have been thinking more and more about this issue.

Perhaps I may concentrate on positive happenings within the employment agencies industry. The Federation of Recruitment and Employment Services has been very proactive, as has been the Institute of Employment Consultants, in getting the message through to employment agencies that a great pool of talent and experience is being wasted by not considering people who are over a particular age.

My point, which I hope I made strongly against the Bill, is that if an employer does not say, "I intend to discriminate against everybody over the age of 35, 40 or 50," there will be no conversation between the employment agent who has a file full of people with experience but without the right age profile and that employer. If such a conversation could take place, the agent would say to that employer, "Hang on a minute, you are looking for a lively, able person who has no drawbacks. I have many women returners-to-work and people who have been made redundant through no fault of their own. They have a wealth of experience."

In the past, the attitude has been that if someone is over 50, he is considering only retirement and not thinking about doing a good job of work and using his experience.

That attitude is bonkers. The Bill is trying to sweep the matter under the carpet and stop people knowing what is happening.

Institutional age barriers are another issue. The Bill may say that it is all right for the armed forces and others to continue to put out information about whether people can join at a particular age. We in politics need to challenge the view that people can train for a career only between the ages of 16 and 19. We should say, "That is an old attitude." Why should we recruit young police officers? The police force has changed dramatically. I went to my son's passing-out parade in the police. As he has a university degree, I thought that he would be one of the oldest recruits in his intake, but that was not the case: he was one of the youngest. Many of the recruits were older, because the force has found that the recruitment of mature people is the right way to go.

There was a row created by the Opposition and others when we suggested that social workers should be recruited from the general population—from among people who did not necessarily have degrees or higher education. Such people could provide the experience that proves so important. In social services, the experience that people have is much more important than an academic qualification. I do not say that, having got someone with experience, an employer does not need to give that person training. Some of that training, by the very nature of things, will be academic training, but why should anyone assume that we can say that training and new careers are available only for young people? We must challenge that. It is extremely important.

Some countries have decided to have age discrimination legislation on their statute books and legislation on human rights. A compulsory retirement age is one of the technical aspects with which we could find ourselves getting into problems. Again, whether they are right or wrong, in this country people seem to accept that there should be an age at which an employer can say to an employee, "You have got to 60—or 65 or 70—and you are now forced to give up your job and to go into retirement." There has been a big row about women being forced to retire at 60 when their male colleagues can work on to 65. Again, the legislation has been changed. When considering age discrimination legislation, we must be careful that we do not inadvertently create a position that ends up as being undesirable in terms of political correctness.

Many women have suddenly found that the additional benefit that they would gained from their private pension scheme, where they were able to receive a generous pension at 60 although their male colleagues had to wait until 65, has been taken away from them because, in such a scheme, they have been forced to have equality between the sexes. That has disadvantaged women. All hon. Members believe firmly, and have evidence to suggest, that women are unfairly treated in almost every other aspect of employment.

There is a moral imperative here, and this is not the moral imperative that the hon. Member for Walsall, North believes exists. I believe firmly that, if an employer is taking someone on, he has the moral right to make up his mind whom he will employ. Even if I believe he is wrong in taking someone and excluding a raft of people over a particular age, and I argue my case as strongly as possible and demand information to do that, I still believe that he or she has the right to decide whom to employ and why.

Mr. Winnick: I am surprised at that because, presumably, the hon. Gentleman is arguing for the repeal of legislation on not only sex equality but race. Surely he is making the strongest possible point that, if an employer does not want to employ someone because he or she happens to be black or of Asian origin, that person should not be employed and the employer has a right not to do so. Is that really what the hon. Gentleman is saying? In that case, he presumably opposes the legislation that has been passed over a number of years and will try to get it removed from the statute book.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman knows that it is extremely difficult to put any genie back in the bottle. If it is in their mind to do so, employers discriminate against women and coloured people. When one understands that they are discriminating, one has a chance of changing their mind by persuasion. The problem that we have with all these things is that we all know that a higher proportion of people in ethnic minorities are unemployed, and that women do not move as quickly through an organisation and receive equal pay, even though they move much more quickly off the unemployment register than men. Therefore, to a certain extent, it is easier for women to find work, but it is not easier for them to get the promotions that we feel they deserve.

I have argued consistently all along that I have never discriminated in that way. My record stands on its own. To suggest that I believe that legislation on racial, sexual or age matters harms people's employment prospects is wrong. The Bill will again put the problem further underground and make it more difficult to do what is happening in the employment sector. Organisations such as FRES and the Institute of Employment Consultants are taking positive action, getting employment agencies to get through. The message that gets home to employment agencies is not that this is a great moral imperative; it is that if they analyse who is on their books and who is difficult to place, but who has good qualifications—people come to employment agencies to get people with the right qualifications—a surplus of people who should be in jobs are having difficulty getting them. Therefore it is in the market and commercial interests of that employment agency to persuade people. That is what drives this thing forward.

I still believe that the employer has a right to choose whom to take on and that anything that artificially imposes on that person a duty to do something different is wrong. Yes, he will say in front of the cameras, "I have no discrimination policy," but, by looking just at the people whom he employs, we will all know that he is discriminating.

There are different feelings among employers. Often a manager in his early 30s might instantly ask, "If I take people on who are 40 or 50 and who have been in this business longer than me, will they really take me as their leader and manager?" Those real fears need to be worked through. Again, people will sometimes say, "We have an office full of teenagers in their early 20s. There is an atmosphere in the office that is different from that of an office with people aged 50 or 60." Those things come

[Mr. Bruce]

forward. They can be overcome. Employers should overcome them and they should ensure that those problems are resolved.

The case of employees wasting their time in applying for jobs is extremely important. However, I have never got a job for which an age limit was advertised that was not outside my age. Every time I applied for a job with a minimum age, I applied early and found that I was able to gain that job. It is important that we do not send out the message from the House that, because an employer has advertised an age range in a particular job, the applicant who is outside that age range should not develop a strategy to demonstrate to the employer that he has the experience and requirements to do the job. If people do not know that they have a hidden barrier that has been removed from the advertisement, that will be difficult for them to cope with.

One of the pieces of evidence in the briefing material that is extremely important to understand is that, for a long time, France has had legislation outlawing putting age ranges in advertisements, but in a recent survey 30 per cent. of employers put illegal age requirements in the advertisements. That is especially important to note. The number of people who are getting back into work in the older age range in the United Kingdom is good compared with the number in France. We are doing a great deal better.

Mr. Tony Banks: May I ask the hon. Gentleman a direct question? Does he intend to carry on talking until we run out of time on the Bill, or will he give other hon. Members a chance to make a few points? If he is going to continue talking, at least we will know that and I can go outside and have a cup of tea because, apart from anything else, he is boring me rigid.

Mr. Bruce: I urge the hon. Gentleman not to take such foolish action, as I am looking forward to hearing his speech. I do not intend to speak until 2.30 pm. I am grateful to him for intervening because it has given me a chance to have a sip of water, which will keep my voice going and help me to complete my speech properly rather than gabble through it.

The evidence from France shows overwhelmingly that putting more regulations in place does not result in any improvement for older people. In the United States, where it is illegal to include age preferences in advertisements, the employment prospects for older people are not as good as they should be.

We must concentrate on the real issues rather than push the problem underground and try to hide it. We must concentrate on how we can improve the position for older people. Some five years ago, it eventually clicked with the Government that it was wrong to set an upper age limit when recruiting civil servants. There used to be a belief that civil servants should come straight from university and stay for the rest of their working lives. That left no opportunity for older people to join the civil service. That has been knocked on the head and I congratulate the Conservative Government on taking such a positive step.

Of course, not everyone has been convinced of the case. A number of hon. Members have referred to Age Concern. My colleague Bryan Cassidy, the Member of the European Parliament who looks after Norfolk, has been extremely active in trying to persuade the European Parliament and Commission to drop their agist policy—which is being inflicted in our name, under the European banner.

It is extraordinary that for almost every job—driver, clerk or secretary—the European Parliament and Commission impose an age limit of 35. That is bonkers. For a few jobs—for example, interpreters—they will employ people up to the age of 40. Those really flexible institutions even allow people up to the age of 45 to apply for one or two other jobs. I am surprised that the hon. Member for Walsall, North did not mention Europe's agist policy. Had he done so, he might have gained some support from Conservative Euro-sceptics because if his Bill had become law we might have been able to prosecute the European Parliament and Commission.

We need to change Europe's policy, not hide it. We should not make it illegal for the European Parliament and Commission to discriminate against British subjects who want to work for them. We must work to change the policy. Many hon. Members say that the social chapter will make only a few minor changes—

Mrs. Gillan: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his attention to detail. Has he seen some of the recent advertisements in the Commission's *Official Journal*? They state, for example, that interpreters must have been born after 24 March 1959; that typists must be over 20 and under 36 years of age; and that administrative assistants must have been born after 26 June 1959. Does my hon. Friend appreciate that that would rule out both him and me from applying for those jobs?

Mr. Bruce: I would be ruled out anyway because I do not speak another language well enough to qualify for a job with the European institutions. Agism within the European Parliament and the Commission is an absolute scandal and the Bill would allow them to hide that scandal from the public.

Mr. Winnick: I made the point about the European Parliament and Commission discriminating on the ground of age and drew a comparison between that policy and the age of the Commissioners. As the hon. Gentleman has been speaking for 40 minutes, I must ask him whether he intends to give both my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) and his hon. Friends an opportunity to contribute to the debate. I understand that the hon. Gentleman intends to continue speaking until at least 12 o'clock. Is that really fair? Why will not he allow the debate to continue as it started and give other people the opportunity to make their point? We all know how difficult it is for everyone to have the opportunity to speak on a Friday.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman is playing into the hands of the Government Whips by intervening in my speech. In fact, I have only about 20 minutes allocated for each subject. I assure the hon. Gentleman that plenty of time will be left for others to speak. Interventions make me lose track of what I am saying, which is likely to increase, not decrease, the length of my speech. I have no particular time in mind. I had only 24 hours to prepare my speech, so I am obviously limited in what I can say.

I want to return to the point about the European Parliament and Commission—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry if I am repeating myself; I had not intended to do so. Some hon. Members might wonder whether there is a hidden agenda behind the social chapter. The European Parliament and Commission impose regulation upon regulation on employers. Perhaps they are trying to ensure that employers in Britain cannot provide any jobs, regardless of age. Perhaps they want the jobs to go to our competitors.

Hon. Members should read a European Parliament session document dated 1 December 1995, published by the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment. I am sure that the rules of the House would allow me to quote extensively from that 56-page document, but I do not want to delay the debate. However, I must quote paragraph 9 on page 37, which I am sure will interest hon. Members because it shows the European Parliament's attitude to imposing more and more regulations and costs on employers. It points out that

"a labour market which functions satisfactorily has a balanced age structure and makes efficient use of the specific knowledge, skills and experience of each age group;".

That is good—I agree with the report up to that point. However, it then continues:

"warns of the risk of certain age groups—especially older people—being faced with structural obstacles or age discrimination in the labour market as a result of its flexibilisation and demographic trends; emphasises the European Union's responsibility with respect to equal opportunities policy".

It appeared to me, reading through the document, that the European Parliament seeks, not only to make it illegal to discriminate against older people but to take financial measures, using taxpayers' money, to ensure that older people are taken on in certain jobs. That sounds fine, but if one taxes companies and individuals and does so to try to transfer the money to the older generation in that way, one destroys jobs, opportunities and the ability of people of all ages to be able to get on and do things.

Mrs. Gillan: For the benefit of those people in the House who are not aware of it, would my hon. Friend remind us who has the majority in the European Parliament?

Mr. Bruce: I think I am right in saying that it is the socialist group, which is the largest group. Indeed, if one read the documentation, one would suppose that it would be impossible for the European Parliament—because, after all, the European Parliament's budget is under the control of the European parliamentarians, who actually have the full—

Mr. Ian McCartney: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is a genuine, serious point of order regarding a decision of the House some months ago about paid consultants speaking in the House and being able to influence debates and decisions.

It is on record that at the beginning of his speech the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce), on my intervention, admitted to the House that he was the paid consultant of two organisations that he has used extensively during this filibuster contribution. I want to get some indication whether he is now breaking the spirit of a decision of the House in respect of the Nolan recommendations, by deliberately flouting the opinion of the overwhelming majority of the House that paid consultants should not use that consultancy to frustrate the passage of legislation or unduly influence the possibility of that legislation being passed. I believe that the hon. Gentleman is in danger of breaching that in his conduct so far this morning.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have seen no evidence of any filibuster so far this morning. Although the hon. Gentleman's contribution has been lengthy, it has been quite in order. As for declaring interests, all hon. Members know the rules of the House and it is up to them whether they carry them out. I am sure that all hon. Members would wish to do so.

Mr. McCartney: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I realise that it is not in the purview of the Chair to deal with that matter in the sense of ordering an hon. Gentleman to reconsider his position but, given that the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges is setting about considering the code of conduct, may I give notice, in view of that matter and the way in which the hon. Gentleman continues to proceed, that this is one debate that I shall ask the Committee to consider carefully in respect of the code of conduct?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a matter for the Chair; it is a matter for the hon. Gentleman. I repeat, all hon. Members know what the rules are—the old ones and the new ones—and it is a matter for them to work within them.

Mr. Bruce: I am appalled at the hon. Gentleman. I am reaching the end of my speech. I have only a few remarks to make. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the spurious Opposition points of order to you earlier have interrupted my speech. When people consider the time for which I am supposed to have spoken, I hope that they will take off all the filibustering, all the interventions and all the time wasting. It is wrong for the hon. Gentleman to attack me personally when I am the only hon. Gentleman who has declared a financial interest in the debate, as I said in my first words. It is wrong to suggest that, for any reason, I am trying to filibuster on behalf of a specific organisation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It would be most helpful now if we got on with the debate.

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I believe that I should have finished about five minutes ago if I had been allowed to make progress.

I complete my remarks by saying that the legislation that the Labour party and the Liberal party wish to introduce now is a small wedge to try to force the problem underground, by telling people that they are not allowed in any way to tell people that they discriminate on age grounds. As we have noted time and time again, we do not help the problem by legislating in that way.

Finally, I place it on record that everything that I have done in my work when I was employed by other people and when I ran my own employment agency, and my policies as an employer as a Member of Parliament, have demonstrated time and time again that I have been proactive in improving the lot of people who have been discriminated against in employment.

[Mr. Bruce]

I advise a group that ensures that private employment agencies are making a commitment to take disabled people into work, and they are making that commitment. That is something that I do; it is declared, but I am not paid to do it. I am extremely keen to ensure that the House does not pass the Bill today or on any other day, because I believe that it would be a backward move and would force the problem underground instead of ensuring that employers do things properly.

11.53 am

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I was beginning to wonder how old I was when the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) started his speech. I was writing my notes for the debate while he was speaking, and I shall pick up on some of his points later. One point, however, comes immediately to mind: he said that he believed that employers have a right to choose. One would agree with that within broad limits, but there are times when one cannot allow total freedom of choice. If we were to accept the hon. Gentleman at face value, employers could be racist and sexist in their employment practices.

It is no good the hon. Gentleman telling us about his good intentions, which we all accept. Unfortunately, we do not need to legislate for those who follow good practices. We would not be having our debate today if all employers pursued the best employment practices; we need legislation to deal with those who simply refuse to do so. It is no good saying that employers are entitled to be racist and sexist, as only their work areas are involved—

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Banks: I shall finish my point.

Employers who are racist and sexist create social implications that have knock-on effects throughout the whole of society. I cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's long statement about employers having the right to choose. I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but it is a bit much if he has just thought of something else to say, having spoken for 40 minutes or so.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman makes my point, not his own. By allowing people to hide away the discrimination that we all know occurs, we allow them to continue and do not draw out the discrimination so that the community can impose the necessary conditions on those people.

Mr. Banks: I would have hoped that the hon. Gentleman would allow me to develop my point. I intend to address precisely that issue, but I cannot cover all the points he raised in the first two minutes of my speech.

I do not believe that the legislation would hide discrimination. The Bill, if it becomes an Act, would not necessarily end age discrimination—I do not believe it would. But if one cannot do everything, that is no reason to do nothing. This modest Bill will at least start us on the process, which is a perfectly reasonable thing to do.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) is not noted for his particularly moderate views; he is not the sort of person that my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the Leader of the Opposition, would automatically look to as an example of new Labour. If my hon. Friend had pursued the issue with vigour, red in tooth and claw, I suspect that hon. Members, including the hon. Member for South Dorset, would have leapt up and denounced him as an extremist, and asked why he had not tried a more modest approach. In the opinion of the hon. Member for South Dorset, my hon. Friend could not have won whatever he did.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on being lucky in the ballot for private Members' Bills. He is extraordinarily lucky, as he has won places in the ballot in the past. When I mentioned that to him, he told me that he does not compete in the national lottery, but perhaps he should, given the luck needed to come so high in the private Members' ballot. He should at least try out his luck on the national lottery.

While I am talking about lotteries, and while the Minister with responsibility for work permits is at the Dispatch box, I cannot resist the opportunity to make the following plea. West Ham's application for an extension of the work permit of Ilie Dumitrescu, the Romanian player whom it is trying to transfer from Tottenham Hotspur, has been something of a lottery. Perhaps I had better pursue the subject elsewhere, but those of us in West Ham are disappointed by the decision of the Department for Education and Employment. One has to choose one's moment to raise such issues—I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, understand that.

My hon. Friend's proposal is reasonable. The Bill will not, of itself, end age discrimination—my hon. Friend made that clear—but it will not exclude at the point of application those people in their 40s and 50s who are seeking employment. I find it very distressing—I am sure that all hon. Members have had the same experience—when people attend advice sessions and say, "I am writing application after application. I am qualified for the job, but I am too old. I am in my late 40s or 50s, and no one wants to employ me because of my age."

Mrs. Gillan: I have great sympathy for constituents who come to surgeries and tell stories of that nature. My constituents have raised the same point. I am sure that all hon. Members have sympathy for those people. Earlier in his speech, the hon. Gentleman said that nothing has been done about age discrimination, and that the Bill is a start. Would he care to comment on the three publications: "Age Works", "Getting On" and "Too Old, Who Says?"? Perhaps it may assist him to know that those publications are readily available, so he should pass them to his constituents when they come to him with their tales of woe.

Mr. Banks: I give my constituents as much assistance as I can. That advice is welcome, and no doubt it helps to solve the age discrimination problems of some, and possibly of many. However, it is very depressing to learn how many people still find it impossible to get jobs because of age discrimination. The Minister cannot tell me that the problem does not exist, because we all know it does. Whenever we see a problem, we must try to deal with it. The legislation is not the only way, and it may not be the best way, of dealing with age discrimination, but at least it is an attempt. I do not think that it is helpful to dismiss the proposal out of hand.

What is the aim of the legislation? Sometimes legislation is coercive, but sometimes it can be persuasive. The legislation may persuade employers to look more carefully at their employment practices. If they cannot exclude people over a certain age in their advertisements, they might be encouraged to interview all applicants, and they might be very pleasantly surprised to find what talents and abilities are available.

Mr. Spring: Surely the crucial point is that, where anti-age discrimination legislation is on the statute book in other countries, the participation rates in the older age groups do not bear out the hon. Gentleman's point. The participation rate is substantially higher among people in the 50 to 60 age group in the United Kingdom than in many countries where anti-age discrimination legislation is on the statute book. In reality, that form of legislation appears to have had no effect. I acknowledge that there are other reasons for that.

Mr. Banks: I do not intend to conceal arguments that might run against my own, because on days such as this we should be able to discuss matters objectively, and, as we all profess to be of good will, find a way of dealing with an identified problem.

I have examined the Department's survey of 22 countries with anti-age discrimination laws, including the United States, where it found that there was little evidence that legislation against agism is successful. I accept that fact. The Carnegie Third Age programme—it does much work in that area, and I have drawn upon it for information for my notes—supports that finding. The Bill does not represent anti-age discrimination in a harsh and formulated way. It is a way of being very gentle: it is providing a form of mild encouragement to employers rather than introducing a draconian set of new laws.

Mr. Spring *rose—*

Mr. Banks: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman again, but I do not intend to talk out my hon. Friend's Bill unwittingly by giving way. I shall give way for the purposes of debate, although I had not intended to speak for more than 10 minutes.

Mr. Spring: I do not wish to overwork the point but, essentially, the hon. Gentleman has admitted that anti-age discrimination legislation on the statute book would have no practical effect. That is borne out by evidence gathered from abroad.

Therefore, the Government's voluntary efforts to change the culture through the publications and through applying pressure to jobcentres and employment agencies are the right approach. People complain about too much legislation and too many rules and regulations. The Bill is simply adding to that, without having a direct and positive effect.

Mr. Banks: I never said that the Bill would have no practical effect. No one can give a 100 per cent. guarantee that any piece of legislation will work 100 per cent. That would be absurd. One hopes more or less to meet the objectives that the Act is there to achieve. If 100 per cent. success were the criterion, we would never pass any legislation.

The proposal must be used and judged as it stands, on its own. All the Bill does is make one particular proposal about age discrimination in job advertisements. That provision is welcome, and it has been fostered and long advocated by Age Concern, an organisation specifically geared to looking after the over-50s and to working for their economic and social benefit.

The Carnegie Third Age programme said specifically that legislation to "outlaw agism" as such did not work, and I accept that point, but if organisations such as Carnegie Third Age and Age Concern say that this proposal will be to some advantage, and advocate the measure, I am prepared to take it and see how it works.

The hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) talked about voluntarism. I always prefer voluntarism to legal forms of remedy, because clearly we do not want to go round putting more and more laws on the statute book. We already have far too many. But we do not pass laws simply because we are on a big job creation scheme of our own here in the House of Commons. We do it because, in so many areas of activity in our lives, both economic and social, voluntarism, good behaviour and best practice simply do not exist. Our duty is to encourage.

Legislation is there to encourage as much as to punish, and the Bill is encouraging rather than punishing legislation. That being so, it is gentle, it is not extreme in any way, and it is supported by organisations such as Age Concern. We should give it a fair wind today and see how it goes. I am not going very well myself, in that I am not making much progress in what I wanted to say, but I hope that what I have said in answer to interventions has been helpful.

What distresses me most about age discrimination in employment is the appalling waste of older workers' talent and experience that it represents. I was recently on a fact-finding trip—*[Interruption.]*—it was a genuine fact-finding trip on that occasion. I was in the company of Lord King—[*Interruption.*]—and a very good travelling companion he is. One would always get good treatment on British Airways when travelling with its president. I somehow felt that that would probably happen, and it did.

Lord King and I share a passion for many things, one of which is manufacturing. I wanted to see Boeing, and we went to Seattle. It was wonderful to see people producing those enormous aircraft, and to see a company that puts its whole reputation and financial structure on the line every time it brings out a new product. To use an American expression, it was awesome.

What I found interesting, and what is relevant to the Bill, was the fact that a B52 was being reconstructed. Boeing was using apprentices to learn crafts and skills that had gone out of use because there is no more demand for handmade pieces of equipment. Retired Boeing workers were coming in and working with the apprentices on the B52. The older workers were getting some expenses, but they were not being paid wages, and they could put their talents and experience at the disposal of the young guys starting out in the job of manufacturing for Boeing.

That struck me as a heartening scheme. Those guys said, "I don't want to sit at home and read books or watch television all day. I want to be able to carry on giving young workers the benefit of my experience and skills."

[Mr. Banks]

That is what we must do. Age discrimination can stop that happening. I acknowledge that there are some such schemes in this country. but more should be encouraged.

Mrs. Gillan: I intervene to support the hon. Gentleman's line. As he is so enthusiastic about British Airways, does he know about B and Q? That company originally started employing older workers as an experiment, but it proved such a success that it has become a selling point. People such as the hon. Gentleman and me, who go into DIY stores not really knowing what they want, can rely on an older person for his or her expert advice. The employment of older people is spreading across the country, and is welcome. I intervened merely to support the hon. Gentleman with an example of a company with which I have not travelled abroad.

Mr. Banks: The Minister should not make the assumption that I cannot B and Q it. My hands are callused from years of work in the field. I am a horny-handed son of toil who knows something about do-it-yourself. Otherwise, the hon. Lady is absolutely right. People out shopping are much encouraged to see an older assistant, on whose experience they can draw.

Mrs. Gillan: My point was that the employment of older people has been achieved without legislation.

Mr. Banks: But that one case does not answer all the discrimination that is found in advertisements and work practices. The fact that the Minister and I are conjoined in a particular example does not mean that legislation should not be used as a form of encouragement for employers who do not, for one reason or another, follow the good practices of B and Q, Boeing or British Airways. If those other firms are required to adopt good practices, they might realise what they have been missing for so long.

About 52 Members of Parliament have announced their intention not to stand at the next general election. It is always best to go quietly, before one is pushed, so they are probably right. All those hon. Members are in their mid-40s and older. The youngest is a Minister aged about 44. I suspect that they have already got jobs lined up, or will be able to secure alternative employment. Such opportunities are not available to most people in their 40s and 50s.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Banks: Is the hon. Gentleman trying to stay on after the next general election?

Mr. Robinson: I certainly plan to be here after the next election. The hon. Gentleman mentioned that many Members of Parliament on both sides of the House will not be standing again. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can enlighten me about the Labour party's selection procedures. Does it practise agism, or are candidates of all ages welcome to appear before selection committees?

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman might intend to stay in Parliament, but we will wait to see whether that intention is shared by the electorate in his constituency. I recognise the hon. Gentleman as one of the conspicuous retreads in the House. There is nothing wrong with a retread, except that, when one gets up speed, they tend to fall to pieces.

Age discrimination legislation is not needed in the Labour party, because there is no question of it setting an age limit in its recruitment advertising. As to inviting applications for parliamentary selection, age does not come into it. The Labour party, like a number of good employers, follows best practice.

There is another problem to do with selection. One reason why the Labour party, in its wisdom, decided to go for all-women shortlists was to ensure that what was said was then followed up in practice. It will not surprise hon. Members to hear that what political parties say publicly is not always followed right through when it comes to implementation. There is nothing exceptional about that. We thought that we would deal with the problem directly. Unfortunately, someone challenged us in law—but when we see discrimination, we must try to work against it.

Mr. Ian Bruce: The hon. Gentleman has succeeded in making a stunning point about introducing legislation that has an effect opposite to the one intended. The Labour party tried to bring more women into the House, but has been prevented from so doing by legislation. Should we not therefore be careful—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are not debating women; we are debating a Bill about age discrimination. Can we now get back to it?

Mr. Banks: Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is an interesting point about any legislation. We can never be certain that what we pass here will work. Sometimes the legislation, once tested, turns out faulty. The good intentions behind the Labour party's all-women shortlists fell foul of the law, but that means only that the law needs to be improved, not that we need to scrap it.

We can surely all agree that discrimination on the ground of sex is wrong, and that discrimination on the ground of age is also wrong. If we do not get it right first time, we have to start again. We are not infallible here, and we do not always get it right first time. We all learned an interesting lesson from what happened to the Labour party recently.

The hon. Member for South Dorset says that he does not discriminate in respect of female secretaries. I accept that, but I suspect that many employers certainly discriminate in terms of age when hiring secretaries. Indeed, I suspect that some hon. Members discriminate in terms of age when employing research assistants and secretaries. There is plenty of evidence all around us of such activities.

There is age discrimination in the media, particularly when it comes to presenters of programmes. How many female presenters of television programmes who are over 50 can hon. Members name? There is probably one—there usually is—but I suspect that that will be about it. Most of them conform to a formula which we all know but which I do not intend to repeat in this House.

The same does not apply to men, however. There are plenty of male news presenters over the age of 50. Hon. Members will remember old Reggie Bosanquet.

ITN carried on employing him until he was practically falling to bits. I remember his preposterous wig—even the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) would not deign to wear such a wig. No television company would ever have employed a woman who ended up looking as rough as dear old Reggie.

The hon. Member for South Dorset also said that we do not need legislation to end age discrimination. He might have used the same arguments about racism, sexism and people with disabilities. He said that the market would do the job. I do not accept that. I would like to accept it; I am not someone who wants to pass legislation for the pure joy of it. We could be doing other things if everyone followed best practice.

The hon. Gentleman said that equality of wages had not been achieved. On the other hand, women now constitute more than 50 per cent of the work force—although it is not entirely certain how much legislation has had to do with that. I wonder how much monitoring of the legislation the Department is doing to find out to what extent it—the legislation—is responsible for that statistic.

I know, however, that the Government abolished wages councils. I know also that 80 per cent. of workers covered by the councils were women. Anyone who is complaining about low wages for women should have well in mind the Tory party's deliberate decision to scrap wages councils.

Was the hon. Member for South Dorset saying that we would improve race relations by scrapping the legislation that relates to them? Would we improve the situation for people with disabilities if we scrapped the legislation that was designed to assist them? I cannot believe that the hon. Gentleman was adopting that approach. If he was, however, he could not be more incorrect. That would be impossible.

The hon. Gentleman said, I believe, that we cannot put the genie back into the bottle. I would not use the word "genie". We are certainly not talking about an evil genie. Legislation was found to be necessary, and it is still necessary. If it has not worked, it is wrong to assert that it should not be on the statute book. Instead, it should be enhanced or improved. I am sure that we would agree that discrimination on the ground of sex or race is anathema, and must not be acceptable to any civilised person.

Age discrimination is a waste of human resources. In 12 years' time, for the first time ever, Britain's over-50 population will be larger than the 15 to 44 age group. That is a statistic that we would do well to bear in mind. It is depressing to find that between a quarter and a third of all advertised jobs stipulate age limits. I have mentioned already how often people come into my office to tell me how depressing it is to try to obtain a job in these circumstances.

A recent survey showed that six out of every 10 employers sought under-35s to fill vacancies. Indeed, on reading advertisements, 35 seems to be the upper age limit. We are talking of people in their late 40s and into their 50s, but in many respects 35 seems to be the upper age limit.

I have acknowledged that legislation against agism would be difficult, if not impossible, to enforce. The Carnegie Third Age programme would go along with that. That programme, however, has done an incredible amount of good work. It has sought to nurture and promote good practices in the employment of older workers. It has sought also to end age bars in legislation. That is one of its proposals. It makes age part of its equal opportunity agenda, and provides guidance to employees on the transition from work to retirement in advance so that they might have time to explore options. We need to encourage employers to adopt those practices.

Perhaps we should change entirely the way in which we organise work. It is clear that technology now is not creating new jobs. Whenever there is a technological advance in manufacturing industry, commerce or banking, for example, it tends to mean that fewer jobs are available. Technology nowadays is about fewer people working. We are seeing labour-saving developments, not labour-encouraging ones.

We need more retraining, so that people can be retrained throughout a working life. Employees should be able to take advantage of technological changes. We need to consider a shorter working day, week or year. Perhaps we need longer holidays and earlier retirement. These issues will have to be considered, because technology is moving forward at a great pace.

The idea that we can have full employment, in terms of everyone who wants a job being able to have one, might be moving away from us. It might still be a social and economic objective, but technology may be moving it away from us. Accordingly, we must consider how we organise our working practices.

This modest Bill, introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North, who is anything but modest, should be given a Second Reading. It should receive detailed consideration in Committee. We could introduce improvements and enhancements. We should not prevent it from moving on to the next stage of consideration. I thank my hon. Friend for introducing the Bill, and I hope that it will be given a Second Reading.

12.24 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

Before I move on to the substance of what I have to say, and I say this sincerely, I congratulate the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), who made a persuasive argument and raised an important issue of principle that we need to examine—age discrimination in society. Every hon. Member would agree that it is wholly undesirable. It seems to me that, in oriental societies, which, perhaps, are more successful than our own, the old are valued much more substantially than they are in western industrial societies. It is rather sad that, during the past 50 or 60 years, such an emphasis has been placed on young people to the exclusion of old people in so many characterisations of what is seen to be good and acceptable.

The essential issue at stake is simply whether legislation will be helpful and whether it will it work. I shall examine that in the next few minutes, but first I make a general point. It is crucial to provide employment opportunities for all people as far as that is possible. The Government have a role in that. Therefore, in order to provide the right economic environment so that everybody of any age group can find employment in future, it is crucial to have low taxation, low inflation and a steadily growing economy. Such a macro-economic environment is right for old and young, irrespective of their age.

[Mr. Richard Spring]

Almost uniquely in western Europe, we have seen the success of policies to reduce unemployment, which has fallen by about 750,000 in the past two or three years, and opportunities for people in the 50 to 60 age group have been created. In other parts of Europe, unemployment has risen: it is more than 3 million in France and more than 4 million in Germany. In this country, it is heading down towards 8 per cent. In my constituency, happily, it is only 4.3 per cent.

However desirable legislation may be in principle and in theory, the macro-economic background is the crucial determinant of employment opportunities for any age group. That is at the heart of what we need to look at. So often, what appears desirable on the face of it turns out not to be so. Let us look, for example, at minimum wage legislation, which may seem to address a certain problem. The fact is that by the time one has added differentials to a minimum wage, the net result—as we see all over Europe—is massively higher unemployment than in countries such as the United Kingdom where such legislation does not exist. We also know that employment on-costs, which would flow from the social chapter, would drive jobs away from Europe, greatly to the detriment of everybody who wishes to work in our countries. In the United Kingdom, non-wage labour costs account for 15 per cent. of labour costs. They account for 29 per cent. in France, 24 per cent. in Germany and 21 per cent. in Spain. Crucially, those elements drive jobs away, for whatever age group.

I have run a business and always made it a point of principle to value the experience of individuals—who are, perhaps, more mature in years—for what they have to offer. The maturity and wisdom that comes from having worked for a long time is an irreplaceable phenomenon, and those people are often more stable and rooted than younger people. It makes enormous sense, therefore, to hire people who are more mature, who are older, and I sought to do so when I was an employer. That is a sensible decision.

We should also consider the demographic aspect. By the year 2000, 1.3 million fewer people under the age of 25 will be entering the labour market. In 1993, there were 1 million fewer 16 to 19-year-olds than there were in 1983, a fall of 28 per cent. By the year 2000, 46 per cent. of workers will be in the 35 to 54 age group, compared with only 40 per cent. in 1988, and 40 per cent. of the work force will be aged 45 or over. Although economic activity among women between the ages of 55 and 59 has risen, it has declined among men. During the next few years, fewer and fewer young people will enter the work force, and employers will be forced to hire more mature workers. Because of the demographic shift, that is already beginning to happen.

I agree with those who have said that we should not adopt a negative attitude to the problem of age discrimination, which is wrong in both principle and practice. People who have worked for a long time become stereotyped, and are considered dispensable; it is felt that they cannot add to the corporate effort as a younger person can. As a major employer, the Government have a role to play, and—as my hon. Friend the Minister has said—they are setting an example by means of best practice. Their efforts to persuade people to change their attitudes voluntarily, rather than as a result of legislation, are now beginning to bear fruit.

More people are employed in the United Kingdom than in any other major European Union country. When we compare our labour market with those of other industrialised countries, we can feel confident because our employment policies are more successful than those of many of our competitors.

The Government have clearly stated that they are opposed to age discrimination, and I believe that all hon. Members agree in principle, but there is no denying that some employers are foolish enough to practise such discrimination. As I have said, my own experience tells me that that is unwise.

In an Adjournment debate, the Minister of State, Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), said that there was no evidence that anti-agism legislation worked in 20-odd countries where it operated, particularly in France and the United States. In fact, there is no point in putting legislation on the statute book if it is not going to work, just because establishing the principle makes one feel better.

Mr. Forman: Is it not possible that the position of elderly people in France and the United States might have been worse without such legislation?

Mr. Spring: My hon. Friend makes a fair point, but I do not think that it holds water. Participation rates are better in the United Kingdom than in countries where those laws exist.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has talked about the various publications that the Government have issued to convince employers that discrimination in the workplace against older people is undesirable, foolish and not in the commercial interest of companies. A campaign called "Getting On" was launched by the Department for Employment in 1994, and 32,000 copies of the publication have been distributed. The idea is to encourage debate among employers and make them face up to the fact that there is good sense in employing older workers. I believe there is some evidence that that is working.

The "Too Old, Who Says?" campaign has been designed to encourage employees. The essential message is not to give up, think about the future, be positive and get retrained. The facilities and opportunities for retraining are certainly there. That campaign was launched about a year ago and some 13,000 copies of the leaflet have been distributed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I apologise for interrupting the hon. Member, but I must point out to hon. Members that even on Friday it is not permissible to do their mail or to read newspapers behind the Benches. This is a debating Chamber.

Mr. Spring: The Government are setting a valid example and I am sure that the hon. Member for Walsall, North accepts that. The Government have scrapped age limits for central civil service recruitment, and jobcentres are now positively discouraged from allowing notices of employment possibilities to be displayed if they contain age limits. I have seen and checked that in my

constituency. A whole series of seminars, sponsored by the Government, is taking place in different parts of the country to highlight the problem. Again, that is wholly desirable.

The fruits of the campaign are demonstrated by the fact that important employers and companies, which we admire as great commercial success stories, such as Marks and Spencer plc, Bovis Ltd., Midland Bank plc, the TSB Group plc and others, are following that route. We are trying to change attitudes voluntarily and that is now happening in practice. I hope that my hon. Friends who take a different view will accept that substantial progress is being made, not only by the Government but, increasingly, by the private sector.

In January, a few weeks ago, the "Age Works" booklet was launched to be used specifically by recruitment agencies and employment businesses. It emphasises the importance of attracting older people into the work force.

I have read the report of a study that was done in 1993 by Mr. Jim Conway. That report mentioned the damage that the stop-go economic policies that have been followed since the war had done to the older worker. Mr. Conway produced evidence to suggest that the stop-go cycle has a more damaging effect on older population groups. However, what the Government have been trying to do since the general election is to reverse completely the whole stop-go mentality and create a stable environment of low inflation and steady economic growth, which is much more conducive to an orderly and growing employment market.

Mr. Ian McCartney: On a point of clarification, which election does the hon. Gentleman mean—1979, 1983, 1987 or 1992—after which those policies were introduced?

Mr. Spring: I am the first person to admit that, since the war, we have had a policy of stop-go. That happened—I wish it had not—under both Conservative and Labour Governments. However, since 1992, the Government have clearly been absolutely committed to a macro-economic framework that throws those stop-go policies, which have been so damaging to our long-term performance, out of the window. Compared with other industrialised countries, we are doing very well on inflation, employment creation, exports and all the other elements that were lacking in the past, and that surely proves our commitment not to return to the inflationary cycle. If the hon. Gentleman is objective, he will accept that. Our policies have not been without difficulty, but they are certainly paying off and in the next general election the hon. Gentleman will recognise their true value.

A number of elements are coming together. I have spoken about demography. That and a better economic environment and the realisation among many employers of the value of older workers are all coming together to the benefit of employment opportunities for older people, without the need to reach for legislation. That climate will continue to improve and the culture and attitudes to which I alluded are being strengthened all the time.

Surveys among business groupings and managers have sought to discover how the matter should be treated. I think that in one survey 80 per cent. said that there should be an active attempt to tackle discrimination against older people. However, those people were certainly not clear about whether that should be done by legislation or voluntarily. I am a vice-chairman of the Small Business Bureau and yesterday I had an opportunity to discuss the matter with a number of small business men and business women who are bureau members. The overwhelming view was that although legislation was desirable in principle, the voluntary approach sponsored by Government and led by many of our larger corporations and success stories in the commercial field was having a clear and specific impact. Despite the contrary views of some other organisations, the Confederation of British Industry certainly takes the view that legislation would be an additional constraint on entrepreneurial activity. I certainly support that view.

The Opposition say that the Bill would be a first step and that it would send out a signal. We must address that but, in practice, even if the upper age limit were removed from advertisements, there would still be a multitude of ways by which an employer who wished to discriminate would be able to glean information about a potential candidate. Therefore, in practice the measure might not be workable.

There are other areas, such as training and promotion, which are key parts of the employer-employee relationship, which the Bill does not begin to address. The legislation would be difficult to monitor, and in practice it could probably be got round. It would have no practical effect at a time when the public feel that we legislate excessively in any case.

At the heart of the issue is whether anti-discrimination legislation works. That is the crucial question, because there is no point in passing a Bill that sounds good and perhaps makes us feel good as we all agree on its principle if, in practice, it will have no desirable effect.

It is worth looking at the participation rate of those between the ages of 55 and 64 in countries where there is such legislation. In the United States, it is 66.4 per cent. for males and 46.3 per cent. for females; in Canada, it is 62 per cent. and 36.4 per cent.; in France, it is 44 per cent. and 30.2 per cent.; in Australia, it is 61.4 per cent. and 24.8 per cent.; in New Zealand, it is 56.7 per cent. and 32.7 per cent.; and in Spain, it is 60.6 per cent. and 20.3 per cent. The only reason why I produce those statistics is to compare them with the United Kingdom's. Without any legislation, the participation rate in the UK for males is 65.7 per cent. and for females 39 per cent., substantially higher than in many of the countries where there is legislation. Surely that must be the crucial determinant of what happens in practice.

Aspects of the labour market in the United States of America, which has been alluded to, are different from Europe. America is less regulated and much more competitive in many ways, and it has been hugely more successful than the European Union countries in creating jobs in the private sector.

Hon. Members all agree that we can applaud the principle that has been aired and the argument advanced by the hon. Member for Walsall, North, but there is clear evidence that, in practice, the Bill would not be workable and that the voluntary efforts that are being sponsored by the Government are proving increasingly successful. On that basis, therefore, we should continue those efforts. As more people have the good sense to employ older and more mature people, the argument will be won on that basis and not via the statute book.

12.46 pm

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring), who made a thoughtful and interesting speech. I congratulate the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on his good fortune in having been successful in the ballot and on bringing this issue again before the House. In the past 12 years, no fewer than six Bills, I believe, have dealt with agism and tried to move that issue up the political agenda.

If our discussions continue in Committee, that will cause me no problems because this topic needs to be properly aired and discussed. If we are to go down the legislative route, we need to ensure that that legislation is the right sort of legislation. That is why, in my intervention during the hon. Gentleman's speech, I tried gently to probe to find out why the Bill's focus was so narrow. In responding, I think that he was delighted that a Conservative might be urging him to go further, although that was necessarily the point of my intervention.

Too often, hon. Members are tempted to pass laws that raise a flag for a particular issue but do not bring about any real or desired effect. In the consideration of the Bill, we are trying to prevent employers from putting an upper age limit in their advertisements. At the same time, clause 2 may enable employers to drive a coach and horses through the Bill—that is probably not the best analogy; with the discussion we have had of the European Commission's practices, perhaps I should say, it may enable them to drive a channel tunnel through it. We will obviously consider that matter in Committee.

The way in which the European Commission advertises—a practice that is copied by other international organisations—is not good and should be stopped. The arbitrary imposition of age limits—35, 45, 55, and so on—causes a great deal of resentment. Who is to say that the applicant of 36 is not as good as the applicant of 35? Such arbitrariness is not helpful and sensible employers do not adopt such a practice in their advertisements.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I am listening to my hon. Friend with great interest. He has referred to sensible employers not imposing age limits, but will he also deal with the other side of the argument and question whether we, as legislators, should brand employers as sensible or otherwise? Is it not the absolute right of an employer to decide in what categories he wants to look to find a suitable employee? Surely no outside body should determine whether he is sensible or otherwise in doing so.

Mr. Robinson: My hon. Friend makes a valid point, with which I had intended to deal later but instead will do so now. As I have said, this is the sixth time in 12 years that such a Bill has come before the House. Does that very fact not send out the message that we should be trying to resolve the issue differently? I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister would be prepared to encourage employers, through their professional associations, to draw up a proper code of practice for recruitment. After all, age is not a determinant of ability.

Young people have come to this House, performed effectively and entered the Cabinet quickly. Our more elderly brethren have been equally successful at the top of their profession. Of course, the Japanese and the Chinese make a virtue out of age and experience. In the 1960s and 1970s, Britain, however, was dismissive of anyone who reached pensionable age. We said that we did not need those people any more and that they should retire. In fact, companies soon found that they needed that experience and before long those people were back in post as consultants.

In many ways, the west has become too dogmatic in its approach to recruitment and to people with experience. The House needs to deal with that problem and encourage better practice. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said that I was a retread. At least that shows that in the Conservative party someone in his mid-40s can re-enter the House—as, indeed, did the hon. Member for Walsall, North. I am pleased that in that respect there is some affinity across the House. We are setting a good example to employers.

Many hon. Members have referred to the European Commission's agism policy. The Bill would force the Commission to change the way in which it advertises in this country, but not in France, Belgium or other European countries. The problem is that an applicant from Britain would have his expectations falsely raised—having had his interview, the matter would be decided in Brussels and he would not be chosen.

Mr. Tony Banks: The hon. Gentleman makes a good argument. Would that not be a good case for ensuring that that requirement is written into the social charter?

Mr. Robinson: The hon. Gentleman is as ingenious as ever, but he takes us away from the scope of the Bill because the argument that I just made is not covered by the Bill. Yes, there would be a penalty—I believe, of £2,500—for infringing the law by setting an upper age limit in an advertisement, but the Bill says nothing about the nuance that one can put into an advertisement. One might say, "Only the young upwardly mobile will be considered," and I believe that the Bill would create much legislative nonsense. I should be happy to discuss that issue in Committee.

Mrs. Gillan: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is nonsense that a law in France prevents the use of age limits in advertisements yet the European Commission flouts the law of that country?

Mr. Robinson: I agree with my hon. Friend. That is the difficulty in which we find ourselves.

As the hon. Member for Walsall, North asked, what are we trying to do in introducing the legislation? We are trying to put up a flag to signal that employers should not discriminate against people who are in their second career, the third wave or whatever term one prefers. In the immortal words of the songwriter Tom Lehrer, however, the Bill would be

"Full of sound and fury signifying absolutely nothing".

I wonder whether, as legislators, we are in the business of trying to do that.

Mr. Forman: It was Shakespeare.

Mr. Robinson: I was thinking of Tom Lehrer, but I am reminded that I am quoting from Shakespeare. *[Interruption.]* So are we.

It is important that we have had the debate. I take the opportunity of paying tribute to Age Concern in Somerset, with which I have had dealings although it has not especially lobbied me about the Bill. It is important that we move the issue of agism up the political agenda, but we must be careful not to do so by framing laws that become meaningless in their implementation and interpretation. I hope that the result of the debate will be that industry and small business associations will try to establish among themselves good practice that they can continue to operate in their recruitment policies. That is the key.

What are employers seeking? Are they seeking someone of a specific age or are they seeking someone who will perform the job well? The answer should always be the latter. It is bad recruitment practice to impose in an advertisement the arbitrary rule that no one aged over 35 or over 45 will be employed, and I prefer to think that only a small minority of employers adopt that type of practice in their advertisements. As I said earlier, there is no evidence that a 36-year-old is worse than a 35-year-old. A deplorable artificial element is introduced into recruitment. It would be welcome if my hon. Friend the Minister would, after the debate, give further thought to ways in which we can improve recruitment practice.

I suspect that when my hon. Friend the Minister makes her contribution to the debate, she will say that to pursue this policy is to embark on a regulatory route that is restrictive and unnecessary. There is strength in that argument, but we all recognise—indeed, she has recognised—that there is a problem and we need to find a means of resolving it. I am certain that voluntary organisations such as Age Concern can also help by making a fresh input into our attempts to solve such problems.

I do not wish to see the Bill stopped dead in its tracks as it provokes important discussion. If the hon. Member for Walsall, North has the good fortune to secure the Bill's Second Reading—I suspect that he will not—and he thinks of me, I shall be happy to play my part in the Standing Committee.

1 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Cheryl Gillan): I should declare an interest in the debate: I am living proof of the motto that life begins at 40. I was at the end of my 39th year when I was elected to the House and I should be delighted if my remarks this morning encouraged other men and women to think about starting a career in the House at about that age.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on his success in the ballot. I am grateful to him for his explanation of the concerns that have led him to introduce the Bill. I have been most interested in what he has had to say today, and I have also appreciated the great thought and effort that has gone into the measure. He did not discover the subject overnight when he won the ballot, but he has thought about it long and hard. He feels passionately about the subject, and I share his concern. I would not want a single Member of the House or a wider audience to believe otherwise.

The Government also fully share the hon. Gentleman's objectives: the elimination of age discrimination in employment. We undoubtedly have a common interest in highlighting the problem. I am particularly grateful that, through the introduction of his Bill and today's debate, the hon. Gentleman has helped the Government and me to lift the subject's profile.

I hope that I shall have some success in persuading the hon. Gentleman as to why the Bill is not acceptable to the Government, and why it is unlikely that we shall be able to agree on an amendment that will make it acceptable, particularly at this time. I was sad that, during his lengthy remarks, the hon. Gentleman did not once mention the Campaign for Older Workers, or the research that I announced last year and that I have reinforced again today.

My right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) supported the Bill and advanced a powerful argument, not least because of his great experience as the founder of the headhunter movement—a movement of which I can do nothing but approve. I have been headhunted only once in my life; it was a pleasurable experience, and I thank my right hon. Friend for starting that trend in the recruitment trade.

My right hon. Friend said that, when it comes to CVs, a sense of humour would help. I think that a sense of humour helps people of all ages. I am reminded of Jeanne Calment, the French woman who has achieved the grand age of 120. When asked if she expected to reach her next milestone of 125, she shrugged and said:

"Why be a pessimist? I've waited 120 years to be famous, and I intend to take advantage of that for as long as possible".

She thinks that she is very lucky, because God might have forgotten her, and she says that at least he does not seem to be in a great hurry to meet her. She is a woman after my own heart: it is rumoured that she gave up smoking at the age of 118.

I listened very carefully to my right hon. Friend's plea for the standardisation of CVs. Any hon. Member present in the Chamber who has been interviewed or has interviewed potential employees will share his deep frustration at CVs that are sometimes extremely poorly prepared. They often achieve the very reverse of what they intend, simply because they obscure an otherwise extremely talented person. I have often read a CV and, upon meeting the job applicant, I have thought to myself, "My goodness, that piece of paper does not do justice to this applicant's talents." I have a great deal of sympathy with my right hon. Friend's point.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) made some very telling points. I listened closely to his remarks, not only because he speaks with such authority due to his long service in the House, but because he has obviously canvassed the views of his colleagues in Scotland. He said that he was speaking on their behalf, and on behalf of Age Concern Scotland.

I was concerned about the fact that the hon. Gentleman said that the measure would not cost any money. The hon. Gentleman may need to rethink that point, as I think that it would have implications for industrial tribunals and for public expenditure. It is estimated that compliance costs across the board could run well into millions of pounds. That will obviously depend on the size of the business or organisation concerned, but reorganisation will certainly have to occur.

If cases end up before the courts and the tribunals, that will have implications for the public purse—not least in terms of the legal aid budget. Although I appreciate the

[Mrs. Cheryl Gillan]

hon. Gentleman's comments, perhaps upon reflection he may admit that there is a cost attached to the legislation—although I agree that it may be difficult to pin down the exact figure.

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Minister may like to consider one small piece of evidence: since W. H. Smith agreed to adopt a completely non-agist policy in recruitment, training and retention, the company has saved £800,000.

Mrs. Gillan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. You have taken a line out of one of my presentations to the Older Workers Roadshow. I presume that you have read the text of my speech, and I congratulate you. Part of my argument is that it makes good business and economic sense not to discriminate against older worker applicants. However, I am talking about the compliance costs associated with the legislation should a company or an individual take a case to the courts or the tribunals. I am making a different point.

Mr. McCartney: It is not a different point. As the Minister said, the point of principle is that it is good business not to discriminate against older workers, as W. H. Smith has proved. As to her point about compliance costs, when someone complies with the law—the Conservatives are the party of law and order—there is no cost; but if someone decides not to comply with the law, that is their personal choice. I suggest to you that, when people see the benefits that have accrued to W. H. Smith, the overwhelming majority will be more than willing to comply with any legislation in that field.

Mrs. Gillan *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Could we remember to refer to each other as hon. Members, Ministers or whatever term is appropriate, rather than using the second person pronoun?

Mrs. Gillan: I hope that I have not broken the rules of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise, if it was me, but it may have been the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: For clarification, I can tell the Minister that both parties were at fault.

Mr. McCartney: I apologise.

Mrs. Gillan: I apologise unreservedly, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Tony Banks: Resign.

Mr. Dalyell: May I be clear about what the Minister was saying? Will any costs be incurred other than by those who have offended against the law? Surely any costs would be incurred by those who have broken the law. I do not see what other costs there could be.

Mrs. Gillan: Let me develop my theme, but I shall come back to the hon. Gentleman's question. The costs to which I refer are, in particular, those associated with the change in recruitment practices within organisations. They may or may not have jobs on offer that meet some of the exclusions that the hon. Member for Walsall, North envisages. So should the Bill become law, there would be initial costs for people who had not yet transgressed. I promise that I shall revisit that point later.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow said something that struck home with me, when he painted a powerful picture of the relationship between grandparents and younger people. I must declare an interest, in case the hon. Member for Makerfield jumps up again—I am a step-grandmother.

Mr. McCartney: I can trump that, because I believe that I am the youngest grandfather in the House, with five grandsons so far and another one on the way.

Mrs. Gillan: Obviously the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman and I are working as a double act, because I hoped that he would take up that opening. May I be one of the last to congratulate him? That is a powerful record, and we have something in common.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow raised the theme of grandparents seriously, so I shall return to it seriously. I have had the good fortune to visit the far east, and I was struck by the aspect of its culture whereby, when people of working age have children, the grandparents invariably stop work to take care of them, which allows the parents, who are at their most economically productive, to continue to bring their income into the family. That idea has stayed with me as an example of good practice.

I like the extended family. My grandmother lived with us all my life, and until the day she died I had the good fortune of having that older person there to give me counsel and to take care of me. From a parent's point of view, there is no better person to look after one's most precious asset, one's child, than one's own parent. I think that the hon. Gentleman would recognise that point, because it is worth emphasising.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) said in a brief speech that he entirely supported the Bill. As he is a sponsor of the Bill, that was absolutely right. Age Concern does terrific work, and, like the hon. Member for Walsall, North, my hon. Friend is briefed by that organisation. I do not want any of my remarks to be taken as casting aspersions on the work of that august body.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) came in for some stick, which made me rather sad, because he was the first person to speak in favour—or rather, against the Bill and in favour of the line that I am taking. My hon. Friend has had experience of recruitment, and the hon. Member for Makerfield must acknowledge that there is nothing more powerful than someone speaking from experience.

I was extremely grateful for the in-depth contribution of the hon. Member for Linlithgow, and the House is a wiser place for it. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) agreed that the Bill would not have much effect, yet went on to support it. At least the hon. Member for Walsall, North is behind his Bill body and soul. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West was behind it in a half-hearted fashion.

Mr. Tony Banks: I was not being half-hearted but realistic, in respect of agism. I said that the Bill,

if enacted, would not end agism, but that the mere fact that one cannot do everything with a piece of legislation does not mean that one should do nothing.

Mrs. Gillan: When I challenged the hon. Gentleman on the information that he gives constituents who visit his surgery, and asked him about "Too Old, Who Says?", "Age Works" and "Getting On", he appeared not to know about those publications.

Mr. Banks: There may be many reasons for the Minister caring to visit my constituency—we will not go into all of them. If she comes to the reception area in my office, she will find Government publications waiting for people to read, and those titles are also on display.

Mrs. Gillan: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has put the record straight. I hope that he has read those publications himself.

Mr. Banks: That is another matter.

Mrs. Gillan: It is another matter. I advise the hon. Gentleman to read those documents chapter and verse, from cover to cover—not least because they prove that the Government are doing something. However, the hon. Member for Newham, North-West appears to be growing old gracefully.

Mr. Banks: How sweet. Perhaps the Minister and I can grow old gracefully together.

Mrs. Gillan: I think that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would advise me to refuse that offer.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) contributed some pertinent points. He has made his apologies, because he had to leave to attend surgery matters in his constituency.

My hon. Friend mentioned oriental society. In the course of visiting Japan, I saw the older person at work in a commercial setting. I will refer to the person as the sleeper. In negotiations, a senior man is invariably present—albeit I would appreciate seeing the occasional senior woman. That individual neither comments nor contributes in any other way to the meeting, but he is extremely important.

Even if he appears to sleep during the negotiations, behind the scenes, when the decision is being made to proceed with the contract or to continue the business in hand, the sleeper will turn out to be a senior representative of the company who knows the business inside out. He brings the benefit of his advice and years to bear on the company's business. That is an excellent practice, and more businesses could benefit from the advice of senior people. My hon. Friend did not believe that we need to reach for legislation, which he thought would be difficult to monitor and excessive.

My hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson) has also sent his apologies. He has some distance to travel, to attend to surgery matters in his constituency, but he was keen to make a contribution to this important debate. My hon. Friend was not unhappy to see the Bill further discussed in Committee, and he certainly gave us some good ideas for encouraging the establishment of a code of practice. All hon. Members' contributions have greatly added to the debate.

I should now like to express my own thoughts. The hon. Member for Walsall, North knows that this legislation is not complete. He wrote about his Bill in *The House Magazine* and called for the end of discrimination on the ground of age, and said:

"It is, of course, true that banning job ads that refer to age will not in itself end such discriminatory conduct."

He is kind to acknowledge my support of his good intentions; however, he says "legislate", and I say "persuade and educate". That is the hair's-breadth difference between us; we want to achieve the same ends.

I know that age discrimination is practised by some employers and agree that it is unjust, makes no economic sense and must be eliminated. However, this Bill will not eliminate age discrimination because it can be practised at every stage of the recruitment and employment process.

Age discrimination can be present in advertisements, but it can also be manifested at many other levels. Hon. Members should think about that, because, if we rule out age discrimination in advertisements, it can be practised at the selection for interview, at the selection for the job, and it can certainly be practised when it comes to career development and promotion. I do not think that one hon. Member would disagree that discrimination can occur at all those stages.

The Government are totally opposed to all forms of age discrimination, but there is a real prospect that simply banning upper age limits in advertisements will shift the issue further down the recruitment chain.

Let us examine exactly what banning upper age limits would mean. This private Member's Bill would make it unlawful to state an actual or preferred upper age limit for a job, along the lines of: "Secretary wanted; must be between 40 and 50 years of age". That type of advertisement would be banned—I can see that the hon. Member for Walsall, North is nodding in agreement. However, it would not be unlawful to advertise a job in terms such as: "Secretary wanted; must be aged 40 or over". I can see that the hon. Gentleman is thinking about that prospect.

Where does that leave all the prospective secretaries who are under 40 years of age? This Bill could, in itself, be discriminatory.

Mr. Winnick: I gave consideration to those issues, and anticipated the points which the Minister made. One must deal with the situation as it is. Age discrimination, as the Minister knows—because of what she said, she can only agree—is against people who are over a certain age. The discrimination, in the main, does not apply to people who are under a certain age. The Minister should address herself to that very important distinction.

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Gentleman has made an extremely powerful point. I would perhaps be persuaded to see things from his point of view had the Labour party not issued a press release yesterday which provides its definition of older workers. The press release defined older workers

"as people aged between 25 and 49".

[Mrs. Gillan]

The hon. Gentleman has been shot in the foot by members of his own Front Bench and his own party policy, which has been published in a party press release.

The private Member's Bill of the hon. Member for Walsall, North would allow one to advertise: "Secretary wanted; must be aged 40 and over". That makes this legislation, in itself, discriminatory.

Mr. Ian McCartney: The hon. Lady is being disingenuous in the extreme. The tables used—for 25 to 49-year-olds and for workers over 50—are those that the Government use when they compile the figures. If that is wrong, they can take the responsibility for it. Both tables show a substantial rise in long-term unemployment among these age groups. It is also clear that people of these ages, once they become unemployed, spend much longer than any other age group in the labour market finding work again. That is the truth about yesterday's figures.

Mrs. Gillan: I was quoting a press release entitled "News from Labour". The words used are certainly not those of the Government. The press release refers to

"older workers . . . defined as people aged between 25 and 49".

So the hon. Member for Makerfield labels 25 to 49-year-olds as older workers. He may be interested to know that unemployment has fallen since 1992 by more than 250,000 in this age group, and that long-term unemployment for the same group is down by more than 50,000.

Mr. McCartney *rose—*

Mrs. Gillan: No, I want to make progress. I have already taken 25 minutes.

This Bill could result, as the hon. Member for Walsall, North seemed to acknowledge in *The House Magazine*, in fewer jobs being advertised, and more jobs being filled by informal and word-of-mouth recruitment. Employers must be left with the ability to identify the best person for the job, and must not feel restricted by legislation.

Let us imagine that the legislation is on the statute book. If an employer wished to comply with it, how would he know whether an advertisement was subject to exemption? Would he be required to wait for the courts to decide, or would he need to take legal advice? Employers would have to pay for that advice, directly or indirectly, and for a small business with several sites around the country, it could be costly.

Lawyers are often accused of making lots of money, but they must be licking their lips trying to work out what the Bill could mean for them. If an employer were taken to court because he wanted an assistant professional at a golf club of between 30 and 40, the judge might then rule that that was unlawful. The employer would be fined, and would then readvertise the job for someone over 30.

A 50-year-old might then apply for the job—but not get it, because the employer considers him too old. The employer then decides to go to court to establish that his vacancy is an exemption to the Act. This time the judge decides that there are grounds for exempting the vacancy, so the employer readvertises for a professional golfer who must be under 40. Thus the Bill will be an additional cost burden for employers, and in cases like this one, it will be an insanity.

Who would police the Bill? There is no provision in it for any sort of administrative framework. How would an employer know whether his advertisement was exempt? How would a recruitment agency know? Do we really believe that clogging up the courts to decide individual cases is a workable approach or an effective way of eliminating age discrimination? I genuinely think not.

In my opinion, this Bill would do nothing to change employers' attitudes to age discrimination in employment. It could, however, discourage them from advertising vacancies openly, and it could push discrimination further down the recruitment chain, where it would be more difficult to flush out of the system.

I cannot stress too strongly that the Government share the concerns of the hon. Member for Walsall, North. That is why we have taken positive action to tackle age discrimination through the Campaign for Older Workers. The campaign, and its success to date, owes much to the work of my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe). She did a great deal to raise the profile of this issue, and I thank the hon. Gentleman for mentioning her.

We drew attention to the need for employers to tap into the full range of skills and talents of all age groups, including older workers. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will remember my hon. Friend's efforts to find the oldest worker in Britain—efforts that proved that age need not be a barrier to employment. For example, does the hon. Gentleman remember the success achieved by Audrey Walter, who at the age of 75 achieved a city and guilds bronze medal for her work on the national vocational qualification assessors' course on direct care?

Before I came into this place, I was the head of a department in a professional firm. I took into employment in my department somebody who was called Stan, who I am pleased to say is still there. I shall not reveal his age, which is very young, but he was the most senior person in my department by several decades. He provided a tremendous service to the company and to the department. He was reliable to a fault. He still continues to do a first-class, excellent job. Someone may have said at some stage that he might be a little too senior still to be working, but that was not true. At least I know that I practise what I preach.

What are the Government doing? What progress is being made? The Campaign for Older Workers is targeted at all the key players in the labour market and at all aspects of recruitment and employment. We consider it vital to persuade employers that age discrimination at work has no place in a prosperous economy. To compete successfully, employers must be ready to take full advantage of the skills, reliability, experience and commitment that older people offer. The differences between individuals are far greater and far more job relevant than the differences between age groups. It is in employers' own interests to treat people on their merits regardless of age.

"Getting On" is a booklet that was published by the Department. It offers practical advice to our first target group, to employers. Since publication in 1993, copies have been sent to well over 145,000 organisations. The booklet, with its gold-coloured cover, provides

practical advice on what can be done and sets out the real benefits to be derived in bottom-line business terms in doing so.

"Getting On" urges employers to develop their work forces to be successful in a competitive world market, and suggests that they take five basic steps to ensure that people are selected, developed, promoted and retained on the basis of merit. The five basic steps are: first, drop age bars in advertisements; secondly, select on ability; thirdly, welcome older applicants; fourthly, introduce flexible working; fifthly, invest in workers.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Walsall, North will agree that the booklet is well worth reading, and that it should be read by every employer. Copies are available from the Department. They are available readily and at no cost. I urge people to apply for copies of "Getting On" and of "Too Old, Who Says?" and "Age Works".

Another effective way of getting the message to employers is by inviting them to attend roadshows, which have been held throughout the country. So far, we have held events in Leeds, Glasgow, Birmingham and Cardiff. About 200 people have attended each presentation. Each event has provided employers with a platform from which to exchange views, especially on good practice. The roadshows give them the opportunity to take the message forward to even more employers.

I launched the roadshows personally in Birmingham and Cardiff because I feel so strongly about the issues that they have taken up. I took it upon myself to talk directly to employers—as I have said, about 200 at each venue. The people I met believed the argument, and saw the business sense as well as the economic sense of not ruling out old people in job recruitment. Every one of them, however, whom I spoke to individually, asked me not to legislate—in other words, not to put yet another burden on their businesses.

Mr. Winnick: Does the Minister remember what I said about the letter that I received from the Federation of Small Businesses, which represents many thousands of firms? It stated that it was not opposed to the measure and believed that it could do some good. I accept that some employers are against the Bill, but it is clear that others are not. That point should be taken on board.

Mrs. Gillan: The Federation of Small Businesses is an organisation for which I have the greatest respect, but perhaps it might want to revisit the argument in the light of some of my remarks on the potential costs and burdens of compliance on businesses. It is a difficult issue to cost, but costs are associated with the proposed legislation and they will fall on businesses. The audiences of business men and women that I have addressed have seen the potential costs and burdens, and feel that it is much more effective if they are persuaded by my arguments so that they no longer discriminate than if we placed another measure on them.

We think it vital that we persuade older workers that age should not be a negative factor. My Department's booklet, which has the challenging title, "Too Old, Who Says?", provides employees and jobseekers with advice about what they can do to overcome perhaps even their own prejudices about age being a barrier to employment. It is packed with advice to help older workers to survive and thrive in the fast-changing modern labour market. It gives practical help and advice on where to look for information—jobcentres, the media, agencies, networking, training and enterprise councils and employers—and what to do to plan and improve their chances, whether they are in work and want to build skills, expecting to leave work or unemployed.

In advising people how to get back to work, the booklet urges older workers to take stock of where they want to go with their lives, and to concentrate on what they have to offer with regard to their skills and experience, personal qualities, potential, capacity to be retrained and commitment.

All the roadshows had a speaker on the platform who was an older worker. In that way, the audience was brought face to face with the reality of age discrimination and how it can be overcome, and the potential of older workers to contribute to their companies and our economic well-being. The House will be interested in the speeches of David Leverett and Peter Griffin who accompanied me, as well as the employers who made speeches about the benefits of having older people in their work force.

Recruitment agencies also have a key role to play, and that is why the latest publication from the Department, "Age Works", is directed towards the recruitment and employment service industry. The feedback that I have already had about this booklet—it was published only last month—has expressed overwhelming support for the voluntary approach advocated in it. One organisation begged me not to be

"led down this lunatic path of legislation".

Alec Reed, founder and executive chairman of Reed Personnel Services, welcoming the booklet, said:

"Employers should look for talent not toupees when they are selecting staff. Age limits are blunt tools only appropriate to dinosaur recruiters."

An even blunter tool is legislation.

Hon. Members will say that there is little evidence that the voluntary approach is achieving any success. I am familiar with the cases that hon. Members related about the discrimination experienced by some of their constituents. Such cases also appear in my postbag, and I have great sympathy with individuals with this problem who visit the surgery of their Member of Parliament. Nevertheless, it is clear that the trend is for more and more companies to review their policies and practices.

Of key relevance to the debate is the fact that the number of age-barred advertisements is in decline. Many surveys that are undertaken by the reputable—and some by the not so reputable—paint the blackest of pictures of some sectors of industry. One of those sectors is the one in which I used to work—marketing.

It was my privilege to be invited to speak at a meeting of the Worshipful Company of Marketors. It is often said to me that marketing is one of the main culprits in discriminating on the ground of age when recruiting, that marketing people should all be young, up-and-coming and thrusting, and that there is no room for anybody else with more and wider experience. I did my own quick survey to find out how true that was that week.

Of the 349 job vacancies that appeared in that week's editions of marketing magazines, only 22 displayed an age range or limit, and 14 of those 22 were contained in two recruitment agency advertisements. There were

[Mrs. Gillan]

therefore even fewer offenders—but those offenders should follow the example of their fellow advertisers, and dispense with references to age.

In 1991, an independent survey found that 27 per cent. of advertisements in national newspapers carried an age bar. A similar survey this year found that the figure had fallen to 11 per cent. The media have a role to play. Why do they not do the same as *People Management*, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Walsall, North? Since 1 January, it has refused to publish advertisements containing age barriers.

If members of the media are listening to the debate, let me ask them to follow the example of *People Management*. Why should we have to consider legislation to deal with the problem when it is in the hands of the media to kill it in one fell swoop? The hon. Member for Walsall, North and I both hope that the media are listening, because we have a shared aim.

People Management did not take its action lightly. It could lose £300,000-worth of advertisements if the advertisers went elsehere, but it decided that it was worth having the courage of its convictions, and it is to be praised for that decision.

I am speaking at some length because I feel strongly about the subject—

Mr. Ian McCartney: It is a filibuster.

Mrs. Gillan: I have been accused, from a sedentary position, of filibustering.

Mr. McCartney: It is a filibuster.

Mrs. Gillan: I have moved swiftly; I have kept the debate going, and I have not repeated myself. If the hon. Gentleman wants to trivialise the debate, he can do so outside. I take the matter very seriously.

Mr. Dalyell: The Minister said that she would return to the question of costs. The fault may be mine, but I have heard no reference to the Bill's cost to public funds.

Mrs. Gillan: I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman has not followed my argument. I referred to the potential costs. If an applicant who felt that he had been discriminated against required legal aid, that would fall on the public purse.

Mr. Dalyell *rose—*

Mrs. Gillan: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give way again, because I want to talk about my research. I will write to him giving a compliance cost assessment if that would be helpful.

Last October, I commissioned a comprehensive national survey to be carried out by an independent organisation to find out what action employers were taking to overcome age discrimination in the workplace. It will involve the contacting of all employers who have been employed in the regional presentations, together with a random sample of other employers. The research should help us to learn more about what needs to be done to continue to combat age discrimination.

Research also provides an instructive perspective on the Bill. My Department commissioned research on 20 countries; there was no evidence that anti-agism legislation had any effect on employers' attitudes or practices. Elsewhere, as we have heard, discriminatory practices take place despite legislation.

For example, in France—which has had legislation since 1986 under article 1311-4 of the Code du Travail—the law is not only not enforced, but largely ignored. In 1994, the European industrial relations review found that 30 per cent. of job advertisements in *Le Monde* specified maximum ages or age limits. That is useless and that is not the point of gratuitous legislation.

I hope that the hon. Member for Walsall, North will also note my remarks on the European Commission. The European Commission purports to have the interests of older workers at heart, but the European Parliament, which is dominated by members of the hon. Member's political persuasion, still advertises jobs with age limits. Physician, heal thyself. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association took the age limits out of its job advertisement almost immediately after I wrote to it. The hon. Member for Walsall, North should take his argument to Brussels.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North and I both agree that age discrimination is wrong, but we do not agree about the way in which we should stop it. He says legislate, I say educate. What is important is that people outside the Chamber hear the message. The hon. Member has given me great heart by using his valuable slot in the private Member's Bill ballot, at position No. 4, to highlight the problem. I hope that all the newspapers write about our debate and I hope that employers continue to take the lead that is being given by me, the Department for Education and Employment and the Government to outlaw age discrimination in recruitment.

At a time when our economic policies are delivering sustainable growth, low inflation and rising prosperity, not a single business would thank me for introducing an additional burden—

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister is clearly not giving way.

Mrs. Gillan: I have been more than generous in the amount of times that I have given way during my speech. I have been accused of filibustering and I am just about to say my final sentence. I repeat, my aim is the same. The hon. Member for Walsall, North will continue to press for legislation, but I will continue to carry out my programme of education.

1.46 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): On behalf of the Opposition, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and colleagues on both sides of the House on bringing the Bill before the House. It is interesting to note that this private Member's Bill has all-party support from right hon. and hon. Members. It has support outside the House, from a range of organisations that have been committed for many years to eradicating agism in the labour market. More tellingly, many employers in key sectors of the economy support

the Bill. The organisations that represent small businesses support the Bill. The managers who are responsible for managing industry every day support the Bill. The only organisations that seem to oppose it are those associated with the Government.

If the private Member's Bill procedure is to mean anything for the rights of Back Benchers, the Bill should be entitled, as a matter of course, to proceed to Committee, so that the Committee could consider amendments and suggestions for change appropriately. The Minister, in her long peroration, at no time made any rebuttal of the Bill of any intellectual quality. She did not back up her allegation about resource implications. When she was pressed on resource implications, she said that she could not calculate them. When she was pressed to give detailed information about previous legislation not working, she gave us no historical analysis.

Mrs. Gillan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McCartney: I shall give way in a second.

Today and over the past week there has been a whispering campaign by Conservative Whips about denying hon. Members the opportunity to discuss the Bill in Committee. That is a serious miscalculation by the Government, because a generation of people are suffering job insecurity. People who are fearful of losing their jobs and those who have lost them expect the House properly to consider, at least in the first instance, the removal of blatant discrimination.

Secondly, those people expect economic policies that will present job opportunities for a growing number of people who, at the age of 40 to 45, are being asked to face the prospect of uneconomic activity between that age and the age of official retirement. The House will not do that significant group of citizens any credit by killing the Bill. What does the Minister have to fear from the Bill?

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Gentleman accuses me of not including all sorts of matters in my speech. I assure him that if I had spoken for longer, I could have included those matters. I point him to an article in *The Independent*, which states:

"The Institute of Directors warned that the measure would have little impact and urged MPs to vote against it."

David Mackintosh of Mackintosh Enterprises said:

"Please do not be led down this lunatic path of legislation".

P. Andrews, director of Work Mates, the building trade appointment and recruitment agency, said:

"We would not recommend legislation that outlawed the keeping out of candidate age records."

People support my line and I have delivered a thoughtful argument on the subject.

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Lady used the most inappropriate word, "lunatic". Apparently it is a lunatic proposal, but she has also said that the proposal is of no consequence. Where is the consistency in that? The proposal is no more than an attempt to gain minimum equitable consideration for interview for a job. It is an economic issue and not just a matter of the right not to be discriminated against in the labour market. It is a business and a social and economic imperative to challenge the twin evils of structural long-term unemployment among people aged 40 and above while not adding to the burden the discriminatory practices that deny substantial numbers of people access to the labour market.

I shall try to show the breadth of the problems that face us. The Minister said that unemployment among the age groups that we are discussing is receding. But in the period 1990-95, unemployment has increased by 63 per cent. among those over the age of 50, and 50 per cent. of unemployed people aged 50 and over are unemployed for a year or more. A quarter of that age group is unemployed for four years or more. Communities in which people have a minimum living are already devastated and economic activity continues to drag. As it drags, those communities are at the edge of the nation's activities.

The increase in unemployment during the period 1990-95 among people who were just below 50 was also quite staggering. In some regions, it has risen by more than 400 per cent. and on average over the country as a whole by 100 per cent. For the Minister to dismiss that deterioration in access to the labour market is breathtaking incompetence in both economic and social terms.

The Bill must be seen in context. It will not overnight eradicate agism in the labour market or create overwhelming new job opportunities. It is a genuine attempt to start rolling back the concept that when a person reaches the age of 40 or above and becomes unemployed for whatever reason, his ability to enter the labour market is severely and increasingly curtailed. It is curtailed in terms of not only the labour market, but his ability to get into training.

Mrs. Gillan: If the hon. Gentleman considers that those people's opportunities are curtailed, perhaps he will explain what effect the minimum wage and the social chapter would have on those people's chances.

Mr. McCartney: The national minimum wage will be implemented by an incoming Labour Government. Its rate will be set by Government, employers, trade unions and the Low Pay Unit. The minimum wage will not cost jobs. It will create economic productivity and jobs. I await the general election. The hon. Lady will put her case and we shall put ours. There is overwhelming support in the nation for the minimum wage. Unlike us, the hon. Lady supports a low-pay, no-pay strategy—the fat cats and all of rest of it. As a result, millions of workers receive low pay and poverty wages and are in no-hope jobs, with no opportunity for training or advancement. That is the Government's deregulation strategy.

If we are serious about doing something in the long term about agism in the labour market, we need to introduce legislation that assists both management and employees in key sectors of the economy. We need a labour market where training and investment in retraining play a significant part. We need to change the nature of promotion in companies. We need flexible working to allow older workers, many of whom have caring responsibilities, which the Minister mentioned, to get back to work or to retain their jobs. We need to introduce proposals on relocation and maximising the potential of all working people, whatever their age. That includes their ability to change career.

Agism in the labour market prevents much of that from taking place. Why do the Government fail to recognise the growing support for, and the trend in industry and in

[Mr. McCartney]

the community towards, a legislative framework that would provide minimum standards and offer opportunity for a change in the management culture? That would lead to fundamental changes in the labour market, and would allow older workers either to remain in work or to return to the labour market, because discriminatory factors would have ended. It would allow them to be interviewed and treated on merit.

As the global economy changes, no nation, never mind this nation, can, under any circumstances, be prepared in either the short or the long term to lock out so much talent and ignore the need to develop an industrial strategy for the next millennium. What other nation would take a deliberate decision to lock out of its labour market tens of thousands of experienced workers?

For young people, one of the biggest problems in the labour market involves on-costs on training. As the Government reduce their training budget and access to training, both in absolute terms of money invested and in terms of some of the discriminatory practices allowed by training and enterprise councils against older workers, companies, if they want to invest in training young people, must increasingly do in-work training. That training can be better achieved with a mix of work force that includes older, experienced and skilled workers. That mix of an experienced work force with a new up-and-coming one gives the best chance, not just for this country in the long term, but for companies to prosper and expand.

Mrs. Gillan: If we are so concerned to lock out the older worker, will the hon. Gentleman explain why, in April 1994, the Government's main adult training programme, training for work, was extended to people between the ages of 18 and 63?

Mr. McCartney: As I did not get an answer to a question that I asked some weeks ago on that issue, will the Minister explain why the TEC operating agreement between her Department and the TECs, which, technically, relates to people aged 18 to 63, says on page 52:

"an eligible person aged 18-24 who has been Continuously Unemployed for two years or more prior to entry."?

Such people will be given priority in recruitment. That means that they get priority over workers of an older generation. The Government say one thing in their publicity and campaigning, but, in the day-to-day working of their financial agreement with the TECs, they will continue to discriminate against older workers. As a consequence, in the areas with the highest unemployment among older people—those very areas where investment and retraining is needed—companies are discriminating against older people.

Mrs. Gillan *rose—*

Mr. McCartney: I am not giving way. The hon. Lady took almost 50 minutes for her speech. I am trying to complete mine within 20 minutes. I want to be as positive as possible in support of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North.

The evidence of discrimination is overwhelming. Even the Minister's Department recognises that more than 40 per cent. of employers engage in some form of age discrimination. Officials from her Department recently suggested that when employers pressurise jobcentres, they turn a blind eye to advertisements with agist elements. The truth is that the Government oppose even this small measure to help older workers—

Mrs. Gillan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way now?

Mr. McCartney: I shall not give way—*[Interruption.]* I know that the hon. Lady has her instructions—

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Give way. The hon. Gentleman asked my hon. Friend the Minister a question. Let her answer.

Mr. McCartney: I am not giving way to the Minister. She took 50 minutes for her speech.

The Labour party's position is quite clear. This Conservative Government may not accept my hon. Friend's Bill, but an incoming Labour Government will introduce comprehensive legislation to make age discrimination in employment illegal. We shall consult on the legislation. We want to ensure that not only will workers have a remedy in law against discrimination, but the appropriate legal framework will be put in place to enable employers to change their workplace practices, with co-operation between management and workplace representatives. Whether those workplace representatives are or are not in a trade union will not be relevant.

Our legislation will be a proactive approach to skilful management. We want to change the techniques to ensure investment in human capital, the development of training, the widening of employment opportunities within a company, changes in recruitment policy, improvements in performance and better older worker retention. We will respond to the demographic changes in society. We will promote diversity within the age mix of company work forces. We will work with new and old employers to improve the organisational culture of management, to bring about more flexible working practices. We will ensure that training meets the needs of older workers so that they have greater employment opportunities.

Behind our policy is one simple premise. In the two decades of Conservative government, there have been two recessions. There are now 3 million fewer jobs in manufacturing than there were when the Government took office. There are 1 million fewer jobs in the economy than there were when the Prime Minister came to power. Since 1990, 11 million people in England alone have had to seek unemployment benefit on at least one occasion. Since the last general election, 8.5 million people in Britain have had to seek unemployment benefit on at least one occasion. Over the next two years, people will face a one-in-three chance of becoming unemployed in the insecure labour market created by this Conservative Government's policies.

At the same time as there is such high job insecurity, there is merger mania—with thousands of highly skilled, highly paid and profitable workers being put on the dole to meet the short-term costs of acquisition. The Government allow low pay and job insecurity to drive their economic policies. They back people such as Cedric Brown—*[Interruption.]* This week the Government defended his retirement package, while allowing British Gas, as a matter of course, to sack workers who reach

the age of 50. Those practices are unacceptable, and an incoming Labour Government will give priority to ending them by introducing anti-discrimination legislation.

Following our extensive consultation in the past year with organisations and industry, industry will work effectively with an incoming Labour Government to introduce legislation that will be comprehensive in content and a useful tool for management. Alongside our employment policies of increasing job opportunities in the economy, the legislation will start to end the evil of mass unemployment and, in that context, start to obtain justice for the tens and hundreds of thousands of older workers who have been deliberately placed on the scrap heap by the Government's economic policies.

I ask hon. Members to support the Bill.

2.4 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I welcome the Bill for three reasons. First, it responds to the experience of my constituents. Secondly, it complements the Government's campaign to highlight the unfairness of age discrimination, about which we have just heard. Thirdly, it does not go as far as Labour's commitments, which have just been confirmed, to outlaw age discrimination, which would be a great mistake.

As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and as many hon. Members know from their holidays and from conferences there in which they have taken part, my constituency of Bournemouth is a very attractive place and is one of Britain's most popular places in which to retire.

Many people who retire early tend to seek a second or further career, not only for something to do but to continue to apply their skills and experiences—and, of course, the extra money is useful. All that is natural and to be encouraged. The same applies to those who do not want to retire, and it should never be forgotten by older people that the Conservative Government enabled them to continue in work after reaching the age of retirement by abolishing the earnings rule.

In addition, some people have been made redundant long before their planned retirement and need, and seek, employment. There are also women who have been housewives and mothers for most of their working lives who want to return to the workplace. All those trends will continue.

It is men and women in situations such as those from whom many hon. Members have received complaints about prejudice against older applicants by potential employers. That prejudice at the first stage of recruitment is the major obstacle in returning to the job market.

I applaud the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) for pursuing the Bill at his second attempt, in response to the anxieties expressed by our constituents. It will encourage the potential employer to think twice before committing himself to a younger applicant.

There is no doubt of the value to an employer seeking to fill vacancies of employing middle-aged and older people. Several hon. Members mentioned the advantages of employing more mature staff as part of a mixed-age work force. The content of their remarks equates with my experience of having helped to run a family business.

Older workers are more appreciative of their job. They may be slower than their younger colleagues, but they are much more meticulous in satisfying their job description, not least to protect their job, so they are more reliable and committed. An employer is more likely to employ a 60-year-old whom he took on at the age of 50 than to employ a 30-year-old whom he took on at the age of 20.

Older workers are less prone to absenteeism as a result of sickness or a wide variety of reasons that tempt younger staff to come in late or not at all. Older workers also prove to be less financially demanding of on employer, although that, of course, is no justification in itself for taking them on. Their financial needs and ambitions are less than those of younger people and many enjoy other sources of income—perhaps a pension or investments.

Above all, older workers bring talents that have been discovered, skills that have been developed and experiences that have been acquired from previous employment, to the advantage of a new employer, without the need for costly training. All that must transmit into a better service, increased customer satisfaction and confidence, a more competent work force, lower staff turnover and larger profits.

The essential aspect of the Bill is that no employer will appreciate those talents, skills and experiences that could be available to him unless he sees them on an application form and a CV. He can then make a choice. It is a choice that he can make immediately if the applicant's ability is unattractive—at least the employer will be able to make an informed choice, which is what the Bill provides for.

All those measures complement the Government's Campaign for Older Workers, to which my hon. Friend the Minister has referred. I found the Department's booklets of great interest and very encouraging, as I am sure they are to many of my constituents. It is particularly encouraging that an increasing number of well-known high street stores—such as those mentioned in the booklets and the debate—and the police are reporting the distinct advantages and benefits of an older work force. If that is already a trend that can only be encouraged by the Bill, it will give great hope to the older unemployed, which I welcome.

I hope that other leading stores and businesses will follow the trend. It can be encouraged by employer organisations such as the Confederation of British Industry working in co-operation, perhaps uniquely, with the Trades Union Congress. It can also be encouraged by local chambers of trade and charity organisations. Local authorities, in particular, should be encouraged to appreciate the advantages to the community of employing older women who have just finished their role as housewives and mothers—and not just as lollipop ladies outside schools.

Most of the established small businesses have long been aware of the advantages of employing older workers.

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend may like to know about the Federation of Recruitment and Employment Services, which has helped my Department. It requires all its members to observe a code of good recruitment practice. It tries to find out why an employer is including an age bar in advertisements and it uses its powers of persuasion and reasoning to convince the employer that a person's age will not guarantee ability. The Nationwide building society has dropped age bars from its advertisements and has made great inroads into its thinking and attitudes towards older workers.

Mr. Atkinson: My hon. Friend is right to mention the codes that are being recommended and the work practices that are being implemented—if they were working effectively, there would be no need for the Bill.

I would not welcome the plans of the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats—the Liberal Democrats are not here this afternoon—to put age discrimination on the same footing as racial and sexual discrimination. That policy would not work, but would prove counter-productive to those whom it purported to help. Legislation to outlaw discrimination on the ground of age would be far more difficult to implement than the laws that already exist to discourage prejudice on grounds of race and sex, because performance and skills are so interlinked with age.

Such a policy would encourage employers and applicants to take firms to court for anything that looked like age discrimination. Firms would be at risk if they sent mainly younger workers on training courses. The policy would provide a field day for the legal profession, soak up legal aid and encourage firms to avoid such legislation and regulation. It would not solve the problem of age discrimination, as evidenced in other countries such as the United States of America, where such legislation exists.

The way forward lies with the Government's campaign of persuasion and education, together with the Bill. It will provide a positive sign to older people that age discrimination is unacceptable. It will encourage employers, particularly large ones, to rethink their employment policies so that every person has a right to be considered for work in relation to his skills, capabilities and experience, irrespective of age. For those reasons, I hope that the Bill will be given a Second Reading.

Mr. Winnick *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 63, Noes 1.

Division No. 48] **[2.15 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Richard
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carrington, Matthew
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Dalyell, Tam
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Forman, Nigel
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoyle, Doug
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'ld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Khabra, Piara S
Livingstone, Ken
McCartney, Ian
McKelvey, William
McMaster, Gordon
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
O'Hara, Edward
Pike, Peter L
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Rendel, David
Sedgemore, Brian
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Stewart, Allan
Touhig, Don
Wicks, Malcolm
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Mackinlay and
Mr. John McWilliam.

NOES

Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alan Duncan and
Mr. Michael Stern.

Whereupon MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *declared that the Question was not decided in the affirmative, because it was not supported by the majority prescribed by Standing Order No. 36 (Majority for closure or for proposal of Question).*

Question again proposed, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

2.24 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): The hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) made an extraordinary statement this afternoon, when he seemed to imply that simply because a private Member's Bill was high on the list, it should be entitled to a Second Reading. If and when there is a Labour Government—which is an unlikely prospect, with the polls today showing that the Conservatives are creeping up and poised for victory in the light of the gross hypocrisy vouchsafed the nation by the Labour party in recent weeks—they would never allow a Conservative Member to introduce a private Member's Bill and grant it a Second Reading. The hon. Gentleman's statement was absurd. It is a pity that he was too frit to give way to me, so that I could question him on that point.

The arguments supporting my hon. Friend the Minister make it absolutely clear that the Bill would result in more legislation, which would not create jobs for people over 50 but would destroy jobs for everybody. The Government have a proud record of job creation, and it is the best in Europe. [HON. MEMBERS: "What?"] Hon. Members only have to examine the employment statistics, which show that this country has more people in work and fewer people out of work than any other major nation in Europe. The Bill would lead to more regulation of the labour market, which would destroy jobs for everybody.

The Bill is also philosophically wrong, because people should not be forced to do what is right. All right hon. and hon. Members are united in believing that it is wrong to discriminate against people because of their age. We all accept that people over the age of 40 or 45 have much to offer, in terms of experience and dedication. The House is not united on the premise that that objective must be achieved by over-regulation of the labour market.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) failed to prove that his Bill, which a number of hon. Members said was flawed, would be effective. The evidence that prompted the proposed legislation is contradictory.

Mr. Stern: My hon. Friend is right to say that the House is united against age discrimination, but one principle that has not entered into the debate contradicts

the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). I refer to the principle that an employer should be free to hire whomsoever he chooses.

Mr. Leigh: Of course that is right. There may be good reasons for an employer including certain attributes in an advertisement. It would be absurd to lay down what should or should not be included in recruitment advertising.

Mr. Winnick: The hon. Gentleman argues, together with other Conservative Members, that legislation that has remained on the statute book for 30 years—certainly that on race and gender—was wrong. In many cases, employers would not have chosen to employ people who were not white. The Race Relations Act 1965 has worked very well.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman has made that point several times, but it is not proven. Age discrimination is different. One cannot change one's race—but one's age, by its very nature, changes as one gets older. It is ridiculous to put age on a level playing field with race.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North said that his Bill would not lead to over-regulation. Last year, I attended debate on the Activity Centres (Young Persons' Safety) Bill, which we were told would not lead to over-regulation. I have now heard a rumour that that measure, which received its Second Reading on a wet Friday morning with half a dozen people in the Chamber, would lead to 1,000 new regulations being imposed on that industry. The hon. Member for Walsall, North said that his Bill would not result in extra compliance costs. What of all the legal bills to which my hon. Friend the Minister referred?

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Will the hon. Gentleman admit that that Bill was carried after the shock that the House felt at the needless deaths of four children in a tragedy at sea? The House was quite right to consider it necessary to pass such a Bill, and I am amazed that the hon. Gentleman has seen fit not to mention the tragedy in this context.

Mr. Leigh: I did not want to waste the time of the House, or to be out of order, by dealing at length with that Bill. Today's Bill, we are told, will not lead to over-regulation. But it will, and it will destroy jobs.

Under this successful Conservative Government, in the United Kingdom non-wage labour costs are 15 per cent., in France they are 29 per cent., in Germany 24 per cent. and in Spain 25 per cent. That shows the cost to jobs and the creation of wealth imposed by extra regulations. The figures mean that UK unemployment—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 19 April.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

NON-DOMESTIC RATING (INFORMATION) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Mr. Stewart.*]

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

LAW REFORM (YEAR AND A DAY RULE) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Mr. Hoyle.*]

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

PRISONERS' EARNINGS BILL

Read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

HOUSE OF COMMONS (REFORM) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Second Reading what day?

Second Reading deferred till Friday 16 February.

GENDER IDENTITY (REGISTRATION AND CIVIL STATUS) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [1 February], That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

BRITISH TIME (EXTRA DAYLIGHT) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [26 January], That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 16 February.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That—

(1) at the sitting on Wednesday 14th February, the Speaker shall put the Question on the Motion in the name of Mr. Tony Blair relating to the Local Government Reorganisation (Compensation for Loss of Remuneration) Regulations 1995 not later than Ten o'clock;

(2) at the sitting on Thursday 15th February, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mrs. Secretary Bottomley relating to the Agreement between the Secretary of State for National Heritage and the British Broadcasting Corporation not later than Ten o'clock; and

(3) at the sitting on Monday 19th February, Standing Order No. 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community Documents) shall apply to the Motion in the name of Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew relating to the draft Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 with the substitution of the words 'three hours' for the words 'one and a half hours' in line 4.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

Shooters Hill Fire Station

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

2.35 pm

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): Last Thursday, on the Adjournment debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) talked about the proposed closure of the Downham fire station and paid tribute to two Gwent firefighters, Kevin Lane and Stephen Griffin, sending condolences to their families. Since that debate there has been another tragedy, in which 21-year-old firefighter Fleur Lombard was killed by falling debris while checking a blazing supermarket to ascertain whether anyone was left inside. I am sure that the House will wish to join me in paying tribute to Fleur Lombard and in sending condolences to her parents and to her colleagues in the Avon fire service.

I draw the attention of the House to early-day motion 375 in the names of my hon. Friends the Members for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) and for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo). I urge any hon. Members who have not appended their names to the motion to do so.

I do not wish to detract from the bravery or the tragedy in the cases of the three firefighters to whom I have referred: I merely say that the risks that they faced are those that every firefighter faces every day of his or her working life. I am concerned that the closure of Shooters Hill fire station will increase the time that it takes a fire engine to reach the scene of a fire—in other words, the attendance time. It is clear that the later a fire appliance reaches the scene, the more at risk is the building and the occupants. Greater also is the risk for the firefighters, whether from flames, suffocation or falling debris.

In addition to the proposed closure of Shooters Hill fire station, three other stations in London have been put up for closure, with the removal of a further 22 appliances across London. There is no doubt in my mind that the response and attendance times of the London fire brigade will be increased if the proposed closures go ahead. The Minister did not deny that when replying to the debate on the Downham station: he simply said that the Home Office minimum standards could still be met following the closures. That would mean forcing down standards.

At present, the London fire brigade response and attendance times are much better than those laid down as recommended minima by the Home Office. Is the Minister able to give an assurance that lives will not be put at risk or lost if fire engines arrive on the scene minutes later than they otherwise would have done?

If the cuts take place, it is likely that the Home Office minimum standards will apply in areas such as those covered by the Shooters Hill station. One appliance would need to arrive within 10 minutes, whereas under the London fire and civil defence authority's current arrangements one fire engine is targeted to arrive within five minutes and a second within eight minutes.

I have a list of examples which apply to Shooters Hill. First, there is the turnout to Eastcote primary school. The first appliance arrived within five minutes, the second within seven. Secondly, at Long Walk the first appliance arrived within three minutes and the second within seven. Thirdly, there was a call to Shooters Hill: the first

appliance arrived four minutes and the second within seven. The fourth example is a call to Warland road, where the first appliance also arrived within four minutes and the second within seven. At Elmdene road, the first arrived within three minutes and the second within six. Under the proposals currently before the London fire and civil defence authority, it is unlikely that one appliance would have attended those within 10 minutes.

In 1989 and 1991, as the prospective parliamentary candidate for Woolwich, I was involved in the successful campaign to keep Shooters Hill fire station open. Regrettably, the second appliance was removed. It is the policy of the London fire brigade to send two appliances to property fires in C and D risk areas, exceeding Home Office minimum standards. The fire officer's report shows that the closure of Shooters Hill fire station would mean that the area served by it would be covered by East Greenwich, Woolwich, Eltham, Lee Green and Bexley. If we go back to the debate that was held last week, we find that Eltham and Lee Green will also be covering for the closure of Downham fire station. Both Eltham and Lee Green are single-appliance stations, so the second pump, if a second appliance were needed, would have to come from other stations.

Between them, Shooters Hill and Downham attend 40 calls each week on their own ground. In addition, they attend numerous calls as back-up outside their area. Indeed, all the stations expected to cover for Shooters Hill are one-pump stations, except Plumstead and East Greenwich. Moreover, if we read the report further, we find that East Greenwich is one of the stations that will lose an appliance.

On Wednesday, I presented a petition to the House and referred to the letters that I had received, of which there were more than 1,000, in response to the proposals for Shooters Hill. My hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) is unable to be here today, but in a letter to me he wrote:

"As well as the threatened closure of Shooters Hill Fire Station, there is also the proposed withdrawal of one fire engine from East Greenwich Station. This will seriously affect the capacity of the fire service to respond to calls and emergencies.

The people of Greenwich are rightly deeply concerned at these threats to our local fire service—witness the massive postbags which both of us have had on this subject."

I shall quote briefly from some of the thousand or more letters that I received. One states:

"Within the last week one of my neighbours had an electrical fault within his house, the resultant fact is his house caught on fire and rapidly spread throughout the whole house. The fact that the Fire Brigade responded very quickly I believe saved this man's life. Further cut backs may have had a completely different effect to this man's LIFE."

Another says:

"Having had a house fire in 1985 the fire service was quick to respond and save the house from being destroyed so I feel that I am in a position to know how important it is to keep this and other stations open."

Another states:

"I am particularly anxious about this matter following a serious incident last weekend only nine houses away from my home . . . a delay of even two minutes could have resulted in the deaths of immediate neighbours."

Yet another says that

"within the last few years, the house just across the road from me caught fire and it was only the quick response of the Shooters Hill station that put the fire out, quickly and efficiently and allowed the family there to continue in residence. If it were not for the rapid response time, it would almost certainly have resulted in them having to find alternative accommodation whilst the house was repaired, with all the trauma and upheaval that would have followed."

In the neighbouring borough of Lewisham, the number of appliances at Deptford—one of the poorest and most deprived parts of London—will go down from two to one. That is a short-term measure, but it will lead to the station's eventual closure. Similarly, my constituency contains some of the most socially deprived areas of London, with wards around Woolwich town centre having some of the highest levels of unemployment in the whole of London. One of the stations that is to serve Shooters Hill if the station closes is Plumstead—at the bottom of the hill.

Plumstead, however, also serves Thamesmead, a new town which has grown up over the past 20 years, with no additional cover and no resources. It is a high-risk area which originally was to have its own fire station, but now, sadly, there is no capital available for that, as its priority has been overtaken by other developments in London—for example, Heathrow. I do not dispute the priorities, but there is a need for additional resources.

The Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) complained in the *South London Press* about the loss of an appliance at his fire station in Battersea. If Battersea is saved from the cuts, as he has been asking, that can only mean a closure and a cut elsewhere. I shall deal with the general resource situation later.

The area of the fire station which serves Thamesmead—Plumstead—is to be extended to cover Shooters Hill, when Thamesmead already faces risks due to the difficulty of access and to the construction of properties.

Shooters Hill fire station is perched on the top of Shooters Hill, in very hilly terrain where winter access is difficult. It serves the Memorial hospital in Shooters Hill, which houses elderly and mentally ill patients, as well as the newly designated Queen Elizabeth district general hospital. Other risks in the predetermined attendance area include Falconwood station, Belmarsh prison and 20 schools.

The total number of calls responded to by Shooters Hill has risen over the past two years. The Greenwich police consultative committee has expressed concern about its closure: that was the unanimous view of the 52 community organisations represented on the committee. They pointed to the problems of traffic congestion and difficulty of access caused by the narrow streets and hilly terrain. Because of that terrain, indeed, Shooters Hill was at one time exceptionally provided with a four-wheel-drive appliance.

Shooters Hill is at the centre of the area served by Woolwich, Plumstead, Eltham, Lee Green, Bexley, East Greenwich and Sidcup fire stations—all one-appliance stations except Plumstead. If Shooters Hill closes, there will be a hole in the middle of the area. When two appliances are called out for either one call or two, an entire sector will be left without cover. Indeed, on one occasion, with the present number of appliances, when the Shooters Hill fire engine was detained on a call an appliance had to be sent from Poplar, across the river.

Under the "major incidents" plan, the Shooters Hill fire station area contains Eltham palace, the A102 motorway, the Blackwall tunnel, the Thames barrier, the Erith oil

[Mr. John Austin-Walker]

works and the Valley, home of Charlton football club. Currently, the brigade's attendance time for anywhere in its area is three to four minutes, with a maximum of five. As I said earlier, the Home Office recommendation is eight to 10 minutes.

In London, it is normal practice to send two appliances to a property fire in a C-risk area. More than 70 per cent. of the Shooters Hill area is C risk. I take issue with the risk assessment. In an Adjournment debate last week, I drew attention to research carried out by the Greater Manchester fire authority, which states that the current risk categorisation puts property before life. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East: it seems strange that a higher priority is accorded to the buildings in which we are now than to the lives of pensioners in Woolwich. Like the Audit Commission, I believe that there is an urgent need for a fundamental review of fire cover to take account of changes. When will that review—recommended in the Audit Commission's report "In the Line of Fire"—be carried out?

Let me compare two incidents that have occurred in my constituency. One took place when Shooters Hill had two appliances, and the other when it had one. Four years ago, in Rowton road, four people had to be rescued from upstairs bedrooms. The crew worked very well; they passed the people on to the second crew, who carried out first aid and essential resuscitation. All four survived.

Two years later, when Shooters Hill had only one appliance, there was a serious fire in Llanover road. Again, the crews worked magnificently and did all that they could, but four children did not survive. I am not saying that it is certain that that happened because there was not a second appliance; perhaps the children were beyond help by the time they were found. It is in the minds of everyone, however—certainly those involved in the incident—that a second appliance might have made all the difference.

There is also serious concern about the safety of crews in the absence of a back-up vehicle. Do the Government believe that the minimum fire safety standard recommended by the Home Office is adequate for vast areas of our inner cities? I suggest that it is not. Part of the Shooters Hill area is classified as D risk, and there are a number of such areas on the fringes of Greater London. Is the Minister really saying that it is reasonable for people living in a D-risk area to have to wait 20 minutes for a fire engine to arrive? When will we see the fundamental review requested by the Audit Commission?

In a letter to the leader of the London fire and civil defence authority, Baroness Blatch said that fire officers should be given "flexibility within existing standards" as an interim measure, but that

"in the meantime, existing standards continue to apply".

What does that gobbledegook mean?

The London fire and civil defence authority needs the resources at least to maintain the level of the existing service. The authority faces a situation in which its credit approval for next year has been set at £5.5 million compared with £8.5 million in the current year. With no possibility of any revenue contribution, that will mean that the capital programme will be halved and that will have a drastic effect on operational equipment. The revenue budget will be cut by £7 million in real terms and that will cause the closures and the reduction in appliances. The current budget of £258 million would need to be increased to £266 million to maintain current levels of service. The Government have allowed spending of only £259 million. That shortfall of £7 million will close four fire stations, including Shooters Hill, and lose 28 fire appliances.

I urge the Minister to review the calculations in the settlement in respect of pensions, which I and the authority consider to be inadequate. The proposed cuts envisage the loss of 650 operational posts and a virtual freeze on recruitment. That will exacerbate the pension problems even further as fewer firefighters will contribute to more retired firefighters' pensions.

Already, the fire authority in London is contributing 19 per cent. of its budget to pensions. I raised that point in the debate on the Queen's Speech in 1994. I said then:

"I hope that we might get an assurance from the Government that, when the standard spending assessments are announced in the next couple of weeks, they will give some guarantee on disregards in SSAs with regard to the rising costs of pensions within the fire and civil defence authorities. Unless that is done, there is a real prospect that we face dramatic cuts in the cover provided by fire and civil defence authorities in the next financial year."—[*Official Report*, 18 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 293.]

What I said in 1994 is now coming to fruition.

The estimate of the pension requirements in 1996-97 is £45 million. The calculation in the SSA is £41 million—a difference of £4 million. That is one of the impacts on the budget of the London fire and civil defence authority that is forcing the closures.

I wish to refer the Minister to the health and safety requirements. The fire authority has an obligation to respond to the Health and Safety Executive. In the 1990s, three improvement notices were served on the authority. All of those have been discharged, but on the basis of various training commitments that will cost the authority £2 million a year over a three-year period. Those training requirements should be taken into account in any assessment.

At present, the brigade is able to meet its target of the first appliance arriving in five minutes and the second in eight minutes. If the cuts go ahead, it will be difficult to provide one fire engine in eight or 10 minutes. The response from the public has been huge and the Government will ignore that at their peril. The public know that the cuts have not been put forward willingly by the authority, but that the cuts arise as part of the Government's attacks on public services. If they continue down that path, the Government will be putting dogma before the safety of Londoners and the safety of firefighters. The best tribute that the Minister could pay to the memories of Fleur Lombard, Kevin Lane and Steve Griffin, and the 21 firefighters who have lost their lives since 1990, would be to order an immediate review of the categorisation of risk and an increase in the settlement for the LFCDA and the other authorities to allow them to maintain at least the present level of cover and to ensure the safety of my constituents in Woolwich by keeping Shooters Hill fire station open.

2.53 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): Before I discuss the future of Shooters Hill fire station, I too should like to express a few words about

the recent tragedies in Avon and Gwent. Today is the funeral of retained firefighters Kevin Lane and Stephen Griffin, who died so tragically last week in the course of a search-and-rescue attempt at a house fire in Gwent. On Sunday, we had the death of firefighter Fleur Lombard in a supermarket fire in Bristol. I am sure that I speak for the House in expressing our sadness at that tragic loss of life and extending our sympathy to their families, friends and colleagues at this time.

I know that the fire service will be considering as a matter of urgency what lessons can be learnt from those fires. Such incidents, and the one involving station officer Michael Mee in West Yorkshire, who drowned while trying to rescue a child over the Christmas period, remind us yet again of the selfless bravery of the fire service.

The courage of our firefighters and other qualities of the fire service were recognised in a report by the Audit Commission last year, entitled "In the Line of Fire". The commission stated that the fire service could be proud of its record in responding to incidents; has high levels of skill and professionalism; is staffed by able managers and courageous front-line staff; and is held in great esteem by both the general public and individuals who have needed its assistance. The Government wholeheartedly endorse the commission's comments.

I understand the concern that the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) and his constituents feel about the quality of their fire service and the sensitivities that must inevitably surround any proposal to close a fire station. The hon. Gentleman was present at last week's debate initiated by the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice), on the future of Downham fire station. That station, like Shooters Hill, has also been recommended for closure by a fire cover review conducted by London fire brigade. Therefore, I shall have to repeat some of the points that the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), made in responding to that debate.

The key point, which I must stress at the outset, is that statutory responsibility for the provision of an effective and efficient fire service rests with the fire authority—in this case, the London fire and civil defence authority. It is for the fire authority to keep its fire cover provision under review and to set a budget that will allow it to meet its statutory and other obligations and, in particular, to provide a service that meets the national recommended standards of fire cover.

The hon. Member for Woolwich referred to the funding of the fire service. As he knows, the fire service is a local authority service, which is funded, like other local authority services, through the revenue support grant, national non-domestic rates and the council tax. There are three underlying issues in relation to fire service funding: the total public expenditure provision for local government; how that total is distributed in terms of standard spending assessments among local authorities; and the criteria for council tax capping.

The Government concluded that for 1996-97 the total fire service element of standard spending assessments in England should be increased by £17 million, that is, by 1.5 per cent., from £1,168 million to £1,185 million. In the Government's view, the settlement was realistic. The fire service, like other public services, must operate as efficiently and effectively as possible. It is important that fire authorities continue to keep their service under review and redeploy resources or reorder their priorities as necessary.

When the Audit Commission looked at the fire service, it commented that the savings that it could identify were lower than it normally identifies in major studies of local government services. It ascribed that in part to the fact that the service was generally well managed at brigade level. None the less, it found that significant savings were possible if best practice was adopted by all fire authorities; and it made a number of detailed recommendations in a management handbook, which should help brigades carry out their responsibilities in the most cost-effective manner.

Of course, the revenue support grant that is allocated to individual fire authorities depends not only on the total provision, but on the distribution formula. It is a matter of general policy, agreed with the local authority associations, that we should review the formula every year and that we should use the most up-to-date data. With any proposal to change the formula, the problem is to find an alternative that does not unreasonably increase the grant to some brigades and disproportionately reduce it to others. However, the Government are always willing to see what improvements can be made. We looked carefully with the Department of the Environment and the local authority associations at the formula for the fire service element of standard spending assessments, and we decided that the formula should be adjusted to include factors for fire safety enforcement, fire safety education and firefighters' pensions. That is in line with the recommendations of the Audit Commission.

As result of the inclusion of those new elements and the updating of the data in the formula, the London fire and civil defence authority's standard spending assessment, including capital financing, will increase by £1.1 million in 1996-97. The London fire and civil defence authority has benefited in previous years from the process of reviewing and updating the formula. For 1996-97, its increase in revenue support grant is lower than the national average, primarily as a result of updating the data in the area cost adjustment. That factor is included in the formula to compensate for the additional costs of providing services in the south-east. On the latest data from the new earnings survey, those costs have gone down.

Under the proposed capping criteria, the authority will be able to set a budget for 1996-97 of up to £5.1 million more than in 1995-96. I understand that London has chosen to fund expenditure in the current year of £4 million above its capping limit by the use of reserves. It was, however, its choice to do that, rather than to make the savings necessary to stay within the cap. The authority was aware that, under the relevant legislation, permitted expenditure increases are calculated on the previous year's budget requirement, net of reserves. To do otherwise would defeat the object of the legislation, which is to keep a firm grip on public expenditure.

It is now for the London fire and civil defence authority, following the settlement and the proposed criteria for council tax capping and in view of its overall financial position, to decide how much to spend on its fire service for 1996-97 to meet its legal obligations. That includes its obligations in respect of firefighters' pensions and to implement improvement notices issued by the Health and Safety Executive.

[Mr. David Maclean]

If the authority should take the view that it is necessary to set a budget above the proposed capping limit to fulfil its statutory obligations, it is open to it to set a budget above that limit and to make out a case for redetermination of the cap. That is the authority's responsibility and the success or otherwise of any redetermination application would depend on the quality of the case.

Alternatively, the authority could decide to draw further on its reserves. I note that, according to its director of finance and information technology, its general reserves of £20 million are "relatively high" for an authority of its size.

The authority can also seek to identify further efficiencies without reducing fire cover below the national recommended standards. It has to strike a balance between demands to provide a high standard of fire cover and the need to ensure that the service makes the best use of its available resources.

I am aware that the authority has, as part of an overall three-year strategy, including the implementation of its fire cover review, already identified potential net savings of about £3.5 million in 1996-97, which could rise to between £6.5 million and £7.5 million a year by 1997-98.

I come to the Government's role in the assessment of fire cover. Under section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is required to be notified of the fire authority's establishment—the number of its fire stations, fire appliances and firefighting posts—as at 1 January each year. The fire authority may not reduce its establishment—although it can increase it—without his consent.

The Home Secretary has a specific and limited role in considering applications under section 19. He grants approval where the following conditions are satisfied: first, the proposals must have been sufficiently widely publicised, in sufficient detail and with adequate time, to enable any interested party to make representations. Secondly, the representations must have been considered by the fire authority. Thirdly, after taking advice from Her Majesty's fire service inspectorate, the Home Secretary must be satisfied that the national recommended standards of fire cover will be maintained.

It is not the role of the Home Secretary to decide whether the proposals that a fire authority makes represent the best arrangements for fire cover. Her Majesty's fire service inspectorate is available to advise the authority on that matter. Ultimately, however, responsibility for fire cover rests with the fire authority, which is accountable in law for the service that it provides.

Although there is no statutory right of consultation about section 19 applications, we have made it clear in guidance to fire authorities that we consider it desirable that they should undertake proper consultations. It has also been made clear that my right hon. and learned Friend will consider representations in addition to those already forwarded to the fire authority, provided that the individual or organisation concerned forwards those representations promptly on being advised that a section 19 application is to be submitted.

The Fire Services Act 1947 does not define the test of an effective and efficient fire service that a fire authority must provide to meet normal requirements for fire cover, but it is long-standing practice to interpret that by reference to the national recommended standards of fire cover. Those standards dictate the initial response to a fire in weight and speed of attack. They rest on four main standards of service, according to the risk category into which a region has been placed. That system of risk is based on the characteristics of the buildings and property in a region and assumes for each category that a predetermined number of firefighting appliances should attend within a certain time.

The standards are not just nationally recommended. They are nationally agreed in the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council, which was established by the 1947 Act and on which the relevant fire service organisations are represented.

Mr. Austin-Walker: Does the Minister recognise that most lives are lost in category C regions, which, generally, are regions of social and economic deprivation?

Mr. Maclean: As I understand it, what matters is the risk of buildings catching fire and, after that has been assessed, the damage likely to be caused. That, I believe, is what the standards are based on.

The hon. Gentleman asked how we could pay less attention to fire standards in buildings for old-age pensioners than to those in this building. If pensioners are living in newer homes, or in homes with better precautions than buildings built in the 1830s that are a fire risk, naturally the older buildings, which are more liable to catch fire, should be in a higher-risk category. That is a sensible fact. That is not a slight against the hon. Gentleman's constituents, and it does not put buildings before people. It represents a sensible assessment of the risk of the buildings in which people live catching fire.

The Government believe that the standards have served the country well, but that is not to say that we regard them as unchangeable. The Audit Commission's report recommended that there should be another fundamental review of fire cover levels. The commission was not saying that standards—

The motion having been made after half-past Two o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at five minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 12 February 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Fishing Crews (Safety)

1. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to modify the regulations governing the occupational safety of the crews of United Kingdom registered fishing vessels fishing in and outwith United Kingdom territorial waters. [13018]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Sir George Young): The occupational safety of crews in United Kingdom fishing vessels is being pursued through the development of regulations to implement European Union health and safety directives.

Dr. Godman: May I remind the Secretary of State of the death of a Scottish fisherman caused by an unsafe winch? At this very moment, a court case is under way relating to the disgraceful and tragic foundering of the Pescado.

Will not European Union directives on occupational safety be extended to the fishing industry in the near future? May we have a debate in the House on those regulations? More important, why does the hon. Gentleman not anticipate them by instructing fishing vessel owners to ensure that survival suits for all crew members are carried on their vessels?

Sir George Young: I have noted the hon. Gentleman's request for a debate in the House. Any regulations would have to go through the usual procedures. He rightly pointed out that a trial is under way in, I think, Bristol, so we must be careful in what we say. It is true that, in the maritime sector, the United Kingdom will have to implement the framework and 10 relevant daughter directives, including a specific directive on fishing vessels, which build on the existing domestic regulations that apply to fishing vessels. It is a matter to which I attach a high priority. I should like to reflect on the hon. Gentleman's specific point about maritime suits.

Mr. Dunn: Is it not necessary for the Government to ensure that not too great a burden is placed on fishermen? Should not a balance be found that ensures practical guidance to enable fishermen to go about their business properly and in safety, while at the same time not placing too many burdens on them?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is right to remind the House of the potential costs of compliance. A cost compliance assessment will be published with a formal consultation document on each directive. That document will be an opportunity for both the owners and those who work on the fishing vessels to comment on what is proposed.

A419

2. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects work to commence on the bypasses on the A419 for (a) Blunsdon and (b) Latton. [13019]

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): The A419 Latton bypass is included in the first tranche of DBFO—design, build, finance and operate—contracts and preparatory works have already begun. The A419 Blunsdon bypass scheme has been placed in the longer-term category. It is too early to say when it may be rolled forward into the main programme.

Mr. Coombs: Is my hon. Friend aware that the villagers of Latton will be delighted to hear that, at long last, they can look forward in the near future to relief from the heavy vehicles that have pounded through their village for so many years? I ask my hon. Friend not to forget the villagers of Blunsdon, who live athwart the same road and who, in my view, are entitled to the same consideration. I urge on him the hope that, in the not too distant future, those villagers will get the same sort of relief.

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend draws attention to the fact that all schemes on the route are extremely popular with the communities that they are intended to serve. The Blunsdon bypass was at a very early stage of its preparation and not ready to be included in the tranche of DBFOs, which include three other schemes on the route. The longer-term category means that a scheme will possibly be required at some future date but is not of sufficient priority to be proceeded with at the moment.

Roads (London)

3. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the relevant local councils in London about the effect on their local environments of his Department's major road schemes on which work has already started; and if he will make a statement. [13020]

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): We hold regular discussions with local authorities as part of the process of designing, developing and constructing all road schemes.

Mr. Cohen: After saying that the M11 link road through my constituency was an urgent matter, fighting with demonstrators at great cost, evicting local people from their homes and demolishing those homes, will the Minister explain why the Government have halted the programme and left the route a mudheap? The leader of the council has described the situation as the worst of all worlds and the Civic Society has said that the Government seem to have a vendetta against Leytonstone. Why does his Department's policy make the art of the absurd look like social realism?

Mr. Norris: We remain convinced of the merits of the excellent Hackney M11 scheme. It will provide the link from the docklands to the motorway system, relieve communities in the hon. Gentleman's constituency of the intolerable pressure of traffic from which they suffer—he and I know about that at first hand—and give us the opportunity to do a great deal of work there that will much improve conditions for local residents. Tenders for the next two contracts in the scheme—contracts 1 and 3—are to be invited in a few weeks' time in April. Work is on-going. The scheme will be completed and the funding for it will be provided.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend accept that the decision to defer the Henlys corner scheme, which is part of the north circular road scheme, was welcomed by many residents of the area? Indeed, if he comes forward with a more modest scheme, he will be even more popular than he is today.

Mr. Norris: I always welcome invitations not to spend money, but on this occasion I fear that, for once, I shall disappoint my hon. Friend. In the fulness of time, we will complete works on the north circular road, because only when the scheme is complete will all Londoners receive the full benefit of that internal bypass through London, which can help to remove so much rat-running traffic, not least through my hon. Friend's constituency.

Bus Deregulation

4. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on bus deregulation in the Burnley and Pendle area. [13021]

Mr. Norris: Deregulation has brought great benefits to bus travellers in Burnley and Pendle, as it has to those elsewhere in the country. Generally, there are more operators running more bus miles at lower cost, with new buses on many routes, and involving significantly less public subsidy than before.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister accept that the Liberal-controlled Pendle council's sale of its 50 per cent. stake in Burnley and Pendle Transport to Stagecoach will mean that Stagecoach will have a virtual monopoly in the running of transport in the Burnley area? Should that not be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission? Will the Minister confirm that whether Burnley council should sell its 50 per cent. stake is completely for it to decide?

Mr. Norris: Far be it from me to intrude on private grief, but, as it happens, the regulatory authorities—not my Department—are satisfied that there is no impediment to Pendle council's sale of its stake. The position that Burnley chooses to adopt is entirely up to it. It is under no compulsion to sell, although logic and common sense should have advised it to sell a long time ago.

Mr. Allen: Does the Minister accept that bus deregulation has led to serious problems in Burnley and Pendle and, indeed, in many other cities and towns? Will he join us in discussing the appropriate shape of re-regulation in Burnley and Pendle and elsewhere with the bus industry, local authorities and passengers, so that we can develop a stable, long-term framework for the bus industry over the next decade? Does he agree that the need for an expanding bus industry should be placed over short-term, ideological dogma?

Mr. Norris: One of the hon. Gentleman's endearing characteristics is his ability to get to the point about five months after everybody else—not least, these days, members of his own party, who, in their local authority guise, and as members of the bus working group which I chair, have agreed with me on a way forward. It is significant that neither they nor the all-party Select Committee report on the bus industry proposed going back to the old days of regulation, because it is recognised by all that those were not days to which anyone interested in developing the bus industry would wish to return.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

5. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce the promoter for the channel tunnel rail link. [13022]

Sir George Young: We expect to announce soon the name of the winning consortium in the competition to select a private sector promoter for the channel tunnel rail link.

Mr. Arnold: My right hon. Friend will be more than aware of not only the battering that the current promoter, Union Railways—a British Rail subsidiary—has taken from people in north-west Kent in relation to the possible damage to the environment but the opportunities in terms of jobs, and so on, that are to be gained from the Ebbsfleet station. Is he aware that we need a decision now on a promoter so that we can ensure that our environment is safeguarded and, above all, that the opportunities deriving from Ebbsfleet are realised as soon as possible?

Sir George Young: It is an important project for the nation—it has been supported by both sides of the House—and for my hon. Friend's constituents, who will gain access to a quick link to St. Pancras station. As I said in my initial response, we hope to make an announcement soon.

Mr. Timms: Will the Secretary of State confirm that, when he makes that announcement, he will also announce the Government's decision on intermediate stations? Will he further confirm that, in making that decision, the Government will honour the commitment made by the right hon. Gentleman's predecessor in 1991 that the rail link will bring economic regeneration to east London?

Sir George Young: It is indeed my intention when I announce the name of the successful competitor to make a simultaneous announcement about the locus of Stratford and the CTRL.

Mr. Chidgey: Will the Secretary of State please assure the House that, when the channel tunnel rail link is constructed, it will allow the operation of large-gauge

freight trains and that links will be made to allow them to operate on an improved and upgraded west coast main line track?

Sir George Young: My understanding is that there is an optional provision for loops for freight traffic. The link is primarily intended for passenger traffic into St. Pancras.

Ms Short: Will the Secretary of State admit that the Government's obsession with rail privatisation has caused long delays in the building of the channel tunnel rail link, and that those delays have meant prolonged blight for many families and a failure to use the opportunity created by the channel tunnel to get more freight on to the railways? Will he take this opportunity to tell the House more about the allegations of financial misbehaviour at Union Railways? Is he aware that the national joke is now about train delays being caused by thieves on the line?

Sir George Young: On the hon. Lady's first question, had we not engaged in dialogue with the private sector, and if the project was to be financed entirely by the public sector, it would have taken significantly longer to be realised.

As for the second point, the hon. Lady will have seen the announcement made last week by Union Railways. I have asked the chairman of Union Railways to keep me abreast of the progress of the investigation. I have no further comment to make at this stage.

Public Transport

6. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are his criteria for the future funding of new capital public transport provision in metropolitan areas. [13023]

Mr. Norris: Funding criteria are set out in Department of Transport circulars 3/89 on section 56 grant and 2/95 on transport policies and programmes guidance to local authorities, both of which are in the Library.

Mr. Gunnell: Does the Minister agree that the scheme for a tramway in Leeds meets the criteria set down by his Department, and that it has the support of all parties in Leeds and strong support from the private sector? Will he assure us that, when he comes to decide on the future funding of the tramway in Leeds, he will bear in mind the length of permission issued by the House for its construction?

Mr. Norris: We do indeed recognise that the tram system in Leeds fits well within the package of measures proposed by the authority. As I explained to the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues when we met the week before last, the weight of demand on available resources meant that we could not fund the scheme this year. Not least among those demands was the Midland metro, which received the go-ahead this year, and the prospect of our entering into a similar commitment, subject to the quality of the bids, on the Croydon tramlink. I assure the hon. Gentleman that not least among our considerations are the time constraints laid on Leeds by the statutory process.

Capital Projects (London)

7. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the most cost-effective capital projects he has planned for London; and when each will be implemented. [13024]

Mr. Norris: The Government's annual report on expenditure on transport over the next three years will be published next month. We are also preparing a document for publication later in the year specifically setting out our transport strategy for London.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Minister agree that one of the most cost-effective capital facilities in London would be a central London river service, the capital costs of which would be but a fraction of the £80-odd million costs of the single station on the Jubilee line at Westminster? Will he confirm that he received a report about a year ago from the transport on water working party, of which the hon. Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) and I are members, which advocated such a service?

Will he further confirm that he expects to receive a report from London First this week? Does he agree that the best features of those reports should be sent to a working party to see how effective such a project would be in the interests of visitors and Londoners alike? Would not the installation of such a service be a permanent memorial for the millennium, whatever might happen to other millennium celebration services down the river?

Mr. Norris: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman and to my hon. Friend the Member for Romford for the considerable effort and expertise that they brought to the Transport on Water proposals for a river service on the Thames. The hon. Gentleman asked me a number of questions about such a service, and I hope that he will accept by way of an answer today that, from the day in 1931 that Sir Alan Herbert mooted the idea of a river service, a great many people who have uttered the immortal phrase, "We should do more about transport on the river," have run up against the practical difficulties that anyone operating such a service at anywhere near financial viability encounters. That being said, the hon. Gentleman will know that the Government office for London has, with my distinct approval, invited London First and KPMG to study the business case for passenger transport on the Thames. They are, as the hon. Gentleman says, due to report shortly. I will consider their findings in detail, and I hope to be able to take matters forward from there.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Will my hon. Friend confirm that capital investment programmes for public transport in London are at a record level, and that, even if the Jubilee line extension project were excluded, investment would be about 10 times more today than it was in 1979?

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend is entirely right. That frequently embarrasses the Labour party, but it is one of those uncomfortable statistics with which it will have to live. My hon. Friend's constituents are a long way from the River Thames, and, although they would no doubt appreciate such a service, they might query the wisdom of providing a large public subsidy for a service that, by definition, few would be able to appreciate. We must

compare the costs of such a project with the demands from his constituents and many others throughout London for more investment in the bus and underground rail infrastructure.

Mr. Tony Banks: If the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) is entirely right, why are there so many clapped-out old buses on London's roads? I suggest that the Minister go outside and see how many filthy and dirty old buses that should have been taken off the roads years ago are belching out fumes and suffocating tourists and Londoners. It is all right for the Minister, who goes around in an air-conditioned chauffeured limo, but those who have to breathe the air know how filthy it is. How much has been spent on new buses in London during the past 12 months?

Mr. Norris: I have it on fairly good authority that my chauffeured limo is not as large as that of the hon. Gentleman when he was chairman of the Greater London council, and the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question lies in precisely that direction. The other day, I looked at a table that showed the tremendous increase in orders for buses nationally that the private sector has been able to institute. The table provided a rather invidious comparison with the very poor record of the industry when it was under national control in 1985. In London, the largest single trial of cleaner fuel buses has been undertaken at substantial public expense by London Transport Buses, and was inaugurated by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Channel Tunnel and Midlands Rail Link

8. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the proposal of Central Railway for a new rail link between the channel tunnel and the midlands. [13025]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend has received a large number of representations about the Central Railway project.

Mr. Lidington: Does my hon. Friend appreciate the anger and frustration among large numbers of my constituents at the continuing refusal of Central Railway to make clear either the likely environmental impact of its proposals or the possible effect they will have on existing passenger rail services? Can he impress on the company that it must either take seriously its obligation under statute to public consultation, and to provide details soon of its proposals, or withdraw the proposals completely and relieve my constituents of the blight that is afflicting them?

Mr. Watts: No application has been made so far. If the company proceeds with its intention of making an application, it will be required to include an environmental assessment in the deposited information. The guidance about Transport and Works Act 1992 applications stresses the importance of proper consultation with local authorities and other affected bodies.

Mr. Grocott: Should not talk of new rail links on old routes remind the Minister and the Government of a salutary lesson? Just 30 years ago, the vandalism of the Beeching era and its obsession with so-called market forces resulted in the closure of many lines that would have provided priceless means of communication today. Will the Minister give an assurance that, whatever happens to the privatisation of British Rail, no significant route miles will be closed? Will he also assure us that routes of lines that have been closed recently will be protected? As sure as eggs is eggs, one day they will be needed again.

Mr. Watts: I recall that the Beeching approach was a policy continued by the Labour Government of 1964 to 1970, who closed more route miles in that one period of office than any other Government have done.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: Given the uncertainty that Central Railway appears to have shown in regard to the exact route of the line—for instance, having stirred up residents of South Nutfield in my constituency by telling them that the line would go through their village, it subsequently discovered that it would not—will my hon. Friend look askance at any future applications from Central Railway for waivers, and bear in mind the need to produce detailed and adequate maps so that local authorities and other local people who are affected can have a proper look?

Mr. Watts: I assure my hon. Friend that, if any application for a waiver is made, details will be placed in the Library of the House. We shall also consult the local authorities that would be affected about the adequacy of the information to be supplied.

West Coast Main Line

9. **Mr. Olner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which organisations he has met to devise through ticketing provisions on the west coast main line between various operators. [13026]

Mr. Watts: None. That is a matter for train operators, who must comply with the approved through ticketing arrangements under the terms of their passenger train operators' licence as granted by the Rail Regulator.

Mr. Olner: The Minister's answer will disappoint many commuters in my constituency of Nuneaton. My local railway station is served by trains from Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow and Holyhead; if there is no through ticketing agreement between the various operators, all the stations on the route are likely to be closed. Will the Minister undertake to get involved to ensure that the network and my constituents are protected?

Mr. Watts: The hon. Gentleman's constituents should not be disappointed. The licence condition is that train operators should maintain the current service at the 1,300 stations that are capable of issuing through tickets. The regulator will permit variations from that only if he is satisfied that a higher, not a lower, standard of service will result. The hon. Gentleman's constituents should be reassured: through ticketing can only become better on the privatised railway than it was on the so-called publicly owned and publicly accountable railway.

Mr. Mans: Now that the Opposition transport spokesman, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short), has made it clear that she prefers nationalised railways and wants those that have been moved into the private sector moved back as soon as possible, will my hon. Friend ensure that the west coast main line moves into the private sector as soon as possible, so that, at the next general election, people can see the benefits of privatisation as they are already seeing the benefits of the Stagecoach service to Weymouth?

Mr. Watts: We intend to bring forward the franchise for the west coast main line in the course of this year.

Mr. Wilson: Does the Minister share the Prime Minister's surprising view that fraud involving hundreds of thousands of pounds represents no more than misbehaviour which should not be allowed to stand in the way of the privatisation dogma? Does he recognise that problems with through ticketing are part and parcel of the same problem that gives rise to fraud by one operator against the others—the fragmentation of the railway network? Will he join the Rail Regulator in at least apologising for the near collapse of the national rail inquiry system? Fraud, the collapse of the information system and the near collapse of through ticketing are all the results of fragmentation. Which of the three does the Minister defend?

Mr. Watts: I note that the hon. Gentleman adds a good few noughts on to the end of any figures that have been quoted as the possible cost of the irregularity on the London-Tilbury-Southend line, which was discovered very rapidly as a result of the routine procedures that were put in place for the privatised structure.

Ms Short *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Watts: The hon. Lady shakes her head. She continues to mislead the public in her interviews, when she knows very well that what she has said is not true.

Ms Short: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I take points of order after questions.

Ms Short: Is it in order for the Minister to say that what I said was not true?

Madam Speaker: The Minister is responsible for his own comments in the House, as we all are.

Mr. Watts: I was referring to the hon. Lady speaking through the broadcast media. What I have said is true and fair comment.

The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) speaks of fragmentation, but even he should understand that the network, in the ownership and operation of Railtrack, remains integrated. Fragmentation, in the way in which he uses the term, means nothing more than the provision of services by a number of dedicated train operating companies.

River Thames Working Group

10. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times the River Thames working group has met in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on its work. [13027]

12. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the latest programme of initiatives to recommence a riverbus service on the Thames. [13029]

Mr. Norris: The River Thames working group has met once in the last 12 months, on 11 July, to consider progress on the recommendations contained in its report published in December 1994 and it will meet again this week on 15 February. My hon. Friend will know that the group was set up to examine the potential for developing freight and passenger traffic on the river.

I continue to support the idea of a riverbus service on the Thames. My Department, as I said in an earlier answer, has sponsored the preparation of a study by London First, with KPMG, on the potential for new passenger services. I look forward to the results of that study being published.

Sir Michael Neubert: Does my hon. Friend accept that, with the minutes ticking away to the millennium, the unique opportunity of establishing a central London river service as a permanent monument and lasting benefit for Londoners becomes daily more pressing? Will he undertake, as a matter of urgency, to bring together the best of the proposals made to him, including the distinctive ideas put to him by the Transport on Water working party with the aim of achieving a river component of a through ticket travelcard transport system for Greater London in good time for the next century?

Mr. Norris: I certainly undertake to consider carefully the proposals that the London First study produces, and to seek to find whatever agreement is possible between its report and that which the Transport on Water working party, of which my hon. Friend is a senior representative, has submitted to us. I will not repeat the caveats that I have already suggested must exist in respect of such a service. My hon. Friend speaks of integration into the travelcard system; if he were to talk of integration on the same fare basis that exists for buses and the underground, it might be a different proposition from the idea of incorporating the service into the travelcard system. On that latter front, I know that Peter Ford, the chairman of London Transport, has shown a willingness to consider ways in which we could, perhaps through that mechanism, achieve much wider awareness of riverbus services.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Further to both the earlier questions on this subject, now that the London First report has been published, we have all the research that we need. We have three catamarans, owned by P and O, idling in St. Katharine's dock ready to do the job. Can the Minister—I put this as a serious proposition, because there is huge interest in the issue—collect together the authors of the report, the Port of London authority, the National Rivers Authority, London Regional Transport and interested hon. Members from the locks at one end down to the estuary at the other, to find out whether he

can sort out the difficulties that remain? Some people need a kick up the backside and the Minister needs to kick them, but the report suggests that it can be done and we need to get around the table to work out the best and most economical way of doing it.

Mr. Norris: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's continued interest in this subject. He will acknowledge that I am keen that we should produce concrete proposals to build on the work of the studies. I have accepted that if that requires the involvement of my Department, or, indeed, other sources, it is a proposition that I would be prepared to consider. We have all been seeking to ensure that there should be a service that is, ostensibly at least, viable at the operating level. If that can be established—the early work seems to show that it can—I believe that we have the ground on which we might be able to build.

Mr. Robathan: My hon. Friend will know that the River Thames does not flow close to Leicestershire, but he and I share much the same attitude to the scheme for river transport. Will he confirm that, when he produces proposals, he will study closely the question of enabling legislation, particularly in relation to piers? With the last scheme, if one caught a boat at Chelsea Harbour, the next stop was Charing Cross. That was a ludicrous situation, because invariably one had to use some other form of transport. Will my hon. Friend look into that closely?

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend puts his finger on the major weakness of previous schemes, which is that they have had to rely entirely on sufficient stopping-off points linking with the public transport infrastructure. In other words, one has to have a system which takes people where they want to go. The transport on water study, and KPMG, for London First, identified the number of locations that it will be necessary to consider. It is not appropriate to elaborate at this point, but my hon. Friend is right in his observation.

Miss Hoey: Does the Minister agree that thousands of people are frustrated every day as they sit in traffic jams and watch an empty M11 wind its way through London? Further to the question of the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), does the Minister agree that we also need a change in planning so that, if planning permission is to be given, any major office development along the river must include the building of a pier?

Mr. Norris: As to the first half of the hon. Lady's question, I am not sure that I agree, because all the studies show that the river is a very inefficient mechanism for conventional commuting—it does not go in a straight line, it has a 7 m rise and fall, and there are many technical difficulties with establishing such a service. There is, however, a market for a service using the river, particularly building on its tourism potential, which could be valuable for London, Londoners and jobs in the capital.

On the hon. Lady's second point, about the desirability of ensuring that the planning process is sufficiently tuned always to consider the potential of the river when riparian applications are considered, she is entirely right. The Thames working group, which was established by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, is taking that matter forward.

Disabled People (Access)

11. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidelines and advice he has issued to (a) manufacturers and (b) purchasers of buses about access for disabled people since the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [13028]

Sir George Young : The Department of Transport has set up working groups with both manufacturers and operators of buses to discuss the regulations that will be drawn up under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Also, we shall shortly be publishing the first in a series of information bulletins which will report the progress that we are making in implementing the transport provisions of the Act. Bulletins will be circulated widely to manufacturers and operators, as well as to local authorities and disability organisations. When regulations are made under part V of the Act, we will issue separate detailed guidance to all those affected.

Mr. Corbett: I am grateful for that answer. Does the Secretary of State recall that, during the passage of the Disability Discrimination Bill and the two similar Back-Bench measures, there was substantial demand from people with disabilities for buses to be made much more accessible to them, as well as for the spin-off benefits for young parents with push chairs, people with heavy luggage, and so on. In passing, does the Secretary of State agree that the bus industry often gives the impression of turning passengers away, rather than trying to attract them? Can he assure the House that he will keep up the pressure on that issue, given that, when measures to help people with disabilities have passed through the House before, the provisions have often been left on the shelf to gather dust?

Sir George Young: Yes, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that that is a subject to which I attach high priority. He is right to point out that it is not merely the disabled who will benefit from the particular features on the buses. They will help many other people, including women or men with young children, and the elderly. He will be pleased to know that 90 per cent. of new buses now have at least some of the features that were recommended by the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee—DIPTAC—and which make it easy for ambulant disabled and elderly people to use the buses. I hope to see further progress.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the smooth driving of buses is of the utmost importance for disabled people, and will he emphasise that to all involved in driving buses?

Sir George Young: Yes.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Does the Secretary of State accept that the enthusiasm he expresses does not seem to be shared by the Government? It took us several months to persuade the Government to include access for disabled persons to buses in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Will the Secretary of State tell us why he cannot present a timetable today, and why he is not using parts V and III of the Act so that disabled people can gain access to buses, trains, bus stations and rail stations?

Will he accept that, on the evidence, one of the obvious reasons for the Government's stalling is the chaos caused by bus deregulation and the equal chaos caused by the Government's determination to privatise rail transport?

Sir George Young: The hon. Member will know that transport infrastructure is covered by part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. We have introduced implementation dates for those parts of the transport industry for which the technology exists to achieve accessibility. For example, for rail rolling stock, the implementation date is 31 December 1998. For other transport modes, there are a wide variety of possible solutions, some of which will be available earlier than others. I will bring forward implementation dates as soon as we and the industry are satisfied that they are achievable and sustainable.

Central Line

13. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the latest estimate of the cost of upgrading the Central line. [13030]

Mr. Norris: London Underground's latest estimate is that the total cost of upgrading the Central line will be £802 million at October 1995 prices.

Mr. Congdon: Can my hon. Friend confirm that that enormous investment will lead to the provision of extra trains during the morning and evening peaks? Will he also confirm that, in the current year, more than £1 billion will be invested in the London underground, and that that is in sharp contrast with the figure four times lower in real terms which was invested by the last Labour Government? Does that not show that the Conservative party is the party that is committed to London transport for the benefit of Londoners?

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend is right on both counts. The 35 per cent. increase in operating performance is a result of the substantial investment in the Central line and, of course, there is more to come throughout the system. I remind the House, as my hon. Friend invited me to do, that in 1978, for example, the level of investment—at 1995 prices—was £198 million, while the same figure for 1995 was £1, 088 million.

Rail Employees

17. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of changes in the total work force following privatisation of the railways. [13034]

Sir George Young: None. Staffing levels are a management matter for the railway industry.

Ms Eagle: Will the Secretary of State admit that one of the main ways in which the new, privatised railway companies intend to make money is by getting rid of staff? Many women already find it difficult to travel on trains late at night because of the de-staffing of stations that has already occurred. They are worried about crime. That situation can only get worse unless we can guarantee that staff will be in place to protect passengers.

Sir George Young: I hope that the hon. Lady will welcome the announcement by Stagecoach on Monday, when it took over one of the newly franchised services. It has decided to invest £3 million in improvements to station and passenger facilities, including security, lighting, waiting rooms and information services. If companies want the public to use their trains, they must provide a secure, efficient and safe environment. I believe that that is what the private sector wants to do.

Dr. Spink: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that privatisation and holding down fares will get more passengers on to trains, and that that will work wonders for employment on the railway?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is quite right that it will not only improve employment prospects but improve security for other passengers.

Disabled People (Access)

19. **Mr. Alan Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet representatives of the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee to discuss access to public transport. [13036]

Sir George Young: My Department has regular meetings with the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee to discuss a wide range of issues relating to the transport needs of disabled people. I will be seeing the chairman on the day of the June quarterly meeting.

Mr. Howarth: Is it the case that the draft European directive on bus and coach construction would prevent the Government from requiring that buses and coaches be made accessible to disabled people? If so, will the right hon. Gentleman assure the House that the Government will insist that the terms of the draft directive are altered so as to ensure, as required by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, that as soon as reasonably practicable buses and coaches are made accessible to people with disabilities?

Sir George Young: I am very anxious that there should be no obstruction to extending access to buses by disabled people. Further discussions and consultations will take place on the European directive to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Child Care

32. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, when he expects provision of on-site child care facilities to be made available in the House. [13050]

Mr. Beith (on behalf of the House of Commons Commission): In the light of a survey of demand for child

care facilities, and following a debate in the House, the Commission decided to introduce a child care voucher scheme in April 1995 for its staff. It provides financial support to qualifying staff who wish to use any of a range of child care facilities at locations which they find convenient. So far, the responsible domestic Committees have not be able to identify a suitable location for on-site facilities in the parliamentary estate, and have not put forward any proposals.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that that answer is unbelievably pathetic? The House can apparently manage to find a great deal of money for the refurbishment of the Strangers' Bar, Annie's Bar and the refreshment and dining facilities that are provided ad nauseam, often for private catering, while the only children's facilities in the entire building consist of one shelf of out-of-date children's books in the Members' Family Room. Does the right hon. Gentleman not think that we should get into the 20th century before the 21st century overtakes us and provide a fully staffed on-site nursery in this building for Members' and staff's children just as any other sensible institution would provide for its staff?

Mr. Beith: I do not think that the staff using the child care voucher scheme find it pathetic; indeed, they find it helpful. The hon. Gentleman's other points must be passed on to his hon. Friends serving on the Committees that I mentioned.

Mr. Ian Bruce: May I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on the work of his Committee and on providing a voucher scheme for nursery education? I wish that he could encourage some county councils to do the same thing. Has he found that people using the vouchers prefer to send their children for nursery education close to their homes rather than to this building, which may be a long way from their homes?

Mr. Beith: Some people find it more convenient to use facilities nearer to their homes. The Commission hopes to establish the general picture when it reviews the scheme next month, a year after it came into operation.

Listed Buildings Legislation

33. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what financial provision has been made in the last 12 months for compliance with the law relating to listed buildings. [13055]

Mr. Beith: Financial provision for conservation requirements is included as part of the cost estimates for individual new works and maintenance projects.

Sir Michael Neubert: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the anxiety caused by the appearance in the House—temporarily, one hopes—of replacement internal doors which look like a job lot purchased at a do-it-yourself store on a wet Saturday afternoon, and also by the flashing red industrial-type lights which appear in the corridors during Divisions? Can the right hon. Gentleman assure us that at all times our concern will be less for the exercise of bureaucratic zeal and more for our obligations as custodians of Parliament as a priceless part of our national heritage?

Mr. Beith: The House has a good and improving record of attention to the conservation requirements of this important building. I am pleased to say that one of the doors, within my sight at this moment, to which the hon. Gentleman referred has already been replaced by its original. The House staff pay careful attention to the need to keep the fittings and furnishings and the building itself in good repair.

Mr. Gunnell: Does the listed status of the building impose any additional costs or difficulties when replacing the plumbing? Will the right hon. Gentleman comment on reports made earlier in the year that some listed bacteria were present in parts of the hot water system? Can he assure us that, as a result of action taken, there is now no danger of Legionnaire's disease being present in the hot water system of the House?

Mr. Beith: I have been advised that there is no danger of Legionnaire's disease being present in the hot water system of the House. However, I shall arrange for a detailed written reply to be given to the hon. Gentleman. I do not think that the problem arose because of the listed status of the building.

TRANSPORT

Road Accidents

20. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many deaths and injuries there were arising from road accidents in 1995, 1994 and previous years. [13037]

Mr. Norris: The number of people killed and seriously injured in road accidents has fallen from the 1981-85 baseline average of 80,130 to 50,181 in 1994, and provisionally to 49,778 in 1995. Slight accidents have increased from a baseline of 241,782 to 265,008 in 1994, and provisionally to a similar level in 1995. That is immensely encouraging, given that the volume of traffic increased by 44 per cent. during the same period.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I welcome the general decline in the accident rate. Can my hon. Friend say whether the introduction of speed cameras has had an effect? If so, will he give the House an assurance that speed cameras are positioned on roads where there are likely to be accidents, rather than where they are likely to lead to the greatest revenue?

Mr. Norris: I give my hon. Friend that assurance. For example, as a result of the west London trial, the number of deaths in that corridor has been reduced from 21 to 7. That evidence is compelling. However, there may be evidence that the longer a speed camera site is in operation the less it is respected. That is a common phenomenon with this kind of installation. The Government will monitor the situation with care.

On my hon. Friend's second point, any revenue received from fines levied as a result of offences detected by speed cameras does not go to the police but to the

Exchequer in the normal way. Speed cameras are located at accident sites when all other conventional traffic calming and safety measures have been exhausted. They are designed solely to reduce the number of accidents. That is why the Government have insisted that there be large signs to warn motorists that they are entering a speed camera area.

Disabled People (Access)

22. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken to ensure that Railtrack provides improved access and facilities for disabled passengers at railway stations under its control. [13039]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend will be bringing forward regulations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 which will require that all new trains be accessible by disabled passengers. Stations are covered by the requirements of the Act, which gives a right of access to disabled people.

Mrs. Clwyd: Does the Minister appreciate that removing staff from stations, as is happening at the moment, makes many stations inaccessible? There is no point in having a ramp installed at a station if no one is there to put it in position. Many disabled passengers are being disadvantaged by that situation.

Mr. Watts: Some train operators have on-board ramps, which are operated by staff on the train. As a result, access can be provided even at unmanned stations.

Mr. Fabricant: Is my hon. Friend aware that facilities for the disabled have improved since privatisation of the British Airports Authority and British Airways? Does that not augur well for the privatisation of British Rail?

Mr. Watts: It does not surprise me in the least that services to passengers of industries which have been privatised have improved. Like my hon. Friend, I look to the privatisation of the railways to improve the situation further.

Public Transport (Manchester)

24. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about public transport in Greater Manchester. [13041]

Mr. Norris: Public transport in Greater Manchester is primarily a matter for the local authorities and the operators concerned. Subject to financial constraints, the Government will continue to consider funding worthwhile public transport schemes in Greater Manchester.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Minister accept that the MetroLink in Greater Manchester has been a huge success? However, if it is to thrive it needs to have four or five lines added. Does the Minister welcome the current consultations about extending the MetroLink towards Tameside? However, it is no good having permission to build the extra lines if the money is not forthcoming.

Mr. Norris: I can certainly assure the hon. Gentleman that we believe that the viability of the system and its usefulness to Manchester is greatly enhanced as it expands, but I know that the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that affordability is the key constraint. I cannot give him a commitment at this moment as to the funding of extensions to the system which already have statutory approval or those which are in various stages of preparation, but I can say that we shall continue to consider them as part of the package of proposals made by Greater Manchester.

Mr. Jenkin: With regard to public transport in the Manchester area and the effect of fraud in relation to public transport, has not the greatest fraud been the great nationalisation experiment perpetrated by left-of-centre Governments, which has failed, and should we not look forward to the end of nationalisation?

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The bus industry has never thrived as it thrives now, entirely in the private sector, and long may it prosper. It will not have escaped my hon. Friend's attention that all the criticisms so often levelled by the Labour party at the railway system in this country are criticisms levelled at a nationalised railway, and that outside this place the general public cannot wait for the advantages that the private sector will bring to enhance the quality of rail services.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Privy Council

34. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make it his policy to review the functions and role of the Privy Council. [13057]

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will the Lord President consider taking powers to abolish the Privy Council oath? Does he appreciate that that arcane mumbo-jumbo of an oath has now been totally devalued by the Government's failure to entrust my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition with a copy of the Scott inquiry report on Privy Council terms for a period during which he could read, digest and absorb its contents? Does he agree that the Privy Council oath is justified only on the rare occasions when approaches can be made to the other side in politics on Privy Council terms, but that on this occasion the Government have failed to do so? Is it not time that that arcane oath was abolished and done away with because it is absolute nonsense?

Mr. Newton: No.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Is it not highly appropriate that a recent oath was uttered by the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott)?

Mr. Newton: I did not quite catch that question, but my hon. Friends obviously think that the answer is yes. I shall take further advice.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Procedure Committee Reports

35. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Lord President of the Council how many reports from the Procedure Committee are awaiting debate on the Floor of the House. [13059]

Mr. Newton: In the current Parliament, the Procedure Committee has produced 17 reports. Five have been debated either on their own or in the context of related business. Of the remainder, six required no resolution of the House or have been implemented wholly or in part by other means.

Mr. Banks: That still leaves several reports that we have not yet had an opportunity to discuss on the Floor of the House. It is a bit depressing to sit in a Committee producing reports only for them to gather dust on a shelf. Specifically, the whole House would be interested in the Committee's recommendations about Prime Minister's Question Time. Prime Minister's Question Time gets most of the criticism from outside this place, much of which is unfair, and the House should have the opportunity to discuss the proposal to have closed questions on Thursdays to see whether that improves the position. May we have a debate on that as quickly as possible, as I should like my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition to be in place as Prime Minister to see the new arrangements through?

Mr. Newton: I indicated in a relatively recent answer that that report is still being studied by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and myself. For my part, the more I think about the matter, the more I think that it may be difficult to achieve a change that would meet the convenience of both sides of the House and therefore command the necessary agreement.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my right hon. Friend believe that there should be a debate about the implications of the Nolan committee recommendations as to what interests can and cannot be registered in the House? My right hon. Friend may be interested to know that, for Question Time today, despite the fact that the House now wants registered interests marked on questions, 14 Labour Members with relevant trade union interests have tabled questions and not one of them seems to regard that as a registrable interest.

Mr. Newton: On the latter point, I am sure that my hon. Friend will know that it would be proper, perhaps, to put the matter to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. On my hon. Friend's wider comments, I am Chairman of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, which is actively considering such issues.

Voting Procedures

36. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has to speed up voting procedures; and if he will make a statement. [13061]

Mr. Newton: None, Madam Speaker. If my hon. Friend has any particular cause for concern, he may wish to draw it to the attention of the Select Committee on Procedure.

Mr. Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend consider those days when the House can be delayed if it is pursuing, perhaps, a run of six Divisions? Sometimes it can be delayed by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), for example, as a result of being delayed in one of the Lobbies. Could not different arrangements be made on such occasions—for example, taking the first Division in the normal way and subsequent ones by the pressing of buttons or something of that sort?

Mr. Newton: In its third report of 1992-93, the Committee recommended that the Chair should have discretion to appoint Tellers at any time up to two minutes after the Question was first put, in the sort of circumstances to which my hon. Friend refers. That recommendation was agreed to by the House. However, I believe that I am right in saying that you, Madam Speaker, have not felt it right to exercise that discretion.

Northern Ireland Peace Process

3.30 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): With permission, Madam Speaker, I will make a statement on the bomb explosion in the South Quay area of London last Friday, the declared end to the IRA ceasefire and the implications for security and the peace process in Northern Ireland.

There is no doubt that the evil act in London was the work of the IRA. It has all the hallmarks of its operations, with the callous sacrifice of innocent lives. The bomb followed shortly after an IRA statement, given to the Irish broadcasting organisation on the evening of 9 February, that the complete cessation of hostilities ordered in August 1994 was now at an end. The IRA admitted its responsibility for the bomb on 10 February.

The facts of the incident are briefly these. Around 5.45 pm last Friday, warning calls were made that a large bomb had been placed at South Quay station, Marsh Wall, in London. Local police arrived at the scene shortly after 6 o'clock, and anti-terrorist branch officers shortly after that.

At around 6.30 pm a suspect vehicle, a Ford flat-backed lorry, was identified, and the immediate area was cleared. While the area was being evacuated, the vehicle exploded, causing extensive damage to buildings in the area, and a large number of casualties. Two people were killed and 43 injured, two of them critically. Three police officers were among the casualties. I know that the House will join me in extending our deepest sympathy to all the innocent victims and their families. It is little short of a miracle that the casualty list was not much longer.

I should like to pay tribute to the efforts of the emergency services. Despite being hampered by a fractured gas main at the scene, they responded magnificently and they richly deserve all our thanks.

I must say to the House that this may not be the last such atrocity. More may follow, both here on the mainland and in Northern Ireland, if the IRA ceasefire is not renewed. We will do all that we can to prevent that and to catch those responsible. The protection of the public will remain our first priority.

In Great Britain, security has immediately returned to pre-ceasefire levels. In Northern Ireland itself, we had been careful from the very first moment of the ceasefire to take no irreversible steps to downgrade our security capability. All necessary measures to cope with the present situation are now in place. The Royal Ulster Constabulary is on full alert. We have sought to make an appropriate and proportionate response to the increased threat without disrupting daily life more than absolutely necessary.

The IRA has brought the 17-month-old ceasefire to an end. There is no shred of an excuse for this return to violence, least of all now, when all-party negotiations were clearly in sight. After the August 1994 ceasefire declaration, we called repeatedly on the IRA to make it clear that it was permanent, despite criticism by some for doubting the good faith of the IRA. We did doubt its good faith and the IRA did not say that it was a permanent ceasefire. None the less, after a prudent period, in order to move the process forward we were prepared to act on the working assumption that the ceasefire would last.

In the months that followed, we reduced the more visible and inconvenient aspects of security. We took soldiers off the streets and opened all the border crossing points. We did everything possible to create new jobs in Northern Ireland through renewed inward investment, and we helped to produce a remarkable economic upsurge. We talked to Sinn Fein leaders at official and at ministerial level. We constantly sought to move the peace process forward towards the all-party negotiations that everyone knows are necessary.

No one took more risks for peace than the Government over the past two years, but we never lost sight of the fact that the IRA commitment had not been made for good. No responsible Government could have done otherwise. That was why we and many others saw a start to the decommissioning of illegal arms as a way of creating confidence in Sinn Fein's acceptance of democratic peaceful methods, and showing that the violence had really ended. But all the time that Sinn Fein was calling for all-party talks, we knew that the IRA continued to train and plan for terrorist attacks. Punishment beatings and killings continued, as the House well knows. It remained ready to resume full-scale terrorism at any time. We could never be confident that its behaviour was that of an organisation that had decided to renounce violence for ever. The IRA peace was not a true peace.

I regret to say that the events of last Friday showed that our caution about the IRA was only too justified. The timing of the return to violence may have been surprising: the fact that violence could resume was not. We must now continue the search for permanent peace and a comprehensive political settlement in Northern Ireland. Let there be no doubt that the Government's commitment to that is as strong as ever, and will remain as strong as ever.

We will work for peace with all the democratic political parties and with the Irish Government. But a huge question mark now hangs over the position of one of the parties—over Sinn Fein. Its leaders have spoken often of their commitment to peace and peaceful methods, but they have always ducked and weaved when they have been questioned about the IRA and its methods. After the events of last Friday, their ambiguity stands out starkly. The test for eligibility to take part in all-party negotiations was set by the British and Irish Governments in paragraph 10 of the Downing Street declaration. They should be democratically mandated parties, which establish a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and which have shown that they abide by the democratic process.

Sinn Fein's leaders claim that they did not know about the bomb at South Quay and the IRA's ceasefire statement, but they have refused either to condemn or to dissociate themselves from either. Sinn Fein must decide whether it is a front for the IRA or a democratic political party that is committed to the ballot and not the bullet. Meanwhile, one thing is clear: in the absence of a genuine end to this renewed violence, meetings between British Ministers and Sinn Fein are not acceptable and cannot take place.

That is also the position of the Irish Government. They have made it clear to Sinn Fein that their attitude and willingness to meet at political level will be determined by whether the IRA ceasefire is restored. We and the Irish Government are at one on this: the ball is in the court of Sinn Fein and the IRA, if indeed that distinction means anything. It is for them to show through their words and

[The Prime Minister]

actions whether they have a part to play in the peace process. I am not in the business of slamming doors, but the British and Irish peoples need to know where Sinn Fein stands.

The people of a democracy are not passive spectators to events. They have the right to make their views clear on these issues, and the people of Northern Ireland, from both communities, have consistently done so. The popular will for peace has never been clearer or more coherently expressed than in recent months. The peace process will go on. I commend all those who have had the courage and the sense, in the face of this latest atrocity, to work to prevent a wider return to violence.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and I have met all the parties in the past two weeks. That process will be intensified with the parties that have not, for the present, disqualified themselves. The aim is, as it has always been, to establish the necessary confidence to enable negotiations between all the parties to begin. I want everyone to be absolutely clear on that point. The objective of all our actions and policies, before and since the ceasefire, has been to get to a position in which all the constitutional and democratic parties can get around the table together. Everything else is a means to that essential end.

On 24 January, I told the House that, if the paramilitaries would not start decommissioning their illegal arms, one alternative way forward was through elections, to give the electoral mandates and confidence that could lead straight, and straight away, to negotiations. As proposed by the Mitchell report, decommissioning could go ahead in parallel with those negotiations. The proposal has been consistently misrepresented by Sinn Fein, and it has been misunderstood more widely. I repeat now that its purpose is to lead directly and speedily to negotiations between all the parties that are committed to peaceful and democratic methods, and it is aimed at reaching a comprehensive political settlement.

An elected body would have to be broadly acceptable and it would be strictly time limited. I am not proposing—as I have made clear on many occasions—an assembly with legislative and administrative powers. Any suggestion of a return to old-style Stormont rule is manifest nonsense on the basis of the proposals that we have put forward. The proposed elections are a door to full negotiations, and I continue to believe that they provide the most promising available opening. We will pursue that proposal and seek to persuade all concerned that it is indeed a way forward and not a means of delaying progress.

Our ideas are still being discussed with the parties. I should like to reassure the House that there are ways forward to negotiations with all the parties, which could include Sinn Fein—but only, of course, if there is an unequivocal return to the ceasefire. Others, including the Irish Government, have ideas, too. Our minds are not closed, and neither, I know, are theirs. I have talked to the Taoiseach twice since the bombing, and we plan to meet soon in London to discuss all the possibilities. I intend to find a way through to the negotiations, with all those who are committed to democracy.

The peace process in Northern Ireland has received a serious setback from the men of violence, but the process is not over—not by any means. We have seen the benefits of what has been achieved since the ceasefire: the freedom to live and to work normally; the freedom to enjoy life; increased prosperity and new jobs; and new hope for the future of the people of both communities in Northern Ireland. Those benefits must not lightly be thrown away.

This Government will not be deterred by terrorism. The people of Northern Ireland have tasted peace—a peace that has changed their lives. I have told the House before that I will leave no stone unturned in the search for peace. That is true today, and it will remain true in the future. The people of Great Britain and Northern Ireland deserve no less than that.

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): First, I join the Prime Minister in condemning without reservation the atrocity at Canary wharf and expressing our deepest and heartfelt sympathy to the victims and their families, and our gratitude once again—as so often before—to the emergency services for their unstinting courage. I also offer our thanks to the people of Northern Ireland, who deserve some credit for the calm and responsible way in which they responded to Friday's bomb. Their steadfastness among the sadness, anger and frustration that they must feel is a lesson to us all.

The Prime Minister has said all that needs to be said about the bombing itself. I would add just this: there has been much speculation about whether, as a matter of tactics, the IRA meant the bomb as a one-off or as part of some more prolonged campaign. For the IRA it may be a matter of tactics, but for the victims it has been a matter of life and death. There can be nothing but the most profound contempt for those who will butcher wholly innocent people in the pursuit of any such strategy, whatever it is.

So the question now is hard but simple. How do we regain the momentum for peace without concessions to the men of war? Will the Prime Minister confirm that the Downing Street declaration made two things very plain? One was that Britain had no selfish interest in Northern Ireland; its future could rest with its people—indeed, with the people of the whole of Ireland.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): What about the United Kingdom?

Mr. Blair: Of course the United Kingdom, too. The second was that, for a lasting settlement to be reached, there had to be a clear commitment by all parties to exclusively peaceful methods. Will the Prime Minister also confirm that all the main parties in the Irish Republic and, indeed, the Social Democratic and Labour party in the north, are committed to those principles?

Is it not the case, therefore, that the vast majority of people from both traditions are committed to peace? They may differ as to the future of Northern Ireland, but they do not as to the means of achieving it. Sinn Fein represents a section of nationalist opinion, but it is worth recalling that it is not predominant even in the nationalist community, north or south. In those circumstances, is not the demand which the Prime Minister makes and which I echo today—that if it wants to participate in negotiations, Sinn Fein must accept the same peaceful methods as everyone else—not only right but the only conceivable course that any British Government could justify? The question then is, if that is so, how do we establish with confidence, now,

that it will accept exclusively peaceful methods in the future? That is a question self-evidently even more central after Friday than before.

Decommissioning weapons was one way. In our judgment, it is and remains the obvious way, but that has been ruled out by Sinn Fein. A new electoral mechanism is sought as an alternative to that. Will the Prime Minister confirm that if it is to work, there must be broad agreement to it and that he will pursue all sensible avenues to achieve it? Can he also confirm, as I think he implied in his statement, that if elections go ahead, they will be on the following terms: that that is not a return to Stormont; that it will lead directly to substantive negotiations—in other words, that it is not a delaying tactic—that decommissioning could begin in parallel and that it will remain part of the three-strand peace process? So that is a way to negotiations.

The Prime Minister is surely right to emphasise that other options, whether they come from the Irish Government or from elsewhere, will always be open to consideration. All options are therefore being examined, but no option can include Sinn Fein unless it comes within the democratic process in a genuine, complete and irreversible way. Does not that mean that it must be prepared to play by the rules of democracy, namely, that sometimes one gets one's way and sometimes one does not, but one cannot achieve by violence what one is denied by the will of the people? Does the Prime Minister agree that it would be a start at least if Sinn Fein said even that it agreed with the six principles of Senator Mitchell?

I do not believe that this is the end of the search for peace. It cannot be. The benefits of peace have been incalculable in jobs, industry, confidence and security—plain, simple normality. People can go out and enjoy themselves without fear. They can learn to get on with and to come to befriend those of a different tradition. But more than that, peace is what the vast majority of the people of all Ireland—Northern Ireland and the Republic—want. To deny them peace is to vanquish democracy and to let violence determine events. The bombers should not gain concessions from the bomb, but neither should they be allowed to thwart peace.

As I have no doubt the right hon. Gentleman knows, many hard decisions will have to be taken over the next few days and weeks. Those taking them, both here and in Northern Ireland and the Republic, will require unusual courage and determination. There will be a need for still more and, perhaps, even greater risks than ever before to be taken, but the risks are justifiable. The people in Northern Ireland should know that, whatever the political differences between myself and the Prime Minister, on this matter we shall stand four square together in the cause of peace.

The Prime Minister: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his continuing and firm support for our efforts to produce a satisfactory outcome and a permanent peace for the people of Northern Ireland. As I have said before, our activities are greatly strengthened by the support that we have had from across the Floor, and I deeply appreciate it.

The right hon. Gentleman expressed his warm appreciation for the emergency services, and also referred to the courage of the people of Northern Ireland. I warmly echo that. The bomb on this occasion was in London, but Northern Ireland has suffered for many years and the courage of its people has been remarkable. That courage deserves a reward, which is why it is right that this House should continue to pursue peace.

The right hon. Gentleman asked the right question—how do we regain momentum? He accurately set out the background, so I shall not reiterate what he said. He was equally right to say that all the democratic parties are committed to peace and that Sinn Fein is but a fraction of the nationalists in the north. The other nationalist party has been a firm adherent to the peace process from the outset.

If Sinn Fein is to re-enter negotiations, it must be upon the basis that the right hon. Gentleman and I have both set out; it must be on the same basis as the other parties; and it must be with the same commitment as the other parties. I do not seek today to erect barriers, to produce harsh words or to make it more difficult for those in Sinn Fein to do what needs to be done, but Sinn Fein-IRA will need to decide again that the ceasefire must return. It is essential that they do that.

On the question of the election mechanism, of course there must be broad agreement and of course it is seen as a route to negotiations. That is the underlying purpose, and I entirely agree with what the right hon. Gentleman said. Equally, he was right to say that we must look at other options. No options can be excluded if they are likely to prove practicable and if they are likely to advance the process. No wise man would turn his back on an option that may enable us to make practical progress and ensure, perhaps, that the bomb that went off the other day is not followed by others.

Sinn Fein must indicate that it is determined to become a democratic party. Doubt has once again savagely and clearly been expressed about its activities in the light of what has happened in the past few days. The right hon. Gentleman pointed out that it has not clearly and unequivocally adopted the six principles set out in the Mitchell report. The Mitchell report itself did not incorporate a seventh vital principle to Northern Ireland, accepted by all the other parties—the principle of consent. That is accepted by all the mainstream parties in Northern Ireland, and has been so accepted for some time. That was not in the Mitchell report, and it has not been accepted by Sinn Fein.

As the right hon. Gentleman said, we are not at the end of the road to peace. If we are pushed back, we will start again. If we are pushed back again, we will start again. If we are pushed back a third time, we will start again. There can be no end to the search for a permanent settlement in Northern Ireland until we have achieved a permanent settlement in Northern Ireland. That should be—and, I hope, will be—true of this Government and all successor Governments, for as long as it may take and of whatever party those Governments may be comprised.

The right hon. Gentleman offered his unequivocal support for the efforts that we are making, and I am grateful for that. We may, as he said, have to take more risks. We will not take reckless risks, but if we believe that a risk is appropriate in the cause of peace—a justifiable risk—we will take it and seek the support of the House in doing so.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Does my right hon. Friend accept that we owe a duty to all those who suffered

[Mr. Tom King]

in the bomb outrage in docklands, as we have owed it to all those in both Great Britain and Northern Ireland, who have suffered outrages at the hands of terrorists over the years, to do two things: neither allow the terrorists to dictate the agenda, nor take away from the Government, Parliament and the Leader of the Opposition, with his welcome support on behalf of his party, the determination to continue the fight for peace? All people of good will throughout the island of Ireland, as well as the British Isles, will support my right hon. Friend in his continuing and brave determination to work to that end.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and knows the opportunities and the difficulties as well as any Member, so I am grateful for his support. He is entirely right in the premises that he sets out and I see no particular reason why I should add to his points, except to say that I agree with them.

The reaction and the courage of the people of London who were involved after the bomb the other day is also well worthy of mention in the House. There was a great deal of quiet bravery on that occasion, and I am delighted to have the opportunity to acknowledge it.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): On behalf of Ulster Unionist Members, I thank the Prime Minister for his statement. We join him in his total condemnation of the IRA atrocity in London—an incident that has not been condemned by Sinn Fein. On behalf of most people in Northern Ireland, and I might add the overwhelming number of people in the Republic of Ireland, we extend our sympathy to the families who have been bereaved and those who have been injured. We thank the Prime Minister, the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition and the leader of the Liberal Democrats for maintaining a bipartisan approach to Northern Ireland. This is a very bad day for Northern Ireland, Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, and we appreciate their united front.

Does the Prime Minister agree that some of those who were involved in the peace process were under the self-delusion that democratic procedures could attract those who are solely committed to violence? That seemed to be an error in the approach of some people. Does he agree that the inevitability of another terrorist attack was increasing as Sinn Fein steadily went through certain procedures: rejecting the Downing Street declaration, not approving the six principles recommended in the Mitchell report, and—strangely enough—refusing to reach agreement with all other Irish nationalists at the Dublin forum for peace and reconciliation, on the forum's report on Friday? Sinn Fein was totally isolating itself.

Does the Prime Minister agree that one of the benefits that we may derive from the terrible incident at the weekend is the mobilisation of the people of Northern Ireland towards lasting peace? There is great abhorrence of what happened and we can use that to our advantage, by isolating the terrorists and instead involving the people in the democratic process. That is why we believe that an election is the one way in which to open up an opportunity. Does the Prime Minister agree that those who have misrepresented the elected forum and given the IRA the impression that it was to be a parliament with legislative and administrative powers in a way fuelled the IRA to do what it did this weekend?

The Ulster Unionists will make their contribution to the peace process. We shall talk to all constitutional parties in Northern Ireland and leaders of all Irish political parties, but to meet them in Dublin will be increasingly difficult following the letter sent out last week by the RUC to all judges and politicians in Northern Ireland, saying that their police protection is to be withdrawn from 4 March this year.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for what he had to say about the victims. He speaks, of course, as someone who has himself suffered from terrorist violence in the past. I think he was right to say that Sinn Fein was finding itself increasingly isolated and that that was indicated by the fact that it was the only party not to agree with the final documentation of the forum for peace in Dublin.

Above all, I agree with the right hon. Gentleman about the desirability of mobilising the people of Northern Ireland for the peace process. They are the most powerful advocates for the peace process and have been since the onset of the process. I think that, with the support of their elected politicians in the House, they can again be mobilised to make it clear to that tiny minority who believe that they can live beyond the law and by terrorism that they are isolated and that they have no friends and no comforters in the democratic House of Commons or among the people of Northern Ireland, whether they be Catholic or Protestant.

As the right hon. Gentleman said, there have been misunderstandings about the nature of the elected forum that I propose. I hope now that those misunderstandings are behind us and laid to rest. I hope that it is now clear what nature of election we propose, what we propose would occur after the election and, in particular, that we seek all-party negotiations speedily thereafter. That is what all parties in the House have sought a way to find. I believe that we may have a route that will reach it. I hope that, in the discussions that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and I will have with the parties in the days and weeks that lie ahead, we might find the route through to those elections speedily.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): May I say that I am absolutely confident in standing here that I speak for the vast mass of the people of both parts of our island, in utterly condemning the terrible atrocity that took place on Friday in London and in expressing the deep sympathy to the families who suffered? No one understands more—especially not more than the people of the north of Ireland—what those people have suffered.

I should also like to say that that event has naturally caused a great many strong feelings in me and my party, given what we have been through in recent times, but I shall keep those to myself today, concentrate on what the Prime Minister was saying positively, and say that I agree with him. We have to concentrate our minds on getting all people together, because the objective has to be what we have never had in Northern Ireland—lasting stability. The worst symptom of the absence of that stability is violence, and it is the duty of all the people to do everything in their power to get everyone to the table.

I also agree that the people of Northern Ireland—and of Ireland as a whole—have recently shown strongly their massive will for peace. I think that one of the best ways

forward now is to let the people speak and to let them speak very clearly. If they do, neither the IRA nor anyone else will be able to ignore them. How do I ask the Prime Minister to let them speak? Let us have a referendum in Northern Ireland before the end of this month and ask John Bruton to do the same. There should be two questions. Question No. 1: "Do you totally and absolutely and unequivocally disapprove of violence for any purpose whatsoever on this island?" Question No. 2: "Do you want to see all parties brought to the table to be given a process of dialogue to create lasting stability?"

The Prime Minister: I think that the sympathy expressed from Northern Ireland for the people of London will be very well received, not only by those who suffered directly from the bomb, and their families, but by other Londoners. Clearly, it is right to try to bring people together. The hon. Gentleman is entirely accurate to say that there is a massive will for peace. That has been evident throughout the past three or four years. We are looking at a range of different options on how we might proceed in the future. More than one option lies before us at the moment and we are examining them. Of course, I shall also take account of what the hon. Gentleman had to say.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): As bombs cannot destroy the yearning in Northern Ireland for permanent peace and as the search for that peace must continue, will my right hon. Friend make a priority of promoting meaningful dialogue at this stage between the constitutional parties of Northern Ireland and the Irish Government in the political track of twin-track? Will he above all make it absolutely clear that there can be no reward for violence?

The Prime Minister: I can assure my hon. Friend upon the latter point. We are certainly keen to encourage dialogue—the former point that he makes—and will continue to do so.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I wish to be associated with the words of the Prime Minister and the leader of Labour party, in sending condolences and best wishes to the victims and thanks to the emergency services. Is it not the case that it is simply impossible for the atrocity on Friday night to have been a spontaneous act, and that it must have been carefully and deliberately planned during the past few weeks while the rest of us were trying to find ways to peace? Is it not also the case that the aim of that act was not just to maim innocent bodies, but to make a casualty of peace itself? Is not that a reason why those who will not condemn must be regarded as condoning? Is not this a moment when Sinn Fein must decide whether it will be a democratic party committed to peace, or a prisoner of every callous and arbitrary decision made by the IRA Provisional Army Council?

The Prime Minister knows that we have supported him in his patient and courageous search for peace with the Irish Prime Minister in the past years, and we shall continue to support him in every act that he takes that seeks to reinvigorate the peace process on the basis of a consensus agreement between the democratic parties. Is it not, however, an iron law in those matters that, when the Irish and British Governments agree, they can have success, but when they disagree, they give the terrorists a chance?

Surely, therefore, the first priority must now be to restore the trust and unanimity of voice and action between Dublin and London. If that requires compromise on the favourite solutions put forward by both sides, surely that is a small price to pay. Surely those who represent the people of Northern Ireland—who will listen, as the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) suggested, to the cry of the people of Northern Ireland to let them have the peace back—will recognise that a new spirit of compromise is the only way to ensure that peace itself is not added to the long list of casualties from Canary wharf.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is undoubtedly right that the bomb last Friday was not spontaneous, and that it must have been planned, prepared and sanctioned over a substantial period. It did not happen miraculously within a few short hours or days. That is undoubtedly the case, and he is entirely right to draw the attention of the House to that. He is also entirely right to make the point that those who are unwilling to condemn may be seen to condone what has happened, and I hope that that point is taken where it is aimed.

With regard to the situation between the British and Irish Governments, our objectives have been and remain the same—to try to bring all parties together so that a democratic agreement can be reached. We have not always agreed on every aspect throughout the past three years, and we have had to compromise between ourselves many times on the right approach to take. We have done so and we have reached agreements, and I am confident that we shall be able to reach agreements again in future.

I look forward to meeting the Taoiseach shortly, although that meeting will probably not take place this week. It may take place next week, but a date has not yet been determined. I have no doubt that we shall both look at the options that lie ahead, to see whether we can find a way forward that we both agree is the best option to deliver the outcome that we both seek.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): May I say to the Prime Minister today that he has the support of all right-thinking and law-abiding people in Northern Ireland at this time? Some of us have come through this for almost a quarter of a century, and we know exactly how the bereaved ones and their families feel. We know the agony and the pain of those who have been injured and of those who will probably never enjoy the fullness of life again. All right-thinking people on both sides of the religious and political divides in Northern Ireland are at one in their sympathy. The House has heard from representatives from all the parties in Northern Ireland, all of whom have said the same in regard to that pain and anguish.

I find it very strange indeed that many commentators and many nationalist leaders, having condemned what IRA-Sinn Fein had done in the heart of the capital city of this United Kingdom, in their next breath repeated the propaganda line that was in the statement—that the people to be blamed for this terrible atrocity were the Prime Minister and the Unionist leaders. While they were prepared to condemn what had been done, those people were also prepared to parrot the lying propaganda of IRA-Sinn Fein. I find that very strange and dangerous.

Dr. Joe Hendron (Belfast, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. Points of order come later.

Rev. Ian Paisley: The leader of the Liberal Democrats was absolutely right when he said that this had not happened overnight. The police in Northern Ireland have discovered that, three weeks ago, a registered tax disc on a lorry registered in England was stolen. That tax disc was on the lorry that did the damage. New number plates were made, and the lorry was brought across, via Larne and Stranraer, to do the damage. That has been confirmed to the owner of the tax disc, who is one of my constituents.

Three weeks ago, then, the planning was going on, and the premeditation of this terrible carnage. How could any democratically elected leader in the House of Commons be asked to sit down and negotiate with people who would do that while they were talking peace?

There is only one way in which the matter can be settled, and that is to pass it over to the people of Northern Ireland. Let them have their say—not in any referendum on chosen questions, but on who speaks for whom at the negotiating table.

The Prime Minister: Let me pick up the points that the hon. Gentleman made. First, his words of understanding to the bereaved will be very well received; I am grateful to him for what he said. He is, of course, right to support what the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) had to say, and I note with interest what he said about the tax disc. That is very strong corroborating evidence.

There is one obstacle to negotiations, above all—the lack of confidence. It is that lack of confidence that we are to address if we are to have everyone seated down together, which is the objective that all of us seek. Often, in emotion, hot words are spoken that cannot easily be recalled, and lie on the record to cause difficulties in the future. As the hon. Gentleman knows, they may not easily be recalled; but I think that, with the greater issue in mind, they can be forgotten, forgiven and put to one side.

I am concerned to look towards the future: not to erect any barriers, but—as we have sought to do with the hon. Gentleman and the other hon. Members who lead political parties in the House—to bring people together to see whether we can find some common ground on which we can all stand against the terrorists whom none of us in the House can or do support. That is what I am seeking to do, and I am grateful for the constructive response that I have had from all the political parties in recent weeks. I shall look forward to continuing those discussions in the days ahead.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): May I also express my sympathies for the many victims of this hideous act of violence, and my thanks to the emergency services, particularly the police and the medical services based in the London hospital in my constituency?

As to the future, of course I welcome the Prime Minister's resolution to continue with the peace process. I know that he will readily accept this, but may I urge him to put particular stress upon gaining the full, open, wholehearted commitment of Sinn Fein to the six principles laid down in the Mitchell report? Will he ask the Irish Prime Minister, whom he is to meet shortly, to join him in urging upon Sinn Fein the acceptance of those six principles?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the six principles. They are clearly important, although, as I said a moment ago, there is a seventh principle missing—which is already acceptable to all the other democratic political parties in the north—that would still need to be accepted by Sinn Fein, and that is the principle of consent. One of the great gains that we have made in the past three or four years is the general acceptance of the principle of consent by all parties in the north and by the Government of the Republic of Ireland as well. I will certainly make the points to the Irish Prime Minister that the right hon. Gentleman, has made, and I know that he will consider them carefully.

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): While the response from some people to my right hon. Friend's suggestion that an election to a forum might be a way out of the impasse was completely predictable, because they are not interested in the democratic way forward, does my right hon. Friend accept that there were others who were not sure what was meant, and that that has been fed by the propaganda that this was simply a stalling device or a way to get back to the old ways of politics in Northern Ireland? As that is the case—and I believe that there are some people who are still unsure, although they would be perfectly happy to go forward to a reasonable way of testing the electorate—will my right hon. Friend, now or later today, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, spell out much more clearly what they have in mind? I believe that the Government have some very constructive thoughts that would be acceptable to democrats from both sides of the political divide.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is quite right to draw the distinction between those who deliberately sought to pervert the message and those who misunderstand the message in the absence of further information. I hope that some of the things that I have said over the past few days and what I have had to say to the House this afternoon will remove many of the misunderstandings.

I hope, first in the private discussions that I am having with the political parties, to remove any other misunderstandings that there may be. I would like to see how far in those private discussions I may be able to iron out the areas of difficulty before I publish a paper setting out what the outcome would be. If that is done, before agreement is reached in the back room, it may make it even more difficult to reach an agreement, because people will take an instant view of whether they are in favour of something, and that does make the difficulties rather more intense. I shall certainly take on board what my hon. Friend has had to say, but, with the House's permission, I would prefer to take it on board first in private discussions with the political parties. When a concordat is reached, clearly it will need to be known by all the people in Northern Ireland as well.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): I would like to join other hon. Members in offering sincere sympathy on behalf of my constituents in North Down to those who have been bereaved and injured. I also endorse entirely the Prime Minister's commitment to an on-going search for peace, but we must address the methods that are to be pursued in that search.

The Prime Minister will be aware that the pro-Union people of Northern Ireland had considerable reservations and reluctance about entering into negotiations with those

who retained the latent threat of un-decommissioned weapons. That latent threat has, through the incident at Canary wharf, been translated into an horrific act of violence. In those circumstances, how can the confidence that is so necessary be created?

Does the right hon. Gentleman also accept that, while there is a necessity to restore in some form the ceasefire, such a restoration and entering into further negotiations with Sinn Fein-IRA begs the question about whether further down the line, when it meets with another impasse, or some situation that does not meet with its approval, it will simply blast it out of the way in the manner of Canary wharf?

The Prime Minister: The hon. and learned Gentleman is right to draw attention to the fact that many people in Northern Ireland had great reluctance, and still are very reluctant, to enter into talks and discussions with paramilitaries who retain weapons. That is entirely right. The purpose that we have in mind is to try and see whether we can proceed by broad all-party agreement, through an election process, through all-party negotiations, during which, in accordance with the Mitchell report, there would be a parallel decommissioning of weapons as the talks proceeded.

What I know the hon. and learned Gentleman will not wish to happen—neither would any hon. Member—is to see barriers erected over which no one can clamber, so that the whole process simply gets bogged down in the sand. In outright war, one can go only for victory. In circumstances such as those we face, there will be areas where people will have to look to see whether the end justifies the means.

If we can get through to an election process with parallel decommissioning, the end is clear—the end that the hon. and learned Gentleman and all sensible people wish to see, which is the beginning, the continuation and the completion of the decommissioning of weapons. What we are seeking is the mechanism. Here is a way in which I believe that we can achieve it.

Sir Michael Spicer (South Worcestershire): Has my right hon. Friend received any requests from the Irish Government for assistance from the British security forces in routing out terrorists and their arms dumps south of the border?

The Prime Minister: No, we have not, but I can tell my hon. Friend that we have very close co-operation with the Irish Government and, on security matters, with the Garda. That has improved dramatically in recent years and has made a considerable contribution to the efforts that we and the Irish Government have sought to make against terrorism in the past few years.

Ms Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): May. I say how tragic it is that my constituency, many of whose residents bore the brunt of bombing during the war and many of whom are of Irish descent, should have been the target of this evil act of terrorism? I had intended to raise only matters connected with my constituents, but the Prime Minister's statement has raised two worrying questions in my mind. First, if the leadership of Sinn Fein is undermined, with whom will the Government negotiate? Secondly, has the Prime Minister taken sufficient note of the strong criticism made by the Prime Minister of Ireland of the electoral proposals?

To return to my constituents, I thank the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and all those who have expressed their sympathy with the victims and who sent their congratulations to the emergency services on the speedy and efficient way in which they responded. I must also express my admiration for the council workers who have worked night and day to board up apartments whose windows were blown out, to make them wind and weather proof.

I do not know whether the Prime Minister is aware that, in addition to the devastation in Marsh Wall, about 1,000 windows have been blown out in the Barkantine estate, which has four tower blocks, which will cost hundreds of thousands of pounds to repair. At this very moment, surveyors are examining the worst-hit tower block—Top Mast Point—to find out whether there is structural damage. If there is, it will cost many millions. Will Government money be forthcoming to help Tower Hamlets council to do the repairs and clearing-up? We want that question answered. We also want to know who will pay for the repairs to the docklands light railway. There was traffic chaos today and the railway must be repaired speedily. I know that the privatisation process has begun.

Finally, is the Prime Minister aware that there has been some talk today of a fund being set up to help victims and their relatives, and householders whose house contents have been damaged by the blast and who are not covered by insurance? If such a fund was set up, would we have Government assistance in publicising it?

The Prime Minister: I hope that the hon. Lady will take back to her constituents the sympathy of the whole House for the difficulties that they have faced. She is right to draw attention to the fact that that part of London suffered grievously on previous occasions, and on this occasion the people have again responded as we would have expected.

The hon. Lady asked a series of specific questions. She asked with whom we shall negotiate. It is clear that we cannot negotiate with Sinn Fein while a campaign of violence is taking place. That is the position of the British Government and of the Irish Government. We are at one on that point. We can negotiate, of course, once there is a verifiable ceasefire back in place, because that is the practical way for us to proceed and that is what we shall seek to do. On the question of elections, that is a matter under discussion between the British and Irish Governments, and I think that we shall be able to reach an amicable agreement.

The hon. Lady raised a number of questions about costs. As far as I can give her answers now, I shall attempt to do so. With regard to Tower Hamlets, the financial implications for the local authorities are not yet clear. That is being examined, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will consider applications under the Bellwin scheme as soon as the position becomes clearer. I cannot tell the hon. Lady what that will amount to at this stage, but we are examining the position. I shall write to the hon. Lady about the docklands light railway as soon as I have further information. I have asked the same questions, but I am not yet in a position to give her the answers.

The hon. Lady mentioned that both businesses and individuals will face difficulties. Of course, any victim who was injured in Friday's terrorist outrage will, almost

[The Prime Minister]

certainly, be eligible to apply for compensation under the criminal injuries compensation scheme. For businesses and other individuals, the matter is complex, but if the hon. Lady will be content I shall write to her.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): In echoing the words of sympathy and thanks, may I ask my right hon. Friend whether he agrees that the effect of Friday night will make the search for a permanent and lasting peace, and progress towards all-party talks, even more important and urgent than before? In the light of comments made by other people, does my right hon. Friend accept that some suggestions—that all Sinn Fein has to do is to say sorry and then we can get back to how things were on Thursday and pretend that nothing has happened—are quite impossible to accept? Does he also agree that, if the bomb that went off on Friday results in an end to the proposals for elections, terrorism will have won and freedom and democracy will have been defeated?

The Prime Minister: We certainly do not wish to see any rewards for terrorism of the sort that we saw on Friday. My hon. Friend is right to say that Friday night makes the search for peace more important and more urgent. On the subject of Sinn Fein, I reiterate the point that I made earlier and, as my hon. Friend put it, sorry will not do. Of course it will not. We would need the clear-cut reinstatement of the ceasefire before we or the Irish Government would be able to re-enter discussions with Sinn Fein.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Everyone will share the Prime Minister's expressions of horror at the atrocity in docklands. Does the Prime Minister also recognise that the ceasefire has brought new life to Northern Ireland and that the ceasefire was the result of work done by my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), Mr. Adams and Albert Reynolds? In one sense, there has been no peace process. There has been a ceasefire, but a peace process must mean talks.

I am sure that the Prime Minister is aware—if he is not, I wish to draw his attention to the point—that the breach between London and Dublin, and between London and Washington, has certainly made a peace process more difficult. John Bruton was told on the telephone about the election proposal, and he was never consulted. The Mitchell report, which suggested all-party talks and simultaneous decommissioning, was set aside.

The Prime Minister *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Benn: It was set aside by the proposal for an election in the north that had never been the subject of proper discussion with Dublin. If we are to have a new ceasefire, are we going to have a peace process following, or will the Government continue to prevaricate on the all-party talks that are absolutely essential if we are to have a long-term settlement in the north?

The Prime Minister: I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman did not urge acceptance upon Sinn Fein either of the six principles or of the consent principle. I am sorry that he neglected to make that point, which I think would be accepted by the whole House. I am not sure that I agree with the right hon. Gentleman's version of history, because it seems to me to be lamentably inaccurate in every respect.

It was nearly three years ago—I do not remember the words precisely—when a message landed on my desk one evening from the IRA saying, "The armed struggle is over. We need your British help to bring it to a conclusion." It realised where it needed to turn, and we have done what we can in the interim to try, first, to bring the ceasefire into operation and, secondly, to move from that ceasefire to a permanent settlement.

The right hon. Gentleman is quite wrong in his assessment of why we have not been able to move forward to a permanent settlement and all-party negotiations. I can tell him that we have not done so because, first, Sinn Fein-IRA refused to decommission any arms whatsoever. They were not asked by the British Government or the Unionist parties to decommission every weapon that they had, although majority opinion both in the north and in the south felt that they should have been.

They were asked to do some decommissioning in order to instil confidence, so that the Unionist parties could sit down with them without the threat of a gun held to their head the moment that Sinn Fein-IRA did not get precisely what they wanted in negotiations. I am not sure whether it was the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) who said it—he will nod or shake his head—but the view in common currency in Northern Ireland is that talks cannot take place with guns

"on the table, under the table or outside the door."

That is generally accepted in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hume *indicated assent.*

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman nods—I thought he said so.

That view has held throughout the process. It is Sinn Fein's refusal to decommission that prevented us, some time ago, from going forward to all-party talks. That was not due to the stubbornness of the British Government, the stubbornness of the Unionist parties or the stubbornness of the people of Northern Ireland, but it was due to the fact that Sinn Fein would not decommission. When it would not do so, an alternative mechanism was found through patient negotiation and agreement, so that all the parties could sit down with a proper mandate to discuss, and decommissioning could take place in parallel with those discussions. The moment that that proposition became apparent, the reward for finding an alternative method was the bomb that murdered people just the other day in London.

I know that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) feels deeply about this, but he is wrong: plain, common-or-garden wrong.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): We have used the phrase "IRA-Sinn Fein" many times in the House, as if the two parts were part of the same entity. Is it correct to treat them in that way now, because I was never sure whether the IRA controlled Sinn Fein or the other way round, or a combination of both? Certainly the events of the past few days would suggest that the IRA Provisional Army Council has ignored Sinn Fein, and, in the current circumstances, Sinn Fein could not now deliver

decommissioning if it were asked. Is not this a chance for Sinn Fein now to take its democratic opportunity, not merely to say that it condemns violence, although that is important, but to take part in whatever democratic process is necessary to determine who comes to the negotiating table?

The Prime Minister: As for the relationship between Sinn Fein and the IRA, I think that they are both members one of another. That is the position, and has been so for a very long time. Were that not the case, perhaps Sinn Fein would be more prepared to condemn openly activities that no civilised person could possibly condone.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): The Prime Minister will be aware that one of the people murdered on Friday was my constituent, John Jefferies. John was a talented young musician, and extremely popular in his local community. I know that the Prime Minister will join me in sending our condolences to his family. Does he agree that we must ensure that John's life is not lost in vain and that everyone in the House and those parties that might want to be part of it must do all in their power to ensure that the peace process gets back on track?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising that issue and I agree entirely with every word she said. I hope that she expresses my personal sympathy to Mr. Jefferies's family. In a sense, the death of Mr. Jefferies, and the death and the injury of others, is a stark commentary on what we have seen for a long time in the dispute in Northern Ireland. They were innocent victims; they had no connection whatsoever with the ancient feuds that light these hatreds and have kept them burning for so long. The hon. Lady is entirely right: the best memorial to Mr. Jefferies and to the other people who have been murdered over the past 30 years would be for us to bend all our will to find a proper, full-term solution.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it seems highly likely that in the end we shall be confronted by the old, hard choices in Ulster? Will he remind the democratic nationalists in the Province that they would have a secure and honoured position in a united and integrated United Kingdom? Will he also remind them that they would be able to exercise real power in some areas if we were to restore a proper measure of local government in Ulster?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend is aware, for he knows Northern Ireland well, most of the choices in terms of how to carry this matter forward are hard choices—there are very few easy choices in the matter. I pray that we shall not come to the old, hard choices that my hon. Friend has in mind, for that would mean that violence and terrorism had taken full root and were flourishing again.

My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that a whole generation of politicians in Northern Ireland have aptitudes and skills not yet fully utilised in the way that they could be and should be in their constituencies. I hope that we shall be able to reach a position, by agreement, where those politicians can use their talents in that respect once again.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that his desire for negotiations as a gateway to inclusive talks is not mutually exclusive to the Irish Government's desire for proximity talks? Proximity talks could address some of the fears, anxieties and uncertainties about the nature of such elections, which would be necessary for them to be successful, which is what the right hon. Gentleman seeks to achieve.

The Prime Minister: The Irish Government seek proximity talks to clarify, essentially, what would be the position during elections and after elections. I am discussing, bilaterally, exactly the same points with the democratic political parties. The difficulty with proximity talks—I hope that the hon. Gentleman does not think that I put the point flippantly—is that we would need to have people in proximity, and there is a certain disinclination to do that at the moment. I have never denied the underlying need for discussions prior to the elections—indeed, I embarked upon those discussions from the moment that I set out to the House the possible electoral route forward.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Thank you. I now draw questions on the statement to a close.

Mr. Benn: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. This matter is of great importance and a number of hon. Members have been rising in an attempt to participate in the statement. Have the Government indicated that they will allocate time for a debate on this issue? Many hon. Members were excluded from today's debate and this is a very big issue. My hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) reminded me that we have not had a debate on Northern Ireland since the ceasefire—something has had to occur to trigger this statement. May we try, through you, Madam Speaker, to persuade the Government to make time available for a debate?

Madam Speaker: As the right hon. Gentleman is aware, that is normally done through the usual channels. He is quite right: we have not had a debate on these matters for some time. Many hon. Members always stand to put a question as there is a lot of interest in these matters. I regret very much that it is not always possible to call all hon. Members who are standing. I have kept the Prime Minister at the Dispatch Box for more than an hour. I have a list of all the hon. Members who have been standing—I always keep a list of such hon. Members and I try to call them alternately. I shall at least try to give hon. Members who have not been called an opportunity to put a question either to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland or to the Prime Minister during subsequent statements. I will bear in mind what the right hon. Gentleman has said, but it is a matter for the usual channels.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. It is obviously your decision to terminate questions at this point, but you must recognise that all those hon. Members who still want to ask a question would seek to be called in a debate on Northern Ireland, in which, we would hope, speeches would be time-limited so that those of us who wanted to

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

contribute were not talked out by ex-Ministers or Privy Councillors, who always seem to get priority when debates are held on any subject.

Madam Speaker: I have just made it clear to the House that, every time there is a statement or a debate, I keep a list and I put stars against the names of the Members who have been called once, twice or three times—or not at all.

Opposition Day

[5TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Ministerial Responsibility

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.37 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the erosion by Her Majesty's Government of the principle of ministerial responsibility.

It is often said that the United Kingdom has no written constitution, which is technically inaccurate, although it may be substantially correct. It undoubtedly conveys the message that much of the practice and many of the principles of our constitution depend on convention, and one such convention is that of ministerial responsibility.

What are conventions? They are merely habits and practices that do not have the force of law. If a convention is broken, no law is broken. Conventions are habits and practices that depend on their observance for their validity. A breach of a convention may, however, do serious damage to the integrity of the constitution, and it may do intense—even immeasurable—damage to the reputation of the Government and of Parliament.

The observance of some conventions is exclusively the responsibility of the Government; self-evidently, ministerial responsibility is one. Ultimately, enforcement of the convention of ministerial responsibility is a matter for the Prime Minister. He leads the Government; he selects his Ministers.

It follows that, when a breach of convention is tolerated, that breach is the Prime Minister's responsibility. He alone has the right to determine who should be in his Government and who should continue to be his Ministers. If, by a breach of the convention of ministerial responsibility, the reputation of Parliament is damaged, the Prime Minister is liable for that, too.

We should ask ourselves how far ministerial responsibility extends. It has been the subject of some dispute in the past three years, in an inquiry the results of which we may shortly hear, but I start with a proposition to which there can be no objection—that the personal actions of a Minister must be his own responsibility.

If a Minister knowingly deceived Parliament or Members of Parliament about a secret change in Government policy, that would be his personal responsibility, and I have no doubt that such a Minister should resign. A Prime Minister who did not require him to do so would be culpable in the extreme because, jointly and severally, they would be guilty of a gross breach of the convention of ministerial responsibility. Together, they would damage the reputation of Parliament.

Let us take another example. If, by his actions, a Minister knowingly created circumstances in which a person facing serious criminal charges was denied information necessary for his defence, would that not be his personal responsibility, and should not that also require resignation? Indeed, if, in either of the examples

that I have offered merely as hypotheses, resignation did not follow, the doctrine of ministerial responsibility would have been seriously eroded.

We must ask ourselves, how do we predict that the present Government might respond to either of those two hypotheses? We shall have to wait to know precisely, but we can obtain a clue to their future behaviour by examining their past behaviour—for they are a Government who have already been party to a substantial erosion of the doctrine of ministerial responsibility.

Sir Robin Butler, in a written statement to the Scott inquiry, appeared to absolve both Ministers and Whitehall permanent secretaries—of which he is, by some distance, the most senior—from almost any mistake, misdemeanour or malpractice in the government machine. In his written statement, he said:

"While ministerial heads of department must always be accountable for the actions of their departments and its staff, neither they nor senior officials can justly be criticised for shortcomings of which they are not aware, and which could not reasonably have been expected to be discovered, or which do not occur as a foreseeable result of their own actions. Ministers and senior officials can only be criticised personally for deficiencies in the organisation if those deficiencies occur as a foreseeable result of their instructions, or they could reasonably be expected to have known about them or discovered such deficiencies and taken action to amend them. While ministerial heads of department must always be accountable for the actions of their department and its staff, neither they, nor senior officials, can justly be criticised in a personal sense for shortcomings of which they are not aware."

I fancy that, in a report to be made public later this week, issue may be taken with some of the propositions in that statement.

Let us take the statement at its face value, however. Let us take what I understand to be perhaps an updating of the Maxwell-Fyfe propositions, but which essentially is the assertion that, where personal responsibility is concerned and where personal knowledge is available, a Minister is likely—indeed, bound—to be held to be responsible. Let us test that modern statement of ministerial responsibility against two recent examples, the first of which is the Pergau dam affair.

The Minister with responsibility, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), against the advice of the permanent secretary of the Overseas Development Administration, expressly authorised the commitment of aid for the Pergau dam. He did so as his personal responsibility; as I understand it, that formed part of the submissions made on his behalf when the matter reached court. Notwithstanding that, he was found by the court to have acted illegally. In a decision in which he overruled the advice of the most senior civil servant in the Department and for which he took personal responsibility, he was found by the court to have acted illegally.

Did resignation follow? Did remorse follow? Was there even an apology? There was none of those—the Foreign Secretary no doubt possessing all the Christian virtues except resignation—yet the circumstances that I have just described fall fairly and squarely within the Butler definition. The failure to resign or to accept responsibility unquestionably eroded the convention of ministerial responsibility.

If being found to have acted illegally were grounds for resignation, the Home Secretary, who has a somewhat feline character, can be regarded only as possessing nine lives. For a while, hardly a week passed without a court holding that the right hon. and learned Gentleman had exceeded his powers.

It is worth reminding ourselves that, when the High Court, or the Court of Session in Scotland, finds that a Minister has acted ultra vires—has acted outwith his powers—that is not an assertion of the supremacy of the court, but rather an assertion of the supremacy of Parliament. To the Minister involved, the court is saying, "You have sought to exercise a power that Parliament has not conferred upon you." Hon. Members should not be critical when members of the Executive are held by the courts to have acted illegally. By doing so, the courts are asserting the sovereignty of Parliament over the Executive.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Would not the Liberal Democrats' policies of weakening the veto and handing more power to the European Parliament undermine ministerial responsibility and accountability to the House?

Mr. Campbell: I think that I am correct in saying that the hon. Gentleman takes an interest in defence matters. He will be aware that, under article V of the north Atlantic treaty, the United Kingdom is bound to go to the defence of any one of the 15 members of NATO, including, for example, Greece or Turkey, and that we are bound to do so using nuclear weapons, if necessary. That shows that a sovereign Parliament can, by treaty, cede certain of its responsibilities. What was the Single European Act if it was not a formal cession of sovereignty from the House to Europe? If we choose to do that, we do so in the exercise of the responsibility that has been conferred on us by the electorate.

As we sign treaties, we can abrogate them—the sovereignty of Parliament is not affected. The suggestion that qualified majority voting, which already exists in certain areas, is somehow an abrogation of the doctrine of ministerial responsibility, as it applies to the obligation on Ministers to take responsibility for their own actions is, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, somewhat constitutionally inept.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The Chancellor of the Exchequer said not so long ago that, were he to be found guilty of what I might term conduct unbecoming of a Cabinet Minister, he would resign forthwith. Surely his Cabinet colleagues hold to the same code of honour.

Mr. Campbell: It is not for me to lay down a code of honour for the Cabinet. That is an issue on which members of the Cabinet must satisfy themselves and the electorate. In a sense, I think that the hon. Gentleman seeks to anticipate the Scott report. I have studiously tried to avoid doing so; I have merely put forward some hypotheses that I think might legitimately test the argument and the extent to which the doctrine and convention of ministerial responsibility can be applied.

What matters is not only the form of responsibility but its substance. The House will recall that the Home Secretary told us that the chief executive of the Prison Service was dismissed because of operational shortcomings in the service. The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that he took no responsibility for operational matters. We were told that policy was for him alone and that operations were for the chief executive.

[Mr. Campbell]

If we are to believe the chief executive, however, he met the Home Secretary almost every day to discuss the Prison Service. Are we to believe that in the course of an extensive relationship only issues of policy were discussed? I do not believe it. Allegations have been made that on occasion the Home Secretary made recommendations, as it were, to the director about the way in which certain prisoners should be dealt with. If that is not involvement in operational matters, what is it?

Did the Home Secretary go to his party conference and receive a standing ovation on the understanding that he took no responsibility for operational matters? When the blue-rinsed matrons of Surbiton rose to Lord Archer's invocation that "Michael should stand and deliver"—the noble Lord has much style, but not much originality—did they do so on the understanding that the right hon. and learned Gentleman would maintain an Olympian detachment from operational matters? Of course they did not. They did so because they were led to believe that, in terms of the Prison Service, the Home Secretary would be a hands-on Minister.

There was then the legendary failure of the shadow Home Secretary, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), either to anticipate or to answer the question whether Mr. Lewis should have been sacked. The logical position is that, if Mr. Lewis and the Home Secretary were both engaged in operational matters and there was a failure in that regard, both of them should have gone. It is a pity that the quick wit of the shadow Home Secretary did not permit him at least to anticipate that question and to give that answer.

What does the erosion of ministerial responsibility tell us about government? It tells us, first, that there is a great deal of arrogance in government. It tells us that there is an unwillingness to be held accountable. It perhaps tells us that there is a great deal of self-satisfaction in government.

What are the consequences of the erosion of ministerial responsibility? They include a deep cynicism among the electorate about the governance of Britain. It is clear beyond any question that the political system has never been held in less respect than it is now.

Above all, the erosion of ministerial responsibility tells us of the weakness of a Government who dare not apply a doctrine that lies at the very heart of constitutional government in the United Kingdom. They dare not do so, because the political consequences would be so damaging to their survival. That is the final indictment of the Government. In their weakness they damage not only themselves but the fabric of the constitution. It is time that we saw the back of them.

4.57 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Roger Freeman): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes the Government's policies for discharging Ministerial accountability to Parliament, for improving the management and delivery of public services, for maintaining high standards in public bodies, and for improving the openness and responsiveness of the public sector, thus creating a framework for good Government.".

To claim that there has been an erosion of ministerial responsibility is contradicted by the facts. The Government have not only adhered to the principle; we have clarified it, sharpened it and taken care to explain it to a wide public audience. I shall respond to the motion by considering how Ministers have discharged their responsibilities in five broad areas.

First, I shall deal with Ministers' responsibility to their own civil servants. Secondly, I shall deal with their responsibilities to next steps agencies. Thirdly, there are Ministers' responsibilities for non-departmental public bodies. Fourthly, I shall refer to ministerial accountability to Parliament. Finally, I shall take up Ministers' responsibilities to the public at large.

First, there is ministerial responsibility for the civil service. Any examination of the subject would be incomplete without dealing with the role of the civil service. The Government regard the civil service as a precious asset that other countries have good reason to envy. In our view, the responsibility of Ministers is not confined to accounting for the actions of the civil service. We have a responsibility for the civil service and to it. We are determined to take such steps as are necessary to maintain its essential character, which is based upon integrity, political impartiality, selection and promotion on merit and accountability, through Ministers, to Parliament.

That is the background to our introduction of the new civil service code. The code provides a succinct statement of the constitutional framework of the civil service and the values that every civil servant is expected to uphold. It restates that civil servants owe their loyalty to Ministers and that Ministers must account to Parliament. We are indebted to the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service, whose original draft provided the model to which we stayed very close.

The code restates the established constitutional framework of accountability to which the Government are committed, but it also contains an important innovation. It provides a right of appeal to the independent civil service commissioners for any civil servant who believes that he or she is being required to act in a way that is illegal, improper or unethical; that breaches constitutional convention or a professional code; that may involve maladministration; or that otherwise breaches the code or raises a fundamental issue of conscience.

The code came into force on 1 January and it deserved more attention than it got. Not only does the concise code apply to every civil servant, but, more importantly, there has been wide consensus on its substance. The House will agree that it is of the utmost importance that the civil service should command the confidence of both present and alternative Administrations. We welcome the view that was expressed in the fifth report 1993-94 by the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service on "The Role of the Civil Service". It stated that there was little doubt that civil servants would be able to demonstrate a high level of commitment to any incoming Government.

Secondly, the report stated that the commitment by the overwhelming majority of civil servants to the principle and practice of a politically impartial civil service is undiminished. Thirdly, it said that the next steps reforms were in principle compatible with the maintenance of the traditional values of the civil service.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Was not this relationship between Ministers, civil servants and Parliament fatally and permanently undermined when Mrs. Thatcher did not take responsibility for authorising the leak of the letter of the Solicitor-General in the Westland case and did not see it as necessary to dismiss any civil servant for giving that authorisation without her permission?

Mr. Freeman: The right hon. Gentleman has been in the House for longer than I have, and he will remember the debate and the explanations that were given at the time. I have affirmed the principles of the new civil service code, the great advantage of which is that it sets out, perhaps for the first time, in crystal clear language the obligations of Ministers and civil servants one to the other.

I shall now deal with ministerial responsibility for agencies. The introduction of the civil service code represents an important element of continuity in the Government's policy for continuity and change in the civil service. At the heart of the programme for change is the next steps project to improve management in Government. Under next steps, since 1988 we have established executive agencies within the public service to deliver services to the public either directly or indirectly. The next steps project has affected practically every part of the civil service, and that covers a wide spectrum of activity. It has made significant management improvements. Currently there are 110 executive agencies, and two civil servants in three are working under next steps arrangements. I expect that proportion to rise to three quarters by the end of next year.

The introduction of next steps executive agencies does not change the usual framework of ministerial accountability to Parliament. Civil servants report to Ministers and Ministers account to Parliament for all the activities of their Departments, including their agencies. The next steps concept introduces a great deal more clarity into the definition of respective roles and responsibilities.

In particular, it makes clearer the aims and objectives of civil service organisations, the tasks and performance targets that Ministers set each agency to achieve, and the amount of resources that are allocated to agencies. The greater separation of roles within the civil service and the introduction of performance targets to areas where previously there were none have been catalysts for change and for improvement in the management and provision of services.

Dr. Godman: Two Benefits Agency offices in my constituency are staffed by highly competent and professional people. However, would the Minister agree that some problems that are brought to us by constituents who are on social security incomes require a response from a Minister in addition to the usual letter from the chief executive?

Mr. Freeman: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. My brief contains comments on agencies, and if he will bear with me I shall deal with his point.

The next steps initiative does not change conventional relationships between Ministers and those carrying out the executive functions of Government. Agencies are within the civil service, and next steps arrangements provide for the clear delegation of operational responsibilities. The chief executive of each agency is personally responsible to the Minister for its management and performance. The form and extent of the delegation is determined case by case in the agency framework document, which is published. Each document sets out the range of tasks that the agency is to perform. That does not mean that, in delegating operational responsibility to the chief executive via the framework document, the Minister washes his hands of any interest other than in output and outcomes.

As I have said, the Minister remains accountable to Parliament for the agency. If he is to provide an adequate account, he needs to keep in touch and to retain the right to look and question and even to intervene in the operations of the agency if public or parliamentary concerns justify it. He may need to give fresh directions or to take other action if he or Parliament is not satisfied with what is being done. The Minister must be able, if necessary, to examine in depth and detail every part of the activities of the agency. That does not cut across the principle of next steps agencies.

Framework documents may require certain decisions or events to be referred or brought to the attention of Ministers, and the basis on which hon. Members have accepted the arrangements under which their inquiries about operational matters are handled by chief executives is the knowledge that, ultimately, if it becomes necessary, they can take up the matter directly with the Minister. The Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service strongly endorsed that.

I agree with the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) that constituents of any hon. Member have recourse to Ministers either in writing or through their Member of Parliament at the Dispatch Box. The establishment of agencies in no way seeks to cut across that principle.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): I have a question for the Minister before he leaves the topic of the next steps agencies. The Prison Service has been mentioned. Does he agree that continual interference by a Minister in what are described as operational matters undermines the authority of the chief executive, and makes it almost impossible for him to run the agency? Is the next steps agency structure incapable of dealing with the problems in the few agencies that are continually surrounded by controversy?

Mr. Freeman: I have defended the right—indeed, the responsibility—of Ministers to inquire, nay to intervene, in the activities of any agency so as to discharge their accountability to Parliament. That is the difference between the public and private sectors. The analogy being drawn by some that an agency is like a subsidiary company of a large group holding company is false. A Minister is accountable to Parliament and must be able to call to account the chief executive and other officers of an agency. He must also be able to examine and inquire into every nook and cranny of its activities.

We are still developing our experience with the agencies. We have 110 of them, and perhaps in certain cases those who sit on the advisory committees of agencies are unclear about their responsibilities. Are they confused about their responsibility to advise the Minister, or do they think that somehow they are non-executive directors of an operating company? They are not the latter. The Minister is responsible at all times, and is accountable to Parliament.

[Mr. Freeman]

He delegates day-to-day responsibility but does not forgo the right to intervene in the affairs of the agency or in the responsibility of the chief executive.

Mr. Beith: I am grateful to the Minister for accepting a further intervention. Is it not the case that the frequency of intervention that he has described and for which there may be the most compelling political and public interest justification, necessarily results in actions at operational level that have been determined by what the Minister has said or by what he is expected to think? Does the Minister accept that the consequence of that is that Ministers must accept that in some circumstances they may have to resign because of operational failures within the agency?

Mr. Freeman: If the right hon. Gentleman will allow me, I shall deal with that point in the concluding part of my remarks, when I come to ministerial responsibility to Parliament. However, he must be right in principle. If it is the responsibility of a Minister in discharging his accountability to Parliament to look into the affairs of an agency, the distinction between policy and operations—which I have defined more clearly in this debate for the benefit of the House—means that, if he intervenes and directs because of pressure brought by Parliament or because of a collective judgment by Parliament that the operations of an agency may need to change, that will become his responsibility and not the chief executive's.

Some people, including some members of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee, have proposed that chief executives should account directly to Select Committees about their annual performance. However, that could not be reconciled with their position as agency staff or, therefore, in relation to civil servants who report to their Minister. That would also not fit in with the Committee's acknowledgement that it is for the Minister to account to Parliament. However, agency chief executives regularly appear before Select Committees to explain the factual position in relation to the agency without prejudicing normal ministerial accountability.

An essential part of the next steps arrangements is that the framework document should in each case spell out as clearly as possible the division of responsibilities between the Minister and the chief executive. Such clarification does not mean that independent advice to Ministers and agencies should be excluded. Agency arrangements often provide for an advisory board or an adviser to the Minister to serve as a source of outside expertise that is relevant to the business of the agency. That may be mirrored by outside advice which the chief executive requires.

The story of next steps is one of success, and there is no doubt that standards of service and performance have improved. Later this month, we shall publish the 1995 "Next Steps Review", an annual White Paper which summarises progress in all the agencies. The review will show that agencies, overall, met 83 per cent. of the key targets that were set by Ministers in 1994-95, which compares favourably with the 80 per cent. that were met in the previous year.

The 1995 review will be the sixth in a series. However, it is significantly different from earlier ones because it has developed from being a report on the next steps project to one which focuses on agency performance. It will show that, in different spheres and in different ways, many next steps agencies are delivering services to improved standards with increased efficiency and effectiveness.

I should like to remind the House of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee's conclusion, in its most recent report on the role of the civil service. It reported that agencies represented

"a significant improvement in the organisation of Government . . . any future Government will want to maintain them in order to implement its objectives for the delivery of services to the public."

I shall now examine the question of ministerial responsibility for non-departmental public bodies, commonly called quangos. The Opposition's arguments in relation to quangos lack common sense because, first, they accuse the Government of eroding the principle of ministerial responsibility and, secondly, they accuse us of the opposite—of having strengthened ministerial control through quangos in spheres that were once the responsibility of local government, thus creating the so-called democratic deficit. The Opposition cannot have it both ways at once—indeed, I am showing that they are wrong twice over.

We have not created some sort of quango state. The evidence for that is published annually in a booklet called "Public Bodies", which is a continuous public record that, significantly, did not exist before this Government created it in the early 1980s. The booklet is available to hon. Members in the Library. It shows that, far from running out of control, non-departmental public bodies—the real quangos—decreased from 2,167, in 1979, to 1,227, in 1995, which is a 43 per cent. reduction. Likewise, the number of staff who are employed by those bodies decreased from 217,000, in 1979, to 109,200, in 1995. That is a 45 per cent. reduction.

The Liberal Democrats, at the last count, had proposed the creation of almost 900 new quangos, including an office of utility regulation—to regulate the regulators—an animal protection commission, an arms conversion agency, and both a local enterprise agency and a local housing arbitration agency for every local authority.

The function of NDPBs is regularly reviewed in a continuous programme. Once they are no longer needed in their existing form, the bodies are abolished, merged or privatised. Even so, we have recently undertaken a further series of initiatives to improve their efficiency, standards and responsiveness. First, we are implementing virtually every one of the recommendations on quangos made in the first report of the Nolan committee. Those recommendations deal not only with public appointments but with proprietary issues. We expect to issue a consultation paper in the next few weeks, following a review of the legal framework of propriety and audit in public bodies, as Nolan recommended.

Secondly, my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is reviewing the way in which the administrative costs of NDPBs are controlled. Thirdly, my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary is examining the scope for rationalising the function of NDPBs in certain policy areas in order to minimise any overlap or spheres of unnecessary regulation. Finally, the efficiency unit in my Department is carrying out a study which is designed to ensure that NDPBs with executive responsibilities have a clear concept of their objectives and effective systems to measure whether they have been achieved.

We are therefore strengthening the accountability of NDPBs to Ministers. At the same time, we are strengthening those bodies' accountability outwards—to

the people who use them. Our work on public appointments is a clear example of ensuring the maintenance of the highest standards through greater openness and public accountability.

The first report of the Nolan committee, to which I have referred, covered public appointments. It found nothing seriously wrong with the system, but it made a number of recommendations that were designed to demonstrate publicly that clean bill of health. We welcome those recommendations and have implemented them.

One key recommendation was the establishment of an independent commissioner for public appointments. Sir Len Peach, formerly chairman of the Police Complaints Authority and a man with an outstanding personal record in both the public and private sectors, started work on 18 December last year. His job is to monitor, regulate and audit the processes for all appointments to executive NDPBs and NHS bodies. To that end, he is currently drafting guidance on public appointments.

The guidance will incorporate a code of practice that is built around seven key principles: ministerial responsibility, as Nolan recommended; appointment on merit; independent scrutiny; equal opportunity; probity; openness and transparency; and proportionality. Sir Len will be consulting with all bodies that have a direct interest in the guidance, including the House, through a draft that will be issued in the week beginning 26 February. He intends to publish the final version in April. He will then publish a preliminary report on his work, towards the end of this year, and a first substantive report in the summer of 1997.

I believe that those reports, together with Departments' public announcements of appointments, will bring full transparency and a great degree of accountability into that aspect of our public life. At the same time, the reports will endorse ministerial responsibility for public appointments and, by showing that that responsibility is open and fully justifiable in the way in which it works, will strengthen that responsibility.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): In relation to the Nolan committee's first report, the Chancellor has not yet made any reference to the work that is being done on the second report, which of course is extremely germane to the issues that he is speaking about.

Mr. Freeman: My understanding from the chairman of the committee is that work is progressing on its report into local public bodies, such as the training and enterprise councils. I should expect that the committee will reach a conclusion and publish a report, possibly in the late spring. As and when that report is available, I am sure that my right hon. Friend, the Lord President will say what form—

Mr. King: It goes much wider than TECs. It covers the very important spheres into which—it is policy that I certainly support—substantial sums of public money go, such as further and higher education, TECs, universities and colleges of higher education. It covers all the housing associations and the housing corporations. It will cover a wide ambit, which will be of considerable interest to the House.

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. The report is an important piece of work, and it is being carried out with typical thoroughness. The House and the other place eagerly await its publication.

Dr. Godman: The Minister will have to forgive me for my parochialism, but does Sir Len Peach have a United Kingdom-wide role, or will he have counterparts in Edinburgh and Belfast?

Mr. Freeman: His role extends throughout Great Britain, and he has a similar role in Northern Ireland. He is therefore, effectively, covering the whole of the United Kingdom.

I shall now deal with the issue of ministerial accountability to Parliament, which has been raised by the Liberal Democrats. In the previous sections of my speech, I have said where progress has been made during the past decade, especially in the past few years, in clarifying responsibility in other aspects of public life. The Minister in charge of a Department is the only person who may be said to be ultimately accountable for the work of his Department. Parliament has usually conferred powers on the Secretary of State or the Minister, and Parliament calls on Ministers to be accountable for the policy, actions and resources of their Departments in the use of those powers.

However, while a Minister has full constitutional accountability to Parliament for everything that the Department does, it is manifestly impossible for him to take all decisions, or be personally involved in every action of his Department. It cannot, therefore, be sensibly suggested that a Minister is personally responsible for every action of his Department. It is worth stressing that distinction, because the terms "ministerial accountability" and "ministerial responsibility" have tended to be used interchangeably.

The mistaken inference that is sometimes drawn is that a Minister must personally take the blame—or the credit—for every action of his Department. It is equally mistaken to think, as some on the Opposition Benches do, that, in clarifying that well-established distinction, the Government are attempting to redefine those things for which Ministers may properly be held both accountable and personally responsible.

For the benefit of the House, I should like to spell out briefly the Government's position. Ministers take personal responsibility for five fundamental areas: the policies of their Departments; the framework within which those policies are delivered; the resources allocated; such implementation decisions as the framework documents for agencies may require to be referred to them or agreed with them; and their response to major failures or expressions of parliamentary or public concern, in the sense of demonstrating what action they have taken to correct a mistake and prevent its recurrence.

The Government's position is fully in accord with the classic statement on the subject made in the House more than 40 years ago in the debate on the Crichel Down affair by Sir David Maxwell-Fyfe. He said at the time:

> "The Minister is not bound to defend action of which he did not know, or of which he disapproves. But . . . he remains constitutionally responsible to Parliament for the fact that something has gone wrong, and he alone can tell Parliament what has occurred and render an account of his stewardship."—[*Official Report*, 20 July 1954; Vol. 530, c.1286-87.]

I am aware that some people contend that the establishment of next steps agencies represents a breach of that orthodoxy. That is not the case.

Next steps agencies are part of ministerial Departments and a few are Departments in their own right. The Minister remains accountable to Parliament, whether the civil

[Mr. Freeman]

servants who carry out the departmental functions in question are in an agency or not. Indeed, the delegation of public clarification of roles in the framework documents serves, if anything, to enhance accountability by increasing transparency.

The focus of what I have said so far has been on the accountability of Ministers to Parliament for their Departments. Ministers also have a responsibility to justify their conduct to Parliament. In that respect, too, the Government's position is perfectly clear. It is only a few months since we made it clear that we agreed with the Nolan committee that the principles of conduct which applied to Ministers could helpfully be set out in one place in clear and comprehensible form.

On 2 November, I told the House that the new first paragraph of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" was taking immediate effect. I shall not detain the House by rehearsing all seven principles of ministerial conduct set out there in full, but it is worth reminding hon. Members of the opening sentence, from which the others follow and which puts the matter in a nutshell. It states:

"Ministers of the Crown are expected to behave according to the highest standards of constitutional and personal conduct in the performance of their duties."

I also remind the House of the great care and wide consultation that we undertook before finalising the revision of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" in the light of the first report from Lord Nolan's committee. The third principle, on not misleading Parliament, attracted particular interest in this place and beyond. Let me remind the House of the version approved by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, which I announced on 2 November:

"Ministers must not knowingly mislead Parliament and the public and should correct any inadvertent errors at the earliest opportunity. They must be as open as possible with Parliament and the public, withholding information only when disclosure would not be in the public interest, which should be decided in accordance with established Parliamentary convention, the law, and any relevant Government Code of Practice."

It is important to emphasise that the principle is deliberately in the public domain, having been carefully debated in the light of Lord Nolan's report. The opening up and clarification of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" is an achievement of the Government. Until 1992, the document was not publicly available. There is no surer confirmation of the Government's willingness to be held to account and to be seen to be held to account.

Some have argued that the word "knowingly" provides some sort of escape clause for rendering account to Parliament. That is not so. Indeed, in retaining that word, we embodied a valuable and long-recognised distinction between intentionally and inadvertently misleading Parliament.

By releasing "Questions of Procedure for Ministers", by recasting it so that the opening paragraph brings together a code of ministerial conduct, by openly discussing the terms of the principles in that code, the Government have demonstrated their clear commitment to upholding the principle of ministerial accountability and responsibility to Parliament.

I hope that I have assisted the House in response to the debate by stating clearly what the Government's successful and clear record has been.

5.24 pm

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): This is a short debate. It is in Liberal Opposition time, so hon. Members from all parties will be relieved to know that I intend to be brief.

I congratulate the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) on the authoritative way in which he advanced his case. The Minister was helpful in setting out the Government's position. May I remind the Minister that there would have been no civil service code but for the report by the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. The Government set their face against the code at the beginning. It was only after that code was published that work was done to achieve a consensus and the code was finally approved.

The Government have been dragged kicking and screaming through the Nolan committee. Fundamental changes have resulted from the Nolan committee and its recommendations both in the way in which the House proceeds and in the way in which Ministers proceed. The committee's recommendations have also resulted in amendments to "Questions of Procedure for Ministers". So the Minister cannot assume all virtue in recounting what is now the Government's position. The Government have been dragged to that position by the effectiveness of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee and the power of the Nolan committee recommendations.

It is fitting that the House is debating ministerial responsibility today, in what might prove to be a crucial week for British democracy and the future of the Tory party. The test for the Tory party is not whether it can react to Scott in a disciplined manner to save Ministers' skins. The test is whether it can rise above short-term party interests to examine the health of British democracy.

The risk for the Tories is that the Prime Minister may even misjudge the interest of his party, as he seriously misjudged the mood of the nation on Nolan. How ironic it would be if the interests of the Tory party and those of British democracy coalesced in the need for ministerial resignations, yet the Prime Minister proved too short-sighted to rise to challenge. Perhaps the Government's position is so parlous that they cannot survive the shock of ministerial resignations in the run-up to a crucial by-election and the local elections in May.

We read that the Prime Minister is so determined to protect his Ministers that he is prepared to threaten an early general election to frighten the rebels into line. Does that mean that no one is to carry the can following Scott? After three years of work and 1,800 pages, and after a Cabinet unit has been set up which has probably spent more on monitoring Scott than was spent on the Scott inquiry, that would be remarkable. Or does it mean only that no Minister will carry the can?

I warn the Prime Minister that if civil servants are to bear the full responsibility and Ministers are to escape scot free, he will seriously misjudge the public mood and he may ill serve his party, his Government and the country.

This is an important debate, first, because the trust between the Government and the people has broken down. This is not a narrow, party political point. There is ample polling evidence, both private and public, to testify to the cynicism with which politicians and Government are now regarded. That may not be surprising in view of the broken promises. Before the general election, the

Government promised reductions in taxation and no increase in value added tax. After the general election, they did something entirely different. They said one thing before the election but did another after it. The Conservative party is governing in the interests of the few rather than the many, which is undermining trust between the Government and the people.

The story of the fat cats is the most graphic illustration of how the Government now govern in the interests of only the few. In contradiction to what the Chancellor of the Duchy claimed, it is my perception that the people feel that they have no influence over the services for which they pay, which they use and in which they work. The right hon. Gentleman claimed that the Government had done a great deal. He should talk to people in the health service, even the consultants and the people on the NHS trust boards, who often feel that they have no influence over the shape of the services that they have been appointed by Ministers to administer.

The right hon. Gentleman touched on the quango state and said that by centralising power he was increasing ministerial responsibility, so the whole argument about the quango state and the democratic deficit was bogus. He claimed that the Government had reduced the number of quangos. That may be true if we accept the Government's definition of a quango—which excludes NHS trusts and other bodies such as training and enterprise councils.

I do not think that even the right hon. Gentleman would deny that many of the services that are now administered through quangos were once within the influence of local government and therefore democratically accountable to the electorate. That accountability has been removed. The quango state accounts for some £34 billion or more of public expenditure, but few of the quangos bear any real relation to the people who use the services and in whose areas those services are administered.

The right hon. Gentleman claimed some virtue in the imposition of the Nolan recommendations on appointments. I welcome what Nolan said—that appointments to quangos should be open, transparent and on merit, rather than on party position. The Labour party is committed to embracing those recommendations. It is rather rich of the Government to claim virtue in Nolan's recommendations; it is no wonder that Members of Parliament and Ministers are less popular than journalists and estate agents. The Tories have become a "Not me, guv" Government. They love the language of individual responsibility—and as an unreconstructed Protestant I do not object to that—yet they disclaim all responsibility.

The Government claim that unemployment is nothing to do with them. There was a time, for some 25 years or more after the war, when a high and stable level of employment was the objective of Governments of all complexions. Now, unemployment is nothing to do with the Government, but that does not prevent them from claiming credit for falling unemployment.

What about the two recessions during the past decade—the longest and deepest recessions since the war? Once again, they were nothing to do with the Government. They were all to do with an international recession. Yet the Government all too readily claim the credit for Britain being the leading economy in Europe.

Let us think back to Black Wednesday. Once again, that was nothing to do with the Government. No one resigned, even though we are now told that at the time the Chancellor wanted to resign, but the Prime Minister pleaded with him not to do so. That is hardly surprising, because the man who took the country into the exchange rate mechanism at the wrong rate, at the wrong time, for the wrong reasons, was the previous Chancellor—who then became the Prime Minister. Black Wednesday was nothing to do with the Government, yet they love to claim the credit for the half-competent economic strategy they stumbled into when their policy was blown out of the water.

Crime has doubled since the Government came to power—but that, they say, has nothing to do with them. Yet the Prime Minister claims the credit for the recent drop in the crime statistics. What about schools? It may be thought that there is currently something of a crisis in state school standards. The Government have been in power for 17 years, yet apparently this crisis is nothing to do with them, but much more to do with Labour or Liberal Democrat-controlled local education authorities and the education establishment. It is nothing to do with the Government.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I have been listening intently to the right hon. Gentleman's speech. He said that the responsibility for education standards lay with Labour councils. Can he explain why a parent in the Labour-controlled borough of Southwark feels she has to put her child in a school in Conservative-controlled Bromley? Why does he think that another parent in the Labour borough of Lewisham feels that he has to put his child in private education? What are the Labour councils in those two boroughs and elsewhere throughout the country doing about that? They are responsible for the delivery of education.

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman misheard me. I did not say that standards in schools were the responsibility of Labour-controlled councils; I said that that is what the Government are claiming. After 17 years in control of the nation's education, all they can do is blame others. They say that it is nothing to do with the Government and everything to do with other people.

The Government claim that all those matters are nothing to do with them. When the voters' heavy hand is felt on their collar, they say, "It's not us, guv. Don't blame us, we're only the Government." So those who are quick to apportion individual responsibility in and to others deny all individual and collective ministerial responsibility. Yet it was the Prime Minister, in a frank interview in the United States not long ago, who admitted that, after so many years of Conservative government, there was no one left to blame.

The case for ministerial responsibility is constitutionally at the very heart of this debate about trust in the political process. I strongly agree with what the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East said.

Ministerial responsibility is at the heart of our bringing the Executive to account. It has long been my view that the Executive is far too powerful in our system of government, and that the House of Commons is ill equipped to bring the Executive to account. The best development of recent years has been in the Select Committees, which have gone a long way to improving the way in which we can bring the Executive to account, but there is still a very long way to go.

[Mr. Foster]

I should have thought that ministerial resignations would have given us some idea of how effective the House is in bringing Ministers to account. A long list of Ministers and parliamentary private secretaries have resigned since 1992. Although all kinds of reasons have been given for those resignations, which I shall not go into, as far as I can tell not one of them resigned because they admitted some deficiency in the policy, operations or activities of their Departments or any of the agencies for which they were responsible. Indeed, a former Minister felt that so deeply that he said:

"no one ever resigns for anything these days".

According to "Questions of Procedure for Ministers", Ministers are accountable to Parliament for the actions of their Departments and agencies. They must be as open as possible with Parliament and the public and must not knowingly mislead Parliament. If they do so, they should resign, according to a letter from the Prime Minister to my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) that was dated 15 April 1994. So Ministers, and only Ministers, are accountable to Parliament, yet, according to the Government, Ministers are not responsible for all actions in the sense of being blameworthy.

The House would not want me to enter into a comprehensive analysis of the concepts of accountability and responsibility, suffice it to refer Members to paragraphs 118 to 138 of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee fifth report. I concurred with the Select Committee when it said in its report:

"We find the government's attempt to draw a sharp distinction between accountability, which cannot be delegated by Ministers, and responsibility which can, unconvincing."

The debate has become crucial with the fragmentation of the civil service under next steps agencies and privatisation. Ministers are able to claim the credit for all that is good in their Departments and agencies and delegate the blame to others. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster seemed to suggest that claiming credit for what was going on in the Department was as reprehensible as delegating blame. I just do not recognise that behaviour in the Government—or, indeed, in any other Government. Ministers are all too ready to claim the credit and delegate the blame to others. Indeed, next steps agencies and privatisation have encouraged that.

On the exchange across the Floor of the House on the Prison Service, which was mentioned by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), I simply ask whether the Home Secretary would have escaped resignation if the Prison Service had been part of his Department rather than a next steps agency? That serious question deserves serious consideration.

If the House accepts my submission that there is a serious problem over trust between the governed and the governors, Parliament should be addressing it. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has outlined an ambitious programme of constitutional and democratic renewal, including a freedom of information Act to address the issue. The Government have dismissed it—not as inadequate but as positively dangerous—yet they have advanced no alternative. Their alarmingly self-congratulatory and complacent amendment shows that they do not even recognise the problem.

Sooner or later, someone in the Government must accept responsibility for something. The Scott report will present an opportunity for the Government to show whether they govern in the interests of all the people or whether everything is to be judged in terms of their own survival.

5.45 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): When I looked at today's Order Paper, I must admit that I was extremely puzzled as to what the debate was to be about. The motion refers to

"the principle of ministerial responsibility".

I could not help thinking that, on such a busy day, the Prime Minister's extremely important statement could have been followed by a debate on important, relevant matters. After all, there are few enough days on which the Liberal Democrats can choose the subject. We could have discussed the very important matter of education, which was mentioned earlier, or the national health service, or perhaps have risen higher, to a debate on European or foreign affairs. But not a bit of it—the debate is on ministerial responsibility.

With great enthusiasm, therefore, I came to the Chamber to listen to the speech of the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell). To my surprise, I heard a speech on the Scott report. I thought that the Scott report was to be published on Thursday, when a statement will be made on it, after which we shall carry—or stagger away with—the vast volumes of the report, wrap towels around our heads and consider it very carefully over the weekend and the days ahead. We know that we are to have a full debate on the Scott report, although I am sure that I shall not have the opportunity to catch Madam Speaker's eye during that debate as the good and the great will tend to be called before me—including the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East, who will no doubt have something to say on the subject.

Why is today's debate clearly aimed at the Scott report? Could it be a soundbite trailer for the learned words of the Liberal Democrats? It is not clear. The subject that has been selected for debate for half a day refers to either cynicism or incompetence. If we are to debate ministerial responsibility, which is in many ways academic and at the heart of the British constitution, it could have been dealt with much more thoroughly. We had to wait for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to address the substance of this somewhat dull yet important and complex constitutional matter.

The rather dull speeches from the previous Front-Bench spokesmen were surpassed by that of the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster), which was even duller. I happened to note that, during the speech of the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East, his Liberal Democrat colleagues yawned. In fact, most were absent, and only two are present now. I for one—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The occupant of the Chair will be yawning if we do not get back to the topic in question.

Mr. Arnold: For my own education, I shall be listening carefully to other contributions to the debate, and I will

listen with great enthusiasm to the speeches that we shall no doubt hear from numerous Liberal Democrat Back Benchers on their chosen subject.

Yes, ministerial responsibility is a matter of great importance. We expect Ministers to come to the House and take responsibility for their decisions. Given the subject of the motion, I find it odd that, in their soundbites the Liberal Democrats frequently promise all kinds of constitutional reforms under which they would arbitrarily hand the powers of this House to other, far less established institutions. The leader of the Liberal Democrats has gone on many a rural ramble around the country to give his views on how the House's responsibility for various matters should be delegated. Indeed, I heard him say on television in May 1994:

"I don't believe in the sovereignty of Parliament".

Ministerial responsibility is a wonderful thing and Ministers should be responsible to Parliament, but how can the Liberal Democrats take that approach if their leader claims not to believe in the sovereignty of Parliament?

Many is the time the House has sat late at night to consider motions relating to European Community legislation. I sometimes wonder what good it would do if we took a differing view. The House should be sovereign, but so many of its powers have already been delegated to European institutions, and things could only get worse if we followed Liberal Democrat policy. We know that the Liberal Democrats would abandon the veto on European decisions and grant the European Parliament responsibilities that would reduce the power of this House. How could Ministers come to the House and take responsibility for actions if sovereignty over those actions no longer rested with them? In that sense, it is perhaps appropriate that the motion refers to

"erosion . . . of the principle of ministerial responsibility".

One of Ministers' most important responsibilities is to answer to the House for the spending of taxpayers' money. An increasingly large amount of the money raised by British taxpayers—it can now be counted in billions of pounds—is being passed to the European Union to spend. How the spending of that money is accounted for is extremely important. I cannot help thinking that, if Ministers were exposed to Liberal Democrat proposals for the extension of qualified majority voting in Europe, they would be overruled time and again on vital British interests. They would then have to come to the House and say that, because of Liberal Democrat policy, they could not answer to the House for decisions with which they may well have disagreed, so Liberal Democrat policies are hardly the solution. *[Interruption.]* I hear the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East say from a sedentary position, "Like fishing".

In the example of fishing, the threat comes from the European Union to which the Liberal Democrats would sacrifice all powers, so fishing is not an especially sensible matter to raise.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The House is lost in admiration at the depth of the hon. Gentleman's grasp of the important constitutional doctrine of ministerial responsibility. As he is so exercised about such matters, he must surely recognise that, in relation to fishing, for example, majority voting rules. That concession was made by Parliament and, indeed, by the Government he supports—no doubt because they believed that it was in the best interests of Great Britain.

Mr. Arnold: The hon. and learned Gentleman refers to the concession to Europe. I am suggesting that the road down which the Liberal Democrats would lead us, were the country to allow them, would end in still more qualified majority voting. British interests could not then be defended, but that does not seem to worry the hon. and learned Gentleman, not least because his party is a federalist party. It would pass much more power up the way—perhaps "across the way" is a better phrase—to Brussels and various European Community institutions. What price ministerial responsibility then?

Under their federalist policies, the Liberals support regional government, which would be a further abrogation of the powers of this House. Whatever the Scots may want, I assure the hon. and learned Gentleman that my constituents would certainly have no truck with regional government, which would mean yet another layer of politicians and bureaucrats, and no doubt more heavy spending and the imposition of further taxes. From my constituents' point of view, the idea of regional government for the south-east, from Reading in Berkshire around the other side of London, would be especially disastrous. My constituents would far rather that I come here as their representative and try to hold Ministers to account. That is far more effective.

In a slight digression, the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East referred to the Home Secretary's accountability to the House. In the European context, I wonder how any Home Secretary could be answerable to the House, or the country, for Liberal Democrat proposals on, for instance, the dispersal of refugees. How could any Home Secretary answer for the Liberal Democrats' favourite policies, which were passed at their conference, on the decriminalisation of prostitution and the possession of cannabis? I doubt whether any of those would go down very well.

The hon. and learned Gentleman made much of quangos. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster rightly pointed out, although the Liberal Democrats claim not to believe in quangos, they would, given the chance, create them. Indeed, at the last count they had proposed almost 900 new ones. They include such wonderful things as an office of utility regulation to regulate the regulators, an animal protection commission, an arms conversion agency and, in every local authority across the country—not least in my constituency—a local enterprise agency. Every district would also have a local housing arbitration agency. I am not sure what that means, but it is Liberal Democrat policy. No doubt the Liberal Democrats would place their defeated candidates on such quangos.

I firmly believe that one of the greatest strengths of our constitution is the fact that Members of Parliament are solely responsible for separate constituencies on whose behalf they come to the House to obtain from the relevant Ministers detailed answers on matters of concern to their constituents. I am sure that the constituents of the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East appreciate having a sole Member of Parliament responsible to them and fighting their corner here in Westminster. The hon. and learned Gentleman cannot pass the buck; he has to take up all the issues—or clearly be seen not to take up issues—and hold Ministers responsible for their actions, particularly those affecting his constituents. That is something that I try to do. Yet the very mechanism for

[Mr. Arnold]

holding Ministers responsible would be undermined by the Liberal Democrats' policy of proportional representation.

I am one of seven Members representing west Kent. Under proportional representation, west Kent would still have seven Members, but to which constituents would they be responsible? Those Members could pick and choose. They could tell a constituent to go to a Member of Parliament from the party for which the constituent voted, and they might or might not hold Ministers responsible for some issues. It is important that constituents have an individual Member of Parliament who answers to them and who comes to Parliament to fight for them, wherever they may be.

Proportional representation would mean not only that individual Members who were solely responsible for their constituencies would no longer be able to hold Ministers responsible; the very mechanism for forming a Government would damage that ministerial responsibility. Whereas our constituents now know when Members are returned at a general election which party is likely to form a Government, under the Liberal Democrat proposal they would not know. The formation of the Government, and therefore ministerial responsibility to this House, would depend on backroom deals, smoke-filled rooms, unsatisfactory compromises and the like.

We do not need the type of reform touched on by the Leader of the Opposition, who suggested a referendum on proportional representation, or the undemocratic imposition of PR proposed by the Liberal Democrats. We would end up with a hung Parliament, in which one or two Liberal Democrats—it remains to be seen whether they would be here in the Chamber—would take a minor part in forming a Government.

Then again, would they support the Government? If one is to support the Government and allow Ministers to carry out their responsibilities properly, one has to turn up to vote in support of the Government. Yet only last week the hon. Members for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) and for Truro (Mr. Taylor) voted against their leader's and their party's policy on a motion relating to GP fundholders, while the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Ms Nicholson) is not in the habit of turning up, and certainly did not vote in support of the previous Liberal Democrat motion before the House.

In conclusion, we had a magnificent opportunity today to have a debate that was not subject to the decisions and programme-planning of the Government. All Back Benchers could have looked forward to a motion from a minority party, the Liberal Democrats, on a subject of great relevance and interest to our constituents. Instead, we got a motion on a subject so boring that it has attracted only two Liberal Democrat Members into the Chamber, while most of our colleagues have gone out to attend to their constituency duties.

6.3 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I heard the whole of the speech of the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold). Unfortunately, he missed the first 15 minutes of the speech of the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), who began speaking at 4.40 pm. The hon. Gentleman came in at 4.55 pm, although he may have been listening to the speech outwith the Chamber.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I am sure you recall, I was in the Chamber. I had to leave for five minutes to check *Hansard*, but I can assure you that I was here for the overwhelming majority of the hon. and learned Gentleman's speech.

Dr. Godman: Naturally, I accept the hon. Gentleman's word, although his absence was noticeable.

I agree about the need for a debate in the near future on the Government's handling of Northern Ireland and on reaction to the dreadful event in London on Friday. I heard the explosion from my apartment in the Barbican, and I said to my wife that I could not believe that yet again it was the foul work of the IRA. We also heard the explosion at the Baltic Exchange a few years ago.

I disagree completely with the hon. Member for Gravesham about electoral reform, which would make for much better governance. I am not happy with the system of proportional representation advocated by the Liberal Democrats, but I think that we need a new system. We shall have such a system when we introduce the Scottish parliament. I much prefer the added Member system to that of proportional representation.

I can well understand why the hon. Member for Gravesham's constituents have no taste for regional government, but the overwhelming majority of my constituents desire that radical change. Their desire is reflected in electors' votes in local and national elections, in which Conservative candidates invariably finish in fourth position, a long way behind—I regret to say, in some respects—candidates of the Scottish National party.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East was anxious to emphasise that a number of issues on which he sought answers were prompted by hypothetical questions, and he chided me for daring to refer—however tangentially—to the Scott report. I was simply making an observation on what the Chancellor of the Exchequer has said about ministerial responsibility and the code of ministerial conduct. The hon. and learned Gentleman made a powerful speech, and I offer my compliments to him.

I did not share the Chancellor of the Duchy's sanguine view of quangos, of which many of my constituents are deeply suspicious, especially their membership. In Scotland, members of quangos have been appointed over the years on a party political basis. No matter what party is in power, it is a disgrace if the governance of Scotland is carried out in that way. It is a disgraceful state of affairs when people are chosen on the basis of party allegiance, rather than—as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) said—on the basis of their qualifications and capability for the post concerned.

The Chancellor of the Duchy made a number of points about the market testing of public resources and agencies. Where do the Government stand on the market testing of the Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service? The Minister may not be able to answer today, but I know that he will, with characteristic courtesy, write to me on the matter. The RMAS is being tested, and it is a very important issue to constituents of mine who are employed by the service in Greenock. They give, in my view, valuable and loyal service to the RMAS. They deserve to be kept fully informed about their future; given the fine work that they do in the Firth of Clyde and elsewhere, they should not be treated callously and thoughtlessly. I should be grateful for a ministerial response to that serious constituency point.

There are points to be made about other agencies. Why do Home Office Ministers treat those awaiting deportation in Scotland differently from people caught up in similar circumstances south of the border? We are discussing ministerial responsibility, and Ministers' treatment of individuals. Surely, whatever the circumstances, there should be some uniformity throughout the United Kingdom. I know that the Minister is not responsible for such matters, but males awaiting deportation in Scotland are invariably incarcerated in Greenock prison. That is unfair to those involved, and not very conducive to the good management of the prison. It would be far better for men awaiting deportation to be detained in a holding centre at Glasgow airport.

Let me point out, with respect to hon. Members representing constituencies south of the border, that such holding centres exist at their main airports. Governor Gunn and his first-class staff should not have to look after detainees in Greenock prison, which is often overcrowded at the best of times. Could not the Home Office, the Scottish Office and the Scottish Prison Service persuade the BAA to make a site available at Glasgow airport? That would be an example of good ministerial management. If Home Office Ministers have United Kingdomwide responsibility for such matters, they should ensure that there is more uniformity on both sides of the border.

I seem to be skipping around in my references to Departments, but I believe that the Minister said that there were 110 agencies. Is it feasible for Sir Len Peach to investigate the implications of the severe cut in the action for community employment budget in Northern Ireland? Is that one of his responsibilities? Ministerial responsibility is of prime importance in the context of that savage cut: Northern Ireland Ministers have been grossly irresponsible. ACE provides employment in both traditions, and has helped to unite the two communities in the provision of assistance for people of all ages.

Such initiatives—introduced by the present Government in a principled way—help to diminish some of the hostility and alienation that are experienced in both communities. I feel, especially in the light of Friday's dreadful incident, that such initiatives make for a more tolerable society in Northern Ireland. I hope that Northern Ireland Ministers will be honest enough to admit that they have made a mistake, and that they should reverse their decision forthwith in the interests of those directly concerned. A cut of £12.5 million in ACE's budget may seem an insignificant aspect of ministerial decision making, but it has an important effect on the voluntary organisations involved and on both communities in Northern Ireland.

I appreciate that an immensely difficult task faces Northern Ireland Ministers. I travel to Northern Ireland fairly frequently, as I do to the Republic—I shall be going to Northern Ireland next week—and I recognise the difficulties involved in governing the Six Counties, given the hostility and resentment that exist in both communities; but a brutal fact will determine what takes place over the next few months, or even the next two or three years. The IRA and Sinn Fein are remorselessly pursuing the goal of a united Ireland. That cannot be achieved while the nationalists in the north are in a minority, but the community of two communities can be made a more tolerable place in which to live, and that can be achieved through ministerial responsibility.

Let me add, at a much less serious level, that there is widespread dissatisfaction with the way in which Ministers govern Scotland, and it is shared by the overwhelming majority of my constituents. Major changes will have to be made in the governance of Scotland, whichever Minister is in a position to make them. The status quo is now acceptable to less than 12 per cent. of the population.

6.17 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I shall not follow the interesting speech of the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), which consisted mostly of constituency points. I want to refer directly to the motion, which not many hon. Members have done.

The speech of the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) was based on a popular myth. Although that myth enjoys great currency, I do the hon. and learned Gentleman the credit of saying that I believe him to know that it is a myth. The myth is that a Minister can and should take immediate responsibility for the smallest action that emanates from his Department, and for what happens at the furthest outpost.

As I have done before in the House, I illustrate that with the story of the man who hammered the table at my advice bureau and asked why John Major had not bothered to send his benefit cheque that week. One understands what he meant, but did he seriously believe that John Major had a bit of a down on him, and that the Government were simply being mean to him? Apparently he did. That may seem a silly story, but it characterises the way in which people view what Ministers should be doing. A Minister should "know" what is happening to transactions that, although small, are important to individuals, but that simply is not the case. Not only is the move to executive agencies in line with what is happening in the rest of the world; it must be the right course.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster spoke about the framework. It is always going to be difficult to get the framework right. Almost everybody understands that we need to make a division between policy and operational matters, but getting it right is difficult. Some cases are easier than others—sometimes it is clear what is policy and what is operational. I accept that in the Prison Service, for example, it is difficult to define what is policy and what is operational.

Some dividing lines have been drawn more successfully than others. The establishment of a board to advise the chief executive and the Minister is crucial. When I had responsibility for some agencies, the advice that I received from an independent adviser from the business community was invaluable not only in understanding what was going on but in being able to have some control over what the agency was doing.

Ministers should not be discouraged by the fact that there are teething troubles. Some of the problems may not be teething troubles but matters in respect of which we will always argue—for example, whether they are operational or policy and whether we have got the dividing line right. That should not discourage them from a ploughing on with this course because it is right. When the management structure is right, it becomes clearer what people should do. If people who work in an arm of

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government know that if they make a complete Horlicks of something, the Minister will get the blame, what is there to make them take the responsibility that they should? It is there that the charters play such a key role.

The charters are best described as a 10-year project of process management. People should examine what they do. The person at the sharp end, the person who is organising at the sharp end and the person who organises a variety of sharp ends—if I can put it that way—should take responsibility for delivering that service. They should not blame the Government or say that it is the Minister's fault. They should say, "I am managing," or, "I am working on this counter. I am taking responsibility for that action." That is process management. There can be no doubt that it has worked.

The combination of the executive agencies and, to an extent, the charters has not only improved the Benefits Agency but transformed it. The service that my constituents get from the Benefits Agency is not perfect. We do not live in a perfect world and mistakes are made. It is a complicated business to administer, but the service that is delivered to my constituents has been transformed.

It is important to be able to identify areas in which performance can be improved. It is not enough only to measure the success. Analysis of public perceptions is crucial. Unless a service is responsive to those perceptions, there can be no real improvement. That is true across the public sector. Service providers increasingly accept that they have to set standards for services and achieve measurable improvements in service delivery. Those who carry out regular customer satisfaction surveys, market research, focus groups and customer panels are much more likely to identify the failings in the service that they provide. The outcomes of such activities inevitably lead to change.

For example, the relatively new patients charter sets challenging targets based on the results of surveys and market research on what users expect and want from our national health service. Thanks to the original charter, nobody waits two years for treatment, and all hip, knee and cataract operations are performed within 18 months. Today, we have had the welcome news that the 18-month deadline guarantee for in-patients that was set in the new patients charter has been met in almost all circumstances, and that soon we should be able to meet it in full.

Why did the Government move from a two-year guarantee to an 18-month one? It was not just the whim of a Minister or because somebody was trying to get publicity. It was because consultation showed that that was what the public expected and wanted from their national health service. They wanted the 18-month guarantee, they wanted nine out of 10 out-patients to be seen within 13 weeks, they wanted new standards for GPs and they wanted the charter to cover the service given by pharmacists and opticians as well as dentists. They wanted choice and information.

There are other examples that I do not have time to go into, but the core of the matter is information. Opposition Members have spoken as though all information has always been available and it has always been reasonable to expect to know what is going on. That is simply not true. Before the Government instituted citizens charters, much of the information on which public service delivery is now based was not available. It is all very well for the Opposition to talk about standards in education, but how do they know what the standards are? How do they know what service was delivered before?

When, a long time ago, I was the Conservative candidate in the old constituency of Stepney and Poplar, there was a school with new buildings and good facilities that had an interesting record. For two years running, it did not have a single examination pass. There were many schools of that sort, especially in working-class areas. People were being let down, but nobody was collecting the information. Nobody knew what was expected from those schools or what the schools were delivering. Thanks to the opening up of government and the availability of information, one service after another is being opened for public inspection.

We know precisely what our railways are delivering, so we will know precisely what improvements are made—and we believe firmly that there will be improvements—by the privatised service. We know what the courts are delivering and what the Benefits Agency is doing because they have to publish targets and people know how they are performing against them.

For the past four years, the examination results of every school and college have been published annually. As a parent with children in school, I believe that it is helpful to have the data necessary to be able to choose the best possible school for one's, children; otherwise, decisions are based on hearsay. I know what the schools in my area were like 10 or 20 years ago but I would not know now without examination results on which to base and inform my opinion.

The Government have done a great deal to open up government. The right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) mentioned the Select Committees as if they were part of the background and always had been. A Conservative Government introduced departmental Select Committees, which have transformed the way in which the House works. They have enhanced the House's ability to hold the Executive to account. I do not think that one will find any Minister in the Conservative Administration since 1979 who does not take Select Committees seriously. An appearance before a Select Committee is terrifying for a Minister. I am pleased to say that I never had to do it, but I know that Ministers spend a great deal of time briefing themselves and that they take very seriously what is said by the Select Committees.

Select Committees do a valuable job and they are a welcome part of the checks and balances of democracy, but I question whether too much credence is sometimes given to a Select Committee report when it has perhaps been based on a transitory look at a problem with substantially less information, back-up and research than is available to any Minister.

The right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland mentioned "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" and said that there was something deficient in it. He is lucky to be able to do so. This Prime Minister published it; no one would have been able to talk about it before. Nor would anyone have been able to refer to Cabinet Committees, and I do not merely mean their composition, as it was a long-standing convention under successive Governments of different colours that one did not mention them. It was not admitted that the Government had them. Now we can discuss what they do, we know who is on them and influence can be brought to bear on them.

The work done by my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Office of Public Service to make quangos more accountable, cut down their numbers, publish public bodies and improve the public appointments system is very welcome indeed. Those are not simply things that have been forced on them, but part of a long-term trend for this Government, who believe in open government.

The civil service cannot be a sacred or static entity. It has to evolve and change with a changing background. It has to change with circumstances. Civil servants are often disgracefully smeared by the Opposition and sneered at as being on the side of the Government. That is partly because they cannot answer back. My experience is that, almost without exception, civil servants are loyal to the Government. They are discreet and are committed to good government and to the Government in power. They are keen to engage in intelligent and private debate.

But that is the point—the civil servants who engage in private debate with this Government and who are loyal to this Government would be equally loyal to any Government elected. Indeed, many of the senior civil servants around today served Labour Ministers, often as private or assistant private secretaries. Undoubtedly, as I know from friends in the Labour party, they were 100 per cent. loyal to them, just as they are 100 per cent. loyal to the Government and would be loyal to any future Government. I had no idea what the politics of the civil servants with whom I worked were and I did not want to know; it was not relevant.

Some Opposition Members should tone down some of their criticism of civil servants. I know they think that they are making a point against the Government, but they are sneering at civil servants who are doing their best.

Mr. Derek Foster: Nothing has been said on that subject throughout the debate. I wonder what point the hon. Gentleman is making.

Mr. Hughes: I am talking about remarks that I have repeatedly heard in the House. I have never heard the right hon. Gentleman do so, but Opposition Members, including Labour Front Benchers, have made insinuations against the integrity of the civil service. We should understand where civil servants stand. We need to be proud of the legacy of our civil service and to understand that its daily achievements are important to our nation and to good government and that we should not do anything that would jeopardise it. The changes that my right hon and hon. Friends are bringing about in the civil service will enhance rather than damage it.

6.34 pm

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): I shall be speedy, as I realise that Front-Bench Members and the Liberal Democrat spokesman wish to reply to the debate.

I will not take this point too far, but my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) said that the debate was boring. I have listened and found it extremely interesting, although it has obviously not ignited the interest of the whole House.

The noteworthy part of the introduction to this debate was doubtless the source of the discussion on ministerial responsibility. Without wanting to criticise them, the Liberal Democrats can stand on Olympian heights, as theirs is the party that is furthest from real ministerial responsibility—so one notes what they say. Yet the debate was introduced by a very learned member of that party—the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell). His principle—it is the principle that one needs to take apart—was that breach of a convention damages the constitution. Certainly that is true. Doubtless he based that on the Maxwell-Fyfe principles. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster alluded to that.

Indeed, enlarging the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), one has to understand that there has been a huge expansion of responsibility and of day-to-day operations in the administration of Government. At the time of the Crichel Down case, only 3 million people were employed by the public sector. Even after 17 years of Conservative government and of shedding responsibilities and manpower, we still employ 5 million in that sector.

A Front-Bench Member with responsibility for the health service and for a million staff told me that he was responsible—nonsense as it was—for the swab left inside a patient in Carlisle. He employed a million people. Each day, his Department took trillions of decisions, yet, in some people's eyes, he was responsible for every single one of those decisions.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and West Devon): May I ask my good friend from the Government side how he squares that comment with the knowledge—which he might not have at his fingertips—that, according to a Treasury decision taken by a Treasury QC, as a result of parliamentary questions that I asked, a Secretary of State for Health has personal ownership of every NHS patient's health record?

Mr. Booth: I am grateful for that intervention because it underlines the necessity to make those opaque waters clear. The debate gives us the opportunity to look at those opaque waters. We had illumination passed on them last week by Sir Robin Butler. I was about to say as I was interrupted that Sir Robin, head of the civil service, gave an example, which was germane and which will illuminate the rest of this debate. He explained the difference between accountability and responsibility, and said that, as the head of the civil service, he might go into the Cabinet Office and meet a security guard who was drunk. He said that he had never met a drunken security guard and he hoped he never would, but, if he did, the security guard would be responsible for his drunken behaviour whereas Sir Robin himself, as head of the Cabinet Office, would be accountable for it. That analogy makes the difference and it gives the lie to, and points to the mistake behind, the motion tabled by the Liberal Democrats.

I hope that the House will support the Government because, alone among the parties, the Conservative party may be trusted with ministerial responsibility.

6.40 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The hon. Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth) put his finger on at least one important facet of the debate when he drew attention to the recent remarks by Sir Robin Butler, the Cabinet Secretary. Sir Robin sought to draw a distinction between ministerial accountability and ministerial

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responsibility. It is a fashionable distinction, but in fact it is rather a new one. I believe that it is one that the Government are seeking to elaborate with a view to diminishing the central core pillar of our parliamentary democracy.

The distinction is reflected in many documents for which the Government have been responsible, most recently in their supplementary White Paper about the civil service code. The distinction was reflected in the debate on the prison escapes by the Home Secretary, who sought to evade criticism altogether on the grounds that, although the escapes fell within the responsibility of the Prison Service and were so grave that they ultimately led to him to dismiss the director of the Prison Service, they were not a matter for which he as Minister had responsibility.

One has only to recall those facts to recognise how the doctrine is being changed. I do not suggest that that is part of a systematic rewriting of our unwritten constitution. I suggest rather that it is a consequence, and not altogether a happy consequence, of the changes in the form and structure of government, which have been directed more to efficiency and effectiveness than to the sustaining of the doctrines that have made our constitutional arrangements highly regarded in other parts of the world.

A statement was made some years ago which I prefer to the doctrine of the division of accountability and responsibility. The statement shows how quickly the Government have managed to alter public perceptions, or have sought to do so, and it was made by Sir Ian Bancroft, the former head of the home civil service. When he gave evidence to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee in 1982, he said:

> "The Minister in charge of a department . . . is responsible, and accountable to Parliament, for the effectiveness of his department's policies and the efficient and economical use of the resources allocated to it. It is part of that responsibility to ensure that his department has the systems, procedures, organisation and staffing necessary to promote efficient management."

I suggest that Sir Ian did not attempt to draw a clear distinction between responsibility and accountability, as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster did when he spoke earlier. The Minister expressed a narrow, confining view of accountability, under which Ministers would not take responsibility for the mistakes of which they had no personal knowledge or for the misjudgments that had led to maladministration. If we accepted that view, it would not merely become conventional for the House of Commons to excuse Ministers on the grounds of lack of knowledge—that has certainly been the case in the past—but be argued that it was even improper for the House of Commons to inquire into the mistakes. That we have moved some way in that direction seems to me to be the almost ineluctable consequence of the establishment of the next steps agencies.

The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee has argued strongly that civil servants themselves, certainly the heads of the next steps agencies, should be accountable to the House and should come to answer questions about the discharge of their responsibilities. That is a debatable and important point, but I am bound to say that that would stand our constitution entirely on its head. I am not wholly persuaded that the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee is right to recommend such a new approach to the responsibilities of civil servants. Our country has benefited from having an independent civil service that is non-partisan and non-political.

We need to hold someone responsible and to be able to call someone to account. Conventionally, that person has been the Minister, but if that has changed, we must seriously consider the politicisation of the civil service and all that flows from it. I find that a very disturbing trend, and a much more serious issue than the Minister seemed to allow.

The debate has been brief, but valuable. I was surprised that the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) called the debate trivial and yet at the same time, slightly contradictorily, he said that it touched on the core of our constitution. He should decide the issue for himself before he comes to the House to make a speech. The other contributions were rather more serious. I have a very brief time available to speak and I hope that those who contributed so thoughtfully to the debate will forgive me if I do not mention all their speeches.

I was pleased to hear the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) mention his support for a system of proportional representation, albeit not that which my party advocates. I was especially impressed by the speech of the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), which was very considered and thoughtful, and much less partisan than his speeches on some occasions.

The importance of the debate, and of the subject matter with which we have wrestled, is enhanced by the fact that a very important report—one which has been three years in preparation—will be published on Thursday. The subject matter of that report is utterly germane to the debate. I know that some people will believe that that report cannot be dealt with adequately in questions and answers following its publication on Thursday. I hope that we shall have a proper opportunity to consider the implications for ministerial responsibility to which it may give rise.

I must tell those on the Government Front Bench that I have been disturbed by evidence of systematic attempts to criticise and devalue the report even before it has been published. The inquiry's procedures have been questioned, but I considered them robust but fair because they allowed the fullest possible comment on allegations by all against whom they have been made. I take the profoundest issue with Lord Howe, who has suggested that the inquiry should have been conducted in an adversarial manner. Such a method is quite unsuited to getting at the truth.

The Government may argue that the Scott report fortifies the Government's commitment to the doctrine of ministerial responsibility, and that, by appointing an inquiry, the Government were giving strength to that. I would simply say that the inquiry was not the only way in which the Government could have proceeded. At least one Minister—the Attorney-General—was highly familiar with all the facets of the affair. That was made plain by the extent to which he sought to suppress evidence that might have been of value to the defence in the Matrix Churchill case.

Instead of setting up the expensive and thorough Scott inquiry, it would have been open to Ministers simply to make a clean breast of the affair to the House. That would have been a discharge of responsibility that the country

would have understood. That would have strengthened the Government's claim to care for the doctrine of ministerial responsibility.

6.51 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service (Mr. David Willetts): The right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) invited hon. Members to rise above party politics, but that may have been a rather optimistic thought, faced with the winding-up speech in a Supply day debate. We have been particularly urged to rise up above party politics and not to prejudge the Scott report. I have not read it, and I will not comment on it today, save to say that in the past three years we have experienced conspicuous attempts to prejudge that report led by, for example, the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook). I must say that I thought that the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) seemed to prejudge the way in which the Government had set up that inquiry.

Some questions have been asked about accountability and responsibility. The right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland and the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland asked about the distinction between the two. Perhaps it will help the House if I try to explain the distinction that we are making. The terminology may or may not be new, but the terminology is not the point; the thought behind the terminology is an old and well-established one.

The thought is that a Minister is accountable to Parliament for everything that goes on within his or her Department, in the sense that Parliament can call the Minister to account for it. The Minister, however, is responsible for the policies of the Department, including its agencies; for the framework within which those policies are delivered; for the resources allocated; for such decisions as the framework document held by next steps agency heads may require to be referred to him; and for responding to major failures or expressions of parliamentary or public concern.

A Minister cannot, however, be sensibly held to be responsible for everything that goes on in his Department in the sense of having personal knowledge and control of every action taken, and being personally blameworthy when tasks in relation to which he has no personal involvement are carried out incompetently.

Mr. Beith: If a Minister has intervened in a way that does not fit within the list of principles that the Minister has just given, is he then responsible for the consequences of his intervention?

Mr. Willetts: The right hon. Gentleman may have in mind the Prison Service, which I shall consider in a moment.

The explanation is that accountability is exercised for everything that goes on in the Department, and responsibility for matters for which the Minister can legitimately be held personally responsible. If one tries to extend personal responsibility to everything that goes on within a Department, the doctrine in effect becomes meaningless and incredible.

Miss Emma Nicholson: The Minister has properly pointed out that it is the thinking behind his remarks that counts. Is not the law, however, forcing Ministers into the position that the motion decries? For example, a recent ruling states that children are the property of the Crown. Ministers are, of course, Ministers of the Crown. A recent Queen's Counsel ruling to which I have already referred states that ownership of health records rests solely with the Secretary of State for Health. Surely such decisions on property and ownership give the lie to the statement that accountability and responsibility do not lie with Ministers. Property and ownership mean that one is responsible and accountable for those things that one owns.

Mr. Willetts: That is a rather eccentric point, but one which we should expect from a member of the Liberal Democrats.

I am trying to address the fundamental doctrine about ministerial accountability and responsibility. The Prison Service offers a clear example of how that doctrine applies in practice. The Home Secretary is accountable to Parliament for the Prison Service, and it is his responsibility to lay down its policies. He is accountable and responsible to Parliament for those policies, but responsibility for day-to-day management has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service. In his report, Sir John Learmont made no criticism of the Home Secretary's policies, but made serious criticisms about the way in which the Prison Service had been run.

Mr. Derek Foster: If the Home Secretary continually interferes in operational matters within the Prison Service—I do not necessarily blame him for doing so if political issues arise in the House or in the tabloids—and makes the operation of the service impossible, what is the position on responsibility and accountability?

Mr. Willetts: Ministers are, of course, entitled to intervene in specific operational matters. Should information come to Ministers' attention that policy is not being properly implemented or that an operational matter is causing concern, they would be failing in their duty to Parliament and to the public if they ignored such information and did nothing.

In the few minutes left to me, I should like to make a small number of simple points that have been lost in the elaborate arguments of the debate. First, many claims were made about membership of quangos and appointments to them. I have done some research on such appointments, and I discovered that, in 1979, the last year of the previous Labour Government, there were 39 members of the Trades Union Congress general council. I invite hon. Members to consider how many appointments to public bodies those 39 members may have held. [HON. MEMBERS: "Twenty."] I hear 20, but no, not even 50. [HON. MEMBERS: "A hundred."] No, the answer is more than 100. [HON. MEMBERS: "One hundred and fifty."] The answer is more than that. Those 39 members of the TUC general council had between them 180 public appointments. That is an average of four and a half each.

That approach to appointments to quangos quite understandably brought that Labour Government into disrepute. It is in striking contrast to our approach—I address in particular the remarks of the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman)—with the appointment of Sir Len Peach. In his role of scrutinising

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public appointments, he ensures that they are all proper and correct. If there is any known political background to someone who receives a public appointment, that is made publicly known.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) made some important points about the policies of the Liberal Democrats. Today the Liberal Democrats have talked a lot about accountability to Parliament. However, they believe in a massive extension of qualified majority voting—so that a Minister will have a clear responsibility to the House, will have a clear position on which he should be negotiating in Europe, and will have lost the power to deliver the policy for which he was responsible to the House. That is the biggest single threat to ministerial accountability.

The Liberal Democrats also referred to quangos—in fact, they proposed 892 new quangos: new Ministries, new levels of regional government, an industrial partnership agency, a judicial services commission, a national statistical commission, an animal protection commission, a fruit commission, a drugs commission, a national qualification council, a general teaching council, a humanities research council—I could go on. The creation of 892 new quangos would completely undermine the ability of the House to hold Ministers to account for their policies. Therefore, it is clear that the House should reject the motion tabled by the Liberal Democrats and instead support the amendment in the name of the Government.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 39, Noes 247.

Division No. 49] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barnes, Harry
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bennett, Andrew F
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Corbyn, Jeremy
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faulds, Andrew
Godman, Dr Norman A
Harvey, Nick
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Lynne, Ms Liz
Maclennan, Robert
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Rendel, David
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. Don Foster.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Chappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael

Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Derek Conway and
Mr. Simon Burns.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the Government's policies for discharging Ministerial accountability to Parliament, for improving the management and delivery of public services, for maintaining high standards in public bodies, and for improving the openness and responsiveness of the public sector, thus creating a framework for good Government.

Local Government Services

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Madam Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.13 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I beg to move,

That this House calls for reform of the financing of local councils so that they can realistically meet needs within the communities they serve; condemns the Government's financial priorities which are leading directly to the imposition of higher council taxes and cuts in local services; and believes that the Government's assault on local authorities, which continues year after year, is directly related to the massive reduction in Conservative representation at a local level.

I wish to make it clear at the start that I hope that the debate will not descend into the trading of insults about whose councils are worse than others. Many debates on local government in the House have been degraded in that way, and I hope that it will not happen tonight. If we chose, Liberal Democrat Members might use our time to attack Westminster or Lambeth, just as Labour spokesmen might do nothing but attack Wandsworth, or perhaps Tower Hamlets as it was under the Liberal Democrat administration, while Conservative spokesmen might do nothing but discuss Cornwall or Walsall.

If we do that, however, we shall merely succeed in losing what little esteem Members of Parliament are left with in the eyes of the public. Nothing makes politicians lose the respect of the public so fast as Members of the House using valuable debating time merely to criticise one another's councils. The public believe that instead we should consider positive ways in which all local authorities might be helped to provide better services at a lower cost.

People may say—and many do—that local government is on the brink of crisis, but a crisis is usually short-lived, whereas, sadly, the problems of local government are of long standing. Local government now faces a challenge from central Government that is perhaps greater than at any time in history. For the past 15 years, local government has been attacked by a Conservative Government who are keen to centralise as much power as they can. Even before that, there was always an imbalance in the relationship between local and central Government.

For too long, local government has been regarded as the property of central Government, its powers and responsibilities relating not to the public, but to Ministers and bureaucrats in Whitehall. Under the past three Conservative Administrations, local authorities have been regarded as the localised implementers of the philosophy and politics of the new right Conservative Government in Whitehall.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be constructive and not use the debate merely as an opportunity to knock the Government.

Mr. Rendel: I am happy to be constructive, as the hon. Gentleman will find if he will be patient. I said that it was important to use the debate to consider the whole of local government, not just to criticise individual councils.

For far too long, local government has been the property of central Government. We must change all that. From May 1996, the Conservatives will be left in control

[Mr. Rendel]

of no more than a small handful of local authorities. As their losses in local government have increased, so their determination to control local government from their Whitehall bastion has also increased. Every year, our local authorities find it harder to cope with the financial burden placed on them by central Government. They do so under a dead weight of bureaucracy and over-regulation.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): The hon. Gentleman talks about the powers and restrictions that central Government place on local authorities, and I believe that we can have a reasonable debate on that. Nevertheless, I draw his attention to the specific case of Taunton Deane borough council, held by the Liberals since 1991, which has never been capped. Two years ago, the council was awarded an extra grant of £1.3 million from central Government—the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration, my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), knows my opinion about that—which was far more than any other council in Somerset or Devon, and the grant has not been significantly reduced since. This year, the council proposes to increase its precept by 158 per cent., resulting in a

"huge increase in council tax",

as the *Somerset County Gazette* reports. What has the hon. Gentleman to say about that?

Mr. Rendel: I have already made it plain that I hope that the debate will not be degraded by that type of intervention, and I shall not even honour the hon. Gentleman with an answer in that respect. I hope that no other hon. Member will seek to degrade the debate in the way that the hon. Gentleman has done.

Every year, our local authorities find it harder to cope. As the Conservatives have been driven from town halls throughout the country, the Government have wreaked their revenge. To ease the burden on central Government—largely to pay for reductions in income tax—the Government have increased the burdens placed on local authorities. At the same time as local authorities have had their resources pulled from under them by central Government, increasing statutory responsibilities are being passed on to them from central Government.

One need only think of the nightmare represented by care in the community or the endless red tape of compulsory competitive tendering. It is fair to sum up the problem which confronts local authorities of all political complexions as that of having a wide range of responsibilities dictated by central Government, without the resources needed to meet them or the freedom to secure those resources.

Let us consider some recent financial settlements. Last year, the Government at least had the honesty to admit that the settlement was very tough. They could hardly do otherwise when their own press release confirmed that, bearing in mind the new burdens in respect of community care, the contribution from central Government had decreased in cash terms. It meant a cut in Government funds of well over 3 per cent.

This year, unfortunately, there has been rather less honesty from Ministers. In November, the Chancellor of the Exchequer pledged that an additional £878 million would be made available for investment in education for 1996-97. Of that, £770 million was to be channelled through local government. As I asked in the debate on the local government settlement, where is the extra £770 million? Funding from central Government for local authorities has not risen in real terms.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that his party's alternative Budget at the end of last year showed no extra money for local councils? Does that mean that the extra money that Liberals wanted for education—equivalent to 1p on income tax—would not be spent under their plans, or does it mean that new taxes would be imposed? Or does it mean that money would be taken from some local councils and given to others?

Mr. Rendel: The hon. Gentleman is wrong in his description of our alternative Budget. It is clear that the extra money from income tax would be spent on education. That is a local authority service. That money would have gone to local authorities for that reason.

This year, the Government have increased the standard spending assessment for education by only 4.5 per cent. Yet local authorities are already spending more this year on education than the Government suggest they should spend next year. If local authorities are to fulfil the Government's pledge of an increase in spending on education of 4.5 per cent., the reality is that the Government are, in effect, pressing local authorities to increase council tax by an average of 8 or 9 per cent., and to cut other services to the bone.

Even then it will not be possible for many authorities to boost spending on education by the amount that the Government suggest. I remind the House of the report produced by the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service, which was published on 15 January. One section read:

"This increase in spending does not, however, have quite the substance that the Chancellor claimed for it. There seems little doubt that some local authorities will be unable to pass on any increase in spending, and that some schools may neither perceive nor receive any increase in resources."

In Cambridgeshire, for example, the education SSA for the current year was £226.1 million. Next year, it is due to rise to £237.3 million, an increase of 4.9 per cent.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I am fascinated by the hon. Gentleman's argument. My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) was told off for using a specific case—presumably one which did not suit the Liberal party's purposes—but we are now being treated to a specific case from the hon. Gentleman. What are the Liberals up to? Do they understand the case that they are putting, or are they merely making it up on the hoof as they go along?

Mr. Rendel: The interventions are becoming more and more futile. I referred to the need not to make foolish interventions merely to describe where certain councils had gone wrong in order to make cheap party political points. I am talking about the way in which the Government's financing of local government has affected certain councils. That is a very different matter.

Cambridgeshire has already decided to spend £241.1 million on education this year because the authority places a greater value on education than do the Government.

That pattern is repeated in a range of county councils from Northumberland to Cornwall. Indeed, it covers the length and breadth of England. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) will no doubt confirm when he replies to the debate, exactly the same pattern is repeated in Scotland and Wales.

The Conservative party controls only a tiny handful of education authorities. No doubt that is why the counties place a greater emphasis on education.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rendel: No. I have already given way enough.

The Government's position no doubt helps to explain why they treat counties and local education authorities in general with such contempt. Even in Buckinghamshire—the last county left in Conservative hands—the council has made it clear that the settlement for 1996-97 is a disaster. It has calculated that it will need to make budget cuts of £12 million to contain expenditure within the capping limit. Yet that limit already assumes an increase in council tax of almost 7 per cent. Any additional Government funding for education will clearly be too little, too late.

In keeping with this evening's theme, what new money there may be will not cover rising costs that are beyond local authority control, such as the £191 million needed for rising pupil numbers or the £131 million required for special needs education. Nor does it take into account the 8 per cent. reduction in schools' capital grants and credit approvals. Vital repairs and maintenance for schools can be delayed for only so long: there comes a time when investment must be made in the infrastructure of our education system.

How can children be expected to learn in damp, decaying classrooms? How can teachers be expected to teach in Dickensian conditions where school buildings are a threat to health and where books are outdated and bedraggled? Conservative Ministers have raised the hopes of parents throughout the country, who thought that at last their children would receive the quality of education that they need, but it is clear already that those hopes were falsely raised.

The Government are guilty of deliberately misleading the public. Their strategy is obvious. They promise new money that will go through to local authorities. When that money does not materialise in schools, Ministers and Conservative Back-Bench Members berate local authorities for not passing it on. How callous can the Government be in toying with parents' concerns for their children's future in that way? How low can their regard for local government be when they seek deliberately to discredit local authorities throughout the country with a campaign that is based on deceit and misinformation?

We are not here merely to talk about what is wrong with local government funding. We must talk also about what we can do to improve it. The solution to the problem of local government funding lies in a change in approach by central Government. The Government must decentralise power. They must allow local authorities to have freedom properly to manage their own affairs. That means giving local authorities greater freedom in raising revenue and in setting spending priorities. It means also raising a larger proportion of funding locally.

At the most recent Conservative party conference, it was decided to end capping. The Conservatives were right to do so. Unfortunately, the Government are now so deaf to good advice that they do not listen to it even when it comes from their supporters. Capping is an unacceptable infringement of the principle of local decision making and local accountability. In addition, the constraints introduced by council tax precepts have had the unfortunate effect of pushing up local authority charges. When leisure facilities and the cost of meals on wheels soar above the rate of inflation, it is obvious who suffers the additional burdens. We know that they are faced by those who can least afford them.

In Northumberland, for example, the exceptionally tight budget will mean that the school uniform allowance will be halved. Voluntary groups will be charged to use school premises when they have never had to face such charges before. Discretionary transport provision will come to an end. A further 120 families in the county will be hit by the introduction of charges for respite care. There will be substantial increases in the cost of home help.

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): I am anxious to have a clear idea of what the hon. Gentleman's party is proposing. When he says that capping must come to an end, is he proposing not to apply capping, or to repeal the legislation that makes it possible for the Government to cap? There is a great difference between the two.

Mr. Rendel: In a few moments, I shall be introducing a completely different system, which will not require the Minister's question to be answered.

Releasing capping in isolation presents its own problems, especially if accompanied by a stingy financial settlement which leaves authorities with no choice but substantially to increase council tax. The problem is that council tax was not designed to bear the weight of being a major source of local tax revenue. It is not suitable for that purpose, because it is simply not fair. It is unfair essentially because it has many of the elements of a simple charge rather than being a really progressive tax. There will be great resistance this year to the Government's proposed council tax increases. Whether they like it or not, Labour and Conservative Members alike will have to address that issue.

If local authorities are to raise a larger proportion of their own revenue and if the council tax is inherently unfair, what is the alternative? The Minister will be glad to hear that I am coming to that. The Liberal Democrats have had a policy on that for many years. We have argued consistently that the right way to raise local taxation is not by taxing personal property but by taxing personal income. It is one of the most basic principles of the modern liberal state that people contribute taxes according to their ability to pay. Our support for a local income tax is not new, nor is the idea confined to our party.

The Layfield report in 1976 took the view that a local income tax is the only form of taxation that warrants serious investigation for the raising of substantial extra council revenue. Furthermore, in a comprehensive new report for the Rowntree Foundation, Sir Charles Carter is due to show his support for a local income tax. I cannot see why the other parties are so resistant to this idea. I hope that it is not simply because they did not think of it

[Mr. Rendel]

first and therefore will not endorse it. Whatever the reason, I suggest that there is now a new impetus for local income tax and that they can no longer avoid giving it serious consideration.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Does my hon. Friend recall that, when the Deputy Prime Minister was charged with getting the Government out of the mess of the poll tax, he admitted that local income tax was a viable alternative but that he was not prepared to support it because it was Liberal Democrat policy?

Mr. Rendel: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful intervention.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rendel: No, I have given way to many Conservative Members.

Other changes to local authority funding are required and some of them can be introduced fairly quickly and easily. It is imperative that central Government release local government capital receipts, which are estimated to be about £5 billion. Those funds should be invested in Britain's infrastructure, and not left languishing in accounts at the behest of Whitehall. That investment is desperately needed. With so many people suffering the indignity of homelessness, how can the Government stand by their line that the money must stay where it is in the banks? When will they learn that homelessness will not be solved by market forces alone?

The area cost adjustment still needs reform and the formulae used to allocate funding according to need have had their shortcomings embarrassingly exposed. One small but important example of that was passed to me recently by the London borough of Kingston. According to central Government estimates that were used to calculate Kingston's grant, Kingston has 224 children in care. In reality, it has 616 children for whom it is statutorily responsible. Making these changes to the funding system will no doubt sharpen the accountability of local government. Local authorities must have the flexibility to respond to local need.

Of course, with the enhanced revenue raising powers goes greater and more transparent responsibility. As a Liberal Democrat, I naturally favour improving the democratic process to match the improvements made to the funding system. There would be no need for capping in any of its forms if people could be made properly accountable through a democratic system of local government.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): The hon. Gentleman proposes two substantial increases in public expenditure. He proposes a substantial increase in revenue-raising powers. He has said that local income tax would substantially increase the revenue available to local government and that he would remove capping. That would lead to an increase in public expenditure and, as he knows, if substantial capital receipts are released, that would also increase public expenditure. *[Interruption.]* I am surprised that I am being barracked. I assumed that we were getting a clear statement of Liberal Democrat policy and I thought that I was following it.

Does the hon. Gentleman's call for increased public expenditure in two areas mean that there would be an overall increase in public expenditure by the Exchequer? If that is not the case, where would the savings come from?

Mr. Rendel: It is clear that the right hon. Gentleman has not understood the local income tax system that we would introduce. Perhaps that is why he does not favour it. Under the system, as local income tax increases and more and more funding is raised by local authorities, an equivalent decrease will occur in national income tax, which means that income tax as a whole will not increase. However, there will be an increase in local fund raising compared with national fund raising.

I realise that some hon. Members may not share the Liberal Democrat enthusiasm for representative voting. I warn hon. Members that, if local authorities are to have greater freedom to respond to local need, we must accept that the political process must be effective enough to ensure that they do so respond. I commend that point to Labour Members as well as to Conservative Members. This year's financial settlement was a disgrace in its deceitful conception, and it needs to be condemned by the House, but it was the direct product of a funding system which sees local government merely as the whipping boy of Whitehall. That relationship needs to be broken.

We must move from local government to local democracy. That requires Westminster-based politicians to let go of some of the reins of power and to trust the public to set their own priorities and govern their own communities. That may not be easy for the Conservatives, who have lost nearly all their influence in local communities, and it may also not be easy for the Labour party, which becomes more centralist the higher its opinion poll ratings go, but it is essential if we are collectively to win back the trust of the public of large. There is no better way for the House to prove that it is packed with public servants who have the interests of others at heart.

Education, transport, care in the community, and the environment—many of the most important aspects of our society—are dealt with by local government. If those services are to be run successfully, a proper system of funding local government is not just an option but a necessity. All those who care about local government recognise that, and I hope that all hon. Members will recognise it in the vote tonight.

7.36 pm

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"congratulates the Government on the priority they have given to education and the police in the 1996–97 settlement for local government; approves the rigorous approach that Government takes towards all public expenditure, including that of local government; commends the flexibility they have given to local authorities to respond to local priorities; and urges local authorities to make the most efficient use of the resources available and to use their freedom responsibly in providing local services.".

The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) asked for a debate on principles rather than on the performance of individual councils. I am happy to oblige him. This is an important issue, and I shall seek to demonstrate that the Conservative approach to local government in no way resembles the hon. Gentleman's epigrammatic description. It is part of a much more constructive approach and has a clear vision of the job that local government is there to do. That job must always move with the times, must be developing and must be organic, because circumstances change.

I should like to set out three propositions. First, Governments must have a view of the total volume of public expenditure that is acceptable in the economy. I cannot think of a Government who would not be willing to accept that starting proposition. The second proposition is that as local government spends about 25 per cent. of total public expenditure, Governments need to take a view about what is a desirable level of local authority spending. However attractive it might be to those in the town hall or to whoever occupies the Opposition Benches at any moment to ignore that, it is inescapable that Government have to come to that view.

I noted with interest an interview with the hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) in the "Parliamentary Monitor", a journal that I noticed only because one of its representatives came to interview me today. The headline over this little chunk is "Reserving the right to cap". I shall quote the hon. Lady faithfully. She said:

"We have found that too many Labour councils are fed up with being labelled by the extreme activities of two or three councils. We have said therefore that we will reserve capping powers to make sure that no council thinks it can act above and beyond the needs of the country."

I commend the hon. Lady for that because it is common sense. Governments must take that view. At some stage, they may have to say, "The national interest has determined that we must limit the total volume of expenditure, and local government must be a part of that constrict."

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): How long is the Minister's memory of history? When was capping introduced for the first time? He speaks as though it is like the laws of the Medes and the Persians and is utterly unalterable.

Mr. Curry: My memory does not necessarily extend to the Medes and the Persians, although I am currently reading John Julian Norwich's excellent book on the history of the Byzantine empire. I have noted that capping took place rather frequently under those regimes, although perhaps with rather more dire consequences than those which the hon. Gentleman has mentioned.

The third proposition is that Governments must set priorities in public expenditure, and that spending by local authorities and through local authorities is necessarily in competition with other public spending. That is the reality of the situation, whether in relation to health, community care, foreign aid, social services or the police service. In the modern state, those three propositions are inescapable. According to the Liberal Democrats, it appears that none of those choices must be made. That is what separates us, right at the beginning.

If the money available to local authorities is inadequate, it can come from only two places: in the form of more grant from central Government, or from the local taxpayer. Ultimately, the money will come from the taxpayer; it must come from the taxpayer wherever it comes from. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) has more sense than most people in his party, because he has acknowledged that simple truth.

There are three components to local government—*[Interruption.]* I am trying to oblige the hon. Member for Newbury by focusing the debate on the central issues, rather than doing a Cook's tour of the local authorities.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): In relation to the central issue, to which the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) referred, did my hon. Friend notice that he suggested not only no capping of local authority taxes, but that there should be a locally imposed income tax? The hon. Gentleman did not mention his party's policy to restore the Greater London council and other regional councils, which presumably would, if they had their way, have the power to impose a local income tax without any parliamentary or central Government capping. That would be a double whammy. How on earth does the hon. Gentleman imagine that people with families to support, and young executive and professional people in places such as Twickenham and Richmond, will possibly manage if two lots of income tax were imposed without any kind of capping?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That was a very long intervention.

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend is right. One thing I noticed in the remarks by the hon. Member for Newbury—because it was not there—was a definition of what is local. At what level will the tax be raised? Will it be raised by one of the new, super-duper regional assemblies which the Liberal party would impose on us? Another thing I noticed was the hon. Gentleman's statement that it would all net out to be the same because, if one raises more tax locally, one could raise less tax centrally. I can only say: would that that would happen. All my experience tells me that I can believe it when I see it. As I do not expect to see it, I see no need to suspend my disbelief.

Local authority finance has three basic components: the revenue support grant, the redistributed business rate and council tax. There are various grants and other finance, but the current expenditure of local government essentially comes from those three sources. What are the options for changing that? Let us examine the options, both within the structure and outside it.

The hon. Member for Newbury, and the hon. Member for North-West Durham, too, espouse the idea of the locally raised and retained business rate. Perhaps they forget—I may speak about the hon. Gentleman's memory—that local business rates were completely discredited by the time we scrapped them, that rate poundages varied enormously from place to place and from year to year, that business had no idea what bills it would be called on to pay in the next year or subsequently, that the less responsible councils viewed local commerce and industry largely as a convenient milch cow, and that relations were often very poor.

[Mr. Curry]

Hugely complicated grant arrangements were needed to compensate for the very uneven distribution of rateable resources across the country. Is it therefore necessary or helpful to introduce that change in those circumstances?

Another option for changing local authority finance, as the hon. Member for Newbury suggested, is to get rid of capping. He said that the argument over whether we must get rid of it in statute or merely not apply it is irrelevant, because they will do something else in any case. That was the heart of his argument. I acknowledge that there are two points of view on that argument. Considered from the local authorities' point of view, I can quite understand people there who say, "We would like to get rid of capping. We want to be able to take the decisions".

That is a natural and understandable reaction. However, there is the wider view, which has caused the hon. Member for North-West Durham, who has left the Chamber to find some crucial piece of evidence—for reasons which I completely understand—*[Laughter.]* I must defend the hon. Lady. She has left for a reason with which I sympathise entirely, which has nothing to do with this debate. In her circumstances, I should have done the same thing. I shall explain to Liberal Members what those entirely honourable reasons are, should they be overwhelmed with curiosity on this matter.

There is a wider, national view—which has led the hon. Member for North-West Durham to retain in her proposals the power to cap, even if she would not wish to use it on every occasion—in relation to what can be afforded. That point of view is just as legitimate. We have, if one likes, two legitimacies that are in conflict. I accept that there is bound to be a conflict, depending on one's perspective. In government, one must take the wider view, which has consequences for what one is willing to permit local government to spend. This year, there has been more generous capping criteria to allow education funding to pass through to schools—I shall come to the point made by the hon. Member for Newbury in relation to that in a moment—if that is the decision of the local authority.

One can equally amend the revenue support grant formula and its principles. It is an organic system that must be upgraded and brought up to date—for example, by new census data. From time to time, it is reasonable to test parts of the system to discover whether it is resilient, robust and providing the best possible answers. I do not defend the system as some sort of crystal structure, every aspect of which must be defended. However, it is a well worked out and sophisticated system, and we must strike a balance between what is understandable and what is comprehensive so that it is accessible.

We share with local authorities and take part in those discussions. I think no one accuses us of not wanting to maintain the genuine debate on the mechanisms for distribution of the grant. That is why this year—which is of great interest to many hon. Members—the examination of area cost adjustment and the sparsity factor of the children's element in the personal social services will have a crucial impact on the way in which the grant is distributed. However, we cannot satisfy everyone.

When people come to talk to me and my hon. Friends about those matters, I notice that the system which they regard as the most objective that could be devised almost invariably coincides with a system that would redirect the most resources towards that local authority. I do not blame local authorities for that because it is natural. However, we can never satisfy everyone because there are bound to be natural conflicts, and a balance must be struck between them.

The hon. Member for Newbury said that he would get rid of the council tax. I pose the question whether, with the turbulence that I accept local government has been through, now is the time to tear up by the root a taxation system that has been there effectively for only a couple of years and to start all over again.

Mr. Rendel: Is not that precisely what the Government did with the poll tax, which was quickly thrown out?

Mr. Curry: That is precisely what we did, because the community charge did not deliver what we demanded of it. The council tax, on the other hand, is delivering a very high rate of collection—much higher than any previous system. The system is accessible and readily understandable. It is easily perceptible. It conforms with Adam Smith's definition of a good tax. The council tax works effectively and it is a stable tax. Therefore, in those circumstances, would it be sensible to start again and tear up the existing structure that is settling down well?

I said earlier that I would not cite local authorities simply to denigrate them. However, I shall this once cite an authority, but with a hint of praise. Lambeth is now beginning to collect a far higher proportion of the council tax that it should be collecting than it ever has before. Collection is a crucial element in local government finance. Councils need to collect as much tax as is legitimately due to them—just as they should fill voids and collect local authority rents. All that is part of the essential management tool of delivering efficient local government.

Mr. Key: I want to underline and endorse everything that my hon. Friend has said about the reform of local government taxation. I was previously a local government finance Minister, and I can only say that what the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) said is absolute nonsense. My right hon. Friend who is now the Deputy Prime Minister looked at the whole question of local income tax in great detail. It is not true to say that we did not look at that, together with every other system.

One of the disadvantages of local income tax is that economically poor areas would have a very low tax base, while all the rich areas that currently seem to return Liberal Democrat authorities would have massive, overflowing coffers. That would necessitate very substantial transfers from one to the other, and we would not end up with a better system.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. These interventions are too long.

Mr. Curry: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who speaks from experience.

I come now to more fundamental changes. The Liberal Democrats are still, I think, saying that they would raise an additional 1p on national income tax and direct it specifically to education. However, there is only one way

that that could happen under the present structure—it would have to be wrapped up into a specific grant and its use limited to the education sector. If the hon. Member for Newbury did that, he would hypothecate it—yet the whole tenor of his remarks was that he wanted to give more freedom to local authorities.

If he delivers that 1p to local authorities through the standard spending assessment system, he cannot hypothecate it, and therefore cannot guarantee that it would go to education. Any council—whether Labour, Liberal Democrat or Conservative—that wished to spend that money on building roads, or building pyramids for that matter, would be legally entitled to do so, even if it would not be wise. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman cannot guarantee that that money would go to education unless he is prepared to eat his own words and deny local authority competence and decision making.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: In a sense, the Minister is correct—but is he not showing the dishonesty of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who claimed in his Budget that he was giving £878 million extra to education? He cannot deliver, either.

Mr. Curry: There is no contradiction—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) should listen. There is no contradiction either in what my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said or in what the hon. Member for Newbury said. My right hon. and learned Friend may find £700-odd million for education, just as the hon. Gentleman may find the product of a 1p income tax for education—and earnestly wish that money to go through to education, adjusting the capping criteria to try to ensure that it does. What my right hon. and learned Friend, the hon. Gentleman and I cannot do is to require in any statutory or legal sense that that money should go to education.

Mr. King: The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) is completely wrong. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor made it clear that he could not compel that money to go to education, but said that he looked to local authorities to ensure that it did. Liberal Democrat Somerset, having made the biggest complaint about education and having said that its top priority is education, did not put the money into education when it had the funds to do so, but put it into other services instead.

Mr. Curry: I have never made the claim that that money must, in some quasi-statutory sense, go through to education. Last year there was a major campaign—in some cases orchestrated by local authorities—protesting against the settlement and focusing on education. Therefore, it would be extraordinary if those local authorities, having been given the extra resources, did not spend them on education—the very thing that they highlighted as the chief priority.

My first objection to a local income tax is that it would be wrong to get rid of the council tax. It is working, it is effective and I know of no one in local government who wishes to pull it up by the roots and start again. Secondly, local income tax means differential rates of tax. There would be a real threat to some of the inner-city areas and attempts to regenerate life there. It would also be a difficult match with the benefits system. I do not buy the idea of local income tax. Council tax is doing the job better—

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Has my hon. Friend seen the internal research document "Towards 1996", produced by the Liberal Democrats? *[Interruption.]* Perhaps "Towards Oblivion" would be a more apt title. The document states:

"Under the Lib-Dems local income tax you would pay income tax twice."

Mr. Curry: Knowing that the hon. Member for Newbury wished to conduct this debate in a high-minded manner, I wrestled with my conscience over whether I should use that excellent Liberal Democrat document, which I understand was drawn up by someone described as a political warfare officer. I decided not to use it. I can only deprecate my hon. Friend's decision to introduce that sort of note into this debate.

I do not know what has happened to site value rating. When the hon. Member for Newbury was chided with having dropped it in the rate support grant last year, he wrote a letter to us protesting that it was still on the Liberal Democrat agenda. However, it has not appeared in today's discussion, so I do not know whether it is still there.

Let us be clear about the education settlement, against the background of statutory powers that I have described. In cash terms, comparing like with like and SSA with SSA, the figures are up—an increase of £74 million. Just under £200 million accounts for pupil numbers, while £322 million accounts for teachers' pay. The remainder covers other sources of inflation.

Ms Hilary Armstrong (North-West Durham): Does the Minister agree that comparing, like with like—cash that was spent last year against cash that will be available this year—there is nothing like a 4.4 per cent. increase?

Mr. Curry: But that is not comparing like with like. Last year's outcome cannot be compared with the money that the Government are making available this year. That is comparing things that are not alike. Every year, local authorities spend more than their SSA and they will continue to do so. The capping criteria allow that additional money to come through. I use the word "money" advisedly because in education everybody talks about resources, as though that is something much grander than money. In fact, most of the time we are talking about money, and it is important to remember that.

Ms Armstrong: Will the Minister explain how much councils will have to spend above SSA this year to meet the education budget in real terms as opposed to last year, given the rise in pay, the rise in pupil numbers and other commitments? How much does he estimate council tax will have to rise to cover that?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Lady is asking the same question in a different way. The only thing that we can compare is what the Government make available to local authorities one year with what they make available the next year. If councils choose to spend other resources—for example, from reserves—that is entirely a matter for them.

Ms Armstrong *rose—*

Mr. Curry: I am not giving way again; I have already given way to the hon. Lady twice.

[Mr. Curry]

There is a tendency to discuss education as if the only issue which matters is money, whereas many recent events have suggested that the method and quality of teaching also have a great deal to do with educational performance. We do ourselves a disservice if we discuss education purely in terms of money.

The hon. Member for Newbury talked about capital receipts, which I know are very beloved of the Opposition. The deputy Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) was—I think—on "Today" a week ago talking about capital receipts lying idle. They are not lying idle; it is the Opposition's great and frightfully convenient myth. Capital receipts are in fact used to finance local government activities. For example, the interest from them replaces borrowing. Such capital receipts are not where they are needed in many circumstances, so there would have to be clear compensation for the way in which capital is allocated.

The Opposition are clutching at a great straw in thinking that they would be able to be frightfully prudent about public expenditure and at the same time give local authorities so much extra money. They will find that the straw turns out to be rather feeble when they try to float on it.

In a debate that I have tried to keep free from indulgence in any unnecessary invective, I rather resented the hon. Member for Newbury saying that homelessness cannot be addressed purely by market forces. Nobody is trying to address homelessness by market forces. The rough sleepers initiative introduced by the Government—we are now considering a successor programme to it—is a very deliberate programme of co-operation with the voluntary sector, using public money specifically to help people, and has nothing whatever to do with market forces. It is entirely designed to find effective ways to help people who desperately need that help.

I do not care what sort of flags people want to fly on it. I am concerned simply with being able to meet the dramatic needs that we encounter. Indeed, voluntary organisations would also resent the implication that somehow they were lending themselves to some exercise in the application of market forces in areas that do not lend themselves to such application.

I remind the House of the state in which we found local government in 1979. Not universally, but in many cases, we found a monolithic local government, divorced from the private sector. It was not used to working with the private sector and there was barely any contact between public and private sectors. Local government was corporatist and dominated by the trade unions which worked for it. There was a closed shop; there was no competition for services or service delivery. In many respects it was wasteful, due to levels of unnecessary management.

We have sought to transform local government. We have introduced efficiency—yes, by public expenditure restraints. That is one of the classic means by which one introduces efficiency. I would not want to pretend that that has not happened. Local government has experienced what is known in jargon as delayering. It has seen more professional management, which—I think—has been accepted.

The establishment of partnership with the private sector, has been dramatic and effective. That partnership has occurred through such practices as compulsory competitive tendering, although many local authorities are still extremely resentful of that process. Partnership with the private sector has been especially noticeable in regeneration schemes such as city challenge and single regeneration budgets, where public resources have been used alongside private resources in order to get value for money as well as more money to get value out of. That has been crucial in bringing about what has often been a mind change in many local authorities, which now consider partnership instinctively instead of having to be—almost—dragged, kicking and screaming, to accept that the concept is valid.

We have seen a new culture of partnership, the development of value for money through the Audit Commission value-for-money studies, and performance indicators, which were intended as a tool for punishment and found to be useful by local authorities. Incidentally, such performance indicators have also given the electorate a great deal more power and information than ever before. Accountability must start with information. We have developed the enabling concept of local authorities that has been widely accepted in local government. Indeed, the most intelligent parts of local government have sought to develop it. That does not comprise a minimalist, static view of local government. It is positive, creative and dynamic.

Of course, we must continue to make efficiencies and implement vigorous cost control. We are approaching the end of the structural review, we have a settled tax in the form of council tax, a widely accepted concept of enabling, and a concept of partnership regarded as necessary and desirable.

Local government next needs to combine a period of stability with measured change and development. There are three essential roles for local government. First, it must play the necessary role of regulator on behalf of central Government and on its own behalf. Trading standards and environmental health officers are doing a necessary job as regulators. That role should have as light a touch and be as user-friendly as possible.

Secondly, local government plays the role of enabler in the way in which services are provided. Thirdly, it has the role of regenerator; the local authority at the heart of its community trying to bring about regeneration, renewal and economic development, which it should develop. We will be introducing a trial scheme—capital challenge—whereby local authorities compete for capital. That idea has a lot of sense to it. I would like local authorities, for example, to consider bidding for capital challenge money to extend and get better value for existing SRB or estate action schemes.

We are introducing the estates renewal programme to tackle some of the most difficult problems on the most deprived estates. Would it not make sense to make those bids alongside SRB bids and estate action programmes? That would also enable better and more extensive value for people. Thinking creatively in such terms is one of the essential functions of local government that I hope they will undertake.

There is a new culture, although one cannot be certain how long it will last and whether it is really imbedded. Some of the Opposition policies such as the end of

compulsory competitive tendering, the end of capping with the most meagre safeguards, wholesale changes in, for example, the financial basis of local government, and changes in business rates are what local government does not need.

Local government has found a new role; the Government have endowed it with a new role. I have enjoyed the warmest and most friendly relations with all people in local government, irrespective of political party. I could justify that and the people who come to see me would also argue that that is so. That is because I esteem what it does. Its role is essential. A new role for it, at the heart of its local community in partnership, is emerging and I hope to continue to promote it from the Government Benches.

8.6 pm

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): The Minister was right about the Government's attitude to local government. There is no doubt that local government has been the whipping boy of the Conservative Government in the past 17 years. The Government have repeatedly attacked local government, constrained its powers and functions and struck at its financial basis. I shall not respond in too much detail to what the Minister said, because he was obviously dealing only with English local authorities. I await the speech of the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), to hear the Government's response to the debate from a Scottish perspective.

I heard the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) appeal for a high-minded approach to the debate and criticise deceit and misinformation. Deceit and misinformation immediately call to mind the most recent "Focus" leaflets in my area. I have never seen more consistent deceit and information than that in Liberal Democrats' focus leaflets. People who live in glasshouses should not throw stones.

I want to address issues in my local area, which I am elected first and foremost to do. I am especially pleased that the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland is present. On behalf of the Government, he certainly has a lot to answer for. The Conservative base in Scottish local government has all but vanished. The Conservatives do not control a single new unitary council. Indeed, there has not been a Conservative councillor in the Cambuslang area of my constituency since 1982.

The Scottish revulsion for the Conservative Government, driven on by Thatcherism, led many middle-of-the-road, decent Conservative voters to start voting Liberal, and they have continued to do so. They would not go the whole way and vote Labour, but what will happen in the coming year when those Tory-Liberal voters find out that the leader of the Liberal party has declared that he will support not the Conservative party but a Labour Government? I do not know, but I shall await the outcome with interest. The Conservative base in Scotland has been destroyed despite the Government's attempts at gerrymandering through the unwanted and uncalled-for reorganisation of Scottish local government.

As a former Strathclyde regional councillor, I know that the council has done a first-class job. For the benefit of the Under-Secretary, who is a new boy in this regard, I should point out that Strathclyde regional council was repeatedly praised by Conservative Secretaries of State for Scotland for its responsible attitude to the organisation of its services and the raising of money for those services.

The previous Secretary of State for Scotland, the right hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang), denied that there would be any job losses because of the reorganisation of Scottish local government. He then said that there would be losses, but only at the edges, and that they would amount to about 1,000, if that. On Friday, I attended a meeting at the city chambers in Glasgow, where I was shown figures that 8,000 jobs will be lost in Scottish local government, and the number is rising.

My constituency is divided between two local authorities: South Lanarkshire, covering Cambuslang, Halfway and Rutherglen, and the new Glasgow city council, covering Toryglen. South Lanarkshire new council is under pressure because the grant settlement from the Government completely ignores any pay awards for local authority staff, including teachers. If the Minister wishes to deny that, he is welcome to intervene. It means that any nationally agreed pay awards have to be met in full by each local authority from whatever resources it can find or, more likely, from the cuts imposed to finance them. It is a cumulative problem, because, according to the figures that I have, no allowance has been made in the grant for the past three years for pay awards.

One opinion put forward at the meeting in the city chambers in Glasgow was that English authorities had received allowances in their grants to deal with a 4.5 per cent. increase, yet there is no comparable increase for Scottish local authorities. I should like the Minister to respond to that point.

There is also pressure on local authority services because of additional works and costs undertaken by local authorities that are not reflected in the grant. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities produced an extensive list of works and costs that were ignored by the Government when they arrived at the grant settlement. One example is the landfill tax that local authorities will have to pay from October 1996, which the Scottish Office has completely ignored.

The Government have retained capping and, in some ways, reinforced the capping of local authority expenditure. In simple terms, in the coming financial year, if a local authority can increase expenditure by only 1 per cent. on that for 1995-96 before being capped, extensive cuts are inevitable. Local authorities in Scotland are being forced to cut services to reach the Government capping limit and thereby avoid action by the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Local authorities, including South Lanarkshire, are, in effect, experiencing another round of cuts, and face service reductions as a result of vacancies not being filled. They also face extra charges on the community, redundancies and the closure of facilities. At the end of the exercise, they are still looking for significant increases in council tax because of the relatively small increase in grant.

South Lanarkshire is a new council for Cambuslang, Halfway and Rutherglen. Twenty years ago, we were incorporated into Glasgow district council, which, in the eyes of many folk, was not a success. We are now part of South Lanarkshire. Despite that council's difficulties, it has recognised the special needs of Cambuslang,

[Mr. Thomas McAvoy]

Halfway and Rutherglen through special measures in the forthcoming year. With great difficulty, it has managed to keep the increase in council rents down to about £2 a week, which, although still high for council tenants, is comparatively low—life is all about comparisons, and the increase is certainly less than the going rate of council increases in Scotland.

In addition, councillors in the rest of South Lanarkshire have taken the wider view and allowed extra capital spending on the housing programme in the Cambuslang and Rutherglen area. That displays a degree of tolerance and good will towards our area that we very much appreciate.

In many ways, all councils in Scotland are in trouble but the figures that I received on Friday for the new Glasgow city council are frightening. Conservatives and others will say that Labour is always crying disaster, that it is merely going through the motions and that, after we have had a little panic and cried wolf, things will settle down and everything will be fine. Only in the longer term will we be able to establish whether there is any credibility in that view.

It is a matter of fact, not opinion, that it costs the new Glasgow city council £874 million to provide its current services. That is what it cost last year, with no expansion of the council budget. For the coming year, grant-aided expenditure results in only £807 million being available. Glasgow city council therefore faces a £67 million shortfall. Surely that must be recognised as a special case.

I am not arguing that the cake should be redistributed in Glasgow's favour but, as someone whose constituency covers two different councils under the new system, I am already on record as saying, and have no hesitation in repeating, that whichever council covers the city of Glasgow will need special help. There is possibly more need in that area than anywhere else in Scotland. With the disaggregation of Strathclyde regional council services, Glasgow city council faces a desperate situation. A deficit of £67 million is equivalent to a cut of almost 8 per cent. in its budget. Various measures have been suggested that would reduce the amount required, through departmental cuts, to £45 million or just 5 per cent., but such cuts are draconian.

Examples of the measures that Glasgow council needs to take include increasing charges for school meals and milk, home helps, recreational facilities, burials and cremations, community education and letting fees. In addition, charges would need to be extended to a wider range of home care and social services, and charges would be introduced for under-five nursery provision and for entry into museums.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Does my hon. Friend agree that the problems that he is outlining are exacerbated by the fact that the new councils have literally no experience of, for example, social work policies, procedures and practice? The same is true of education, so the new authorities face a difficult future.

Mr. McAvoy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention, which reinforces a point that I intended to make later. There will be a learning curve for the new Glasgow city council, which is to be a unitary authority. The Government expect the council to acquire the necessary expertise and knowledge without providing the expenses for training. The training needed to ensure that services are kept to the present high standard will be expensive for the council, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reinforcing that.

The closures of services to which I have referred are not in my imagination, as there is a £67 million shortfall to be met. The options for the council include closing primary and secondary schools, but Strathclyde has tried hard to deal with the problem of surplus school places. The council is considering closing community education facilities and residential schools. These include, for instance, the Carnbooth school, the only school in the area that caters for deaf and blind children. Councillors were so desperate at one stage that they even considered closing that school, although I now believe that they have decided to look at other measures. That is the sort of desperate attitude that the Government have forced on councillors who are trying to balance the budget.

Other facilities considered for closure included elderly people's homes, local authority day centres and hostels, libraries, museums, public halls and the district court. Only last week, the Secretary of State criticised Glasgow district council following the cancellation of a whole day's court cases at the district court, which resulted in many cases not being fully processed. The Government are forcing such situations on councils, and are then criticising them. Despite all these potential cuts, a massive increase in council tax faces Glasgow residents if no help comes from the Government.

On social work, Glasgow district council benefited from the fact that Strathclyde regional council was able to draw resources from a wider area to spend on areas of need—many of which, unfortunately, were in Glasgow. That meant that a disproportionate share of Strathclyde's budget was spent in the city of Glasgow—rightly, as that was where the need was. Strathclyde spent 40 per cent. of its social work budget in the Glasgow area because of the level of need, but only about 30 per cent. will come to Glasgow in grand-aided expenditure. More account should have been taken of the fact that the disaggregation of staff will leave Glasgow in a terrible position.

I maintain that Glasgow needs special help, as the position that it faces is far more critical than anyone could have foreseen. All the factors that I mentioned relating to the local government reorganisation of Strathclyde and the disaggregation show the pressure that is on Glasgow.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): The hon. Gentleman has argued strongly for extra money for Glasgow, and has talked about not wanting a redistribution—a matter that I may return to when I respond to the debate. As he is reaching the end of his speech, may I ask him where he expects to get the extra funding? Will he follow his hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion), who, in a slip on BBC television, indicated that he would take it from the health budget?

Mr. McAvoy: I would recommend that we do not follow the example of the former Secretary of State for Scotland—the current President of the Board of Trade—who wasted £30 million of taxpayers' money on a private

hospital. I ask the Minister—who may not have experience of the matter—to check the figures that show how much money was wasted in Scotland, never mind the United Kingdom, on the poll tax debacle. The Minister should not preach to us when there are examples of disgraceful waste in his own backyard.

Mr. Kynoch: I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman answered the question. He has given an example of a one-off cost, when what he is referring to is an on-going situation. How would he fund it year on year? Would the money come from health, as the hon. Member for Dundee, East said?

Mr. McAvoy: We will make sure that there are no more of these "one-off costs", as the Minister calls them. I can tell him that £30 million would keep Glasgow and Scottish local government going for a wee while.

8.24 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate. I shall make a short speech, to allow other hon. Members to speak.

I was amazed by the introductory speech by the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), who pleaded with us not to pick on any Liberal Democrat councils and use them as examples of authorities in which there is either flagrant waste or services are not up to scratch. He went on to criticise Government expenditure and Government policy and tried to use the debate simply as a political ploy. I do not accept that. I have a list of Liberal Democrat-controlled local authorities and, if the hon. Gentleman is not careful, I shall start to read them out and describe some of the problems suffered by local people in those areas.

The hon. Gentleman said that we need better services at a lower cost. There was nothing in what he went on to say that led me to believe that his party's proposals would provide better services, and certainly not at a lower cost. The hon. Gentleman, who obviously lives in a Liberal Democrat dreamland, added that we need extra expenditure on a number of services, but gave the impression that nobody would have to pay for that extra expenditure. That is absolute and complete tosh. If there is to be extra expenditure on education, social services or any of the areas to which the hon. Gentleman referred, somebody somewhere must pick up the tab. He was dishonest, in that he was not prepared to say how much that tab would be and who would have to pick it up.

I am fortunate that I live in Ribble Valley, one of the most beautiful areas in the United Kingdom. I am also fortunate, in that Ribble Valley is a Conservative-controlled local authority. Our only problem is that we have the vast-spending Lancashire county council above us, and we must pay the brunt of our local authority council tax to that county council. I have no doubt that more will be said about that in the House on Wednesday morning.

The Liberal Democrats demand extra expenditure nationally, with the party's alternative Budget last year stating that its expenditure plans amounted to about £10 billion. That expenditure will have to be found through higher income tax. I know that the Liberal Democrats have grandiose plans, and that they want to introduce punitive rates of tax for those earning more than £100,000. Those rates of tax, however, will find their way down to those earning less than that amount.

We also have the delights of the local income tax to look forward to. I did not understand the hon. Gentleman's comment that the Liberal Democrats would be raising a lot from the local income tax, so that tax would come down nationally as one tax balanced with the other. I assume that, under the party's proposals, the council tax will be abolished and that the Liberal Democrats will not run the council tax alongside the local income tax. Therefore, all that extra money will have to be found.

I live in an affluent area, and local people would have to pay the local income tax. Some of the money raised in my area would have to be siphoned off to pay for expenditure in some of the poorer areas of the north-west, where there are specific problems and where extra money is needed. The Government ensure through the current system that money reaches the areas that need it. One can only imagine what sort of system the hon. Gentleman has in mind following the introduction of a local income tax.

Some people would argue that one Chancellor of the Exchequer is bad enough. But can one imagine what it would be like if we had a local Chancellor of the Exchequer in every town hall throughout the country? He would have to respond to Liberal Democrat councillors, who would be dreaming up grandiose plans for where they wanted to see tax income spent. That local Chancellor would then raise tax locally. I assume that that system would be an absolute nightmare.

Not only would we have a local income tax and other grandiose plans, but the cap that currently protects people from these technicalities would be removed. Councils could then go on a massive spending spree without any intervention from central Government, who would tell them, "Hold on. Local people need protection from those spending plans." That system would be an absolute nightmare.

Mr. Rendel: The hon. Gentleman clearly did not listen to what I said about the need for greater accountability in local authorities. If local accountability is increased by means of a proper voting system, there will be no need for capping.

Mr. Evans: Good grief—are not talking about proportional representation, are we? That would enable councils to shunt off their spending responsibilities. No doubt they would try to make out that central Government were to blame—obviously, the Liberal Democrats would never be in control of central Government—while hiking up local spending. They would hide behind proportional representation, trying to gain power that was disproportionate to the votes that they were securing. It would be a nightmare.

On top of that, the Liberal Democrats would impose regional government, while signing away much of the power that we have at Westminster to Brussels. They are, of course, a federal party: they believe in a United States of Europe. That would be an absolute disaster. There would be tier upon tier of local government, hiding behind the word "democratic". The people would have to pick up the bill for all those tiers of bureaucracy, and there would be no improvement in services.

[Mr. Evans]

I was rather surprised that the hon. Member for Newbury did not mention businesses. For six years, I was a member of West Glamorgan county council. Before the introduction of the uniform business rate, local businesses used to trot along to the council year after year and beg it to take account of their spending plans so that the burden did not fall on them. They were trying to plan for the next 12 months without having the faintest idea how much they would have to find to pay their rates.

Many business people knew that the process was no more than a facade: they would make their pleas, and be ignored. It was like talking to a brick wall. Up would go the council and business rates—and it was particularly difficult for small businesses working on the margins to find the extra money from their profits or, if they were not making profits that year, from some other source.

The hon. Member for Newbury did not say what he would do to help small businesses. One thing that the Government have done is ensure that businesses can plan for the future: they know how much they will be charged. We must ensure that that system of rating is retained.

We know that the Liberal Democrats are big on bureaucracy. In Richmond, for instance, there are a good many extra committees: it seems to be thought that, just because meetings continue until 9 pm, 10 pm or 11 pm, people in the area are being given a better deal, but we are aware that that is not the case.

Mr. Chris Davies (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Has the hon. Gentleman read the auditor's letter to Richmond council? Does he accept that what he has said is simply not true, and that the council was highly praised by the auditor?

Mr. Evans: I have also discovered that, according to the Audit Commission's January 1995 paper "Paying the Piper", £500 million of extra money could be found through savings if only best practice were followed.

Mr. Wilshire: Is my hon. Friend aware that Richmond council is pouring tens of thousands of pounds into opposing the construction of a fifth terminal at Heathrow airport, although all independent local surveys show that the majority of people support it?

Mr. Evans: I did not know that, but I am delighted that my hon. Friend has been able to share the news with the House and the nation.

The Liberal Democrats keep banging on about education. They tell the country that they will put a penny on income tax to pay for extra education services, but, as has been pointed out, they cannot guarantee that the money will be spent on education, just as we cannot guarantee that the extra £700 million or £800 million that is going to local authorities will be spent on it. On Wednesday morning I shall make an impassioned plea to Lancashire county council, asking it to follow the Chancellor's guidance, and I hope that as a result it will spend its budget on education.

The Liberal Democrats cannot even do their sums right. We need only add up all Littleborough and Saddleworth's education spending plans. Their education spokesman had to admit that the accumulated spending plans meant an increase of 2.5p, not 1p.

Mr. Chris Davies: Would the hon. Gentleman care to tell me where the local authority called Littleborough and Saddleworth is?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman represents the area.

Mr. Davies: There is no such local authority.

Mr. Evans: The Liberal Democrats' education spokesman visited the constituency during the by-election—I was there throughout—and had to admit that their expenditure plans amounted to 2.5p on income tax, rather than 1p. I am amazed that, given the opportunity to comment on that, the hon. Gentleman chose to make a pedantic point about the name of the constituency.

It is also a great shame that the Liberal Democrats confuse education spending with the delivery of the service. That does not add up either. We know that, in some parts of the United Kingdom where twice as much is spent on education as in other parts, the outturn is not as much as it is in those other areas. Money is not all that matters.

Since 1979, the amount spent on education has risen by more than 50 per cent. The Government are keeping their commitment, but we need to ensure that other provision remains, such as grant-maintained schooling. I understand that the Liberal Democrats, along with their friends in the Labour party, do not believe in that. My parents could not afford to send me to an independent school, but, thanks to the assisted places scheme, the parents of 60,000 young people will be able to ensure that their children enjoy the education that they consider best for them: the Government are providing the money to make the extra places available. The Liberal Democrats do not want that, however. The same applies to the national curriculum and to testing, which ensures that standards continue to rise.

We must keep an eye on how Liberal Democrats behave within their areas. They say one thing and do another. They say that they are looking after the people, that they want services to be financed properly and that the council tax should be kept as low as possible. A couple of weeks ago, the *Clitheroe Advertiser and Times* reported that the Liberal Democrat councillor on Ribble Valley council had suggested that we introduce car-parking charges in Clitheroe for the first time. Goodness knows at what level the charges would be introduced, but, according to the newspaper, the aim is to raise some £400,000.

I cannot think of such a devious way of introducing a new tax. Not only would local residents have to find the extra money to park their cars in Clitheroe; the charge would harm small businesses in Clitheroe. There are many small businesses in the area—not the major chain stores that operate in such villages, but smaller stores, mostly family-owned, working from early in the morning until late at night. Along with local Conservatives, I shall fight hard against the introduction of such charges.

The hon. Member for Newbury had a wonderful opportunity to say how the Liberal Democrats would improve local services with the money that was available. It is a great shame that he did not do so. There were several interventions on his speech, but he failed to give an honest answer. There is one thing that the Liberal

Democrats have in common with Labour nowadays: they simply do not answer the questions that they are asked, because they dare not do so.

8.38 pm

Ms Hilary Armstrong (North-West Durham): I was interested in the remarks of the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans). The problem is that he does not know his Government's policy. The car park charging policy comes from the Department of the Environment. It is part of the manner in which the Government expect local authorities—

Mr. Nigel Evans *indicated dissent.*

Ms Armstrong: The hon. Gentleman should learn about the policy.

Mr. Evans: I am not having that.

Ms Armstrong: The hon. Gentleman may not be having it, but that is the guidance—the virtual instruction—from his Government. Perhaps he should talk to the Secretary of State.

Several Conservative Members misunderstood local government finance, either deliberately or because it is difficult to understand. I am reminded of the words of Lord Ferrers, the Minister for the Environment and Countryside, who is responsible in the other place for local government. Last Thursday, in answering a question on the current revenue support grant settlement, he said:

"My Lords, it is a fact that some council taxes in London may rise. Given that the total standard support, commonly known as the TSS,"—

I do not think that that is what TSS is, but never mind—

"has increased by more than the AEF and that SSAs in inner London are falling due to changes in the ACA brought about by changes in the NES, with consequent reductions in RSG and NDR, it is not surprising that council taxes in London may rise."

In response to that, my noble Friend Lord Stallard said:

"My Lords, I nearly said that the Minister's replies so far were NBG."

Several hon. Members would concur. Lord Ferrers later said:

"My Lords, it is a complicated subject."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 8 February 1996; Vol. 569, c. 330.]

I suspect that the hon. Member for Ribble Valley is in much the same position as Lord Ferrers. He clearly does not understand that more than 80 per cent. of the money that local government is able to spend is from central coffers. Changing the balance between the amount of money spent and raised locally and the amount raised centrally is of critical importance to the balance between central and local government.

I argued in a similar debate less than two weeks ago that this has been the most centralising Government this century and that there is more power in Whitehall and No. 10 Downing street than ever before. Part of our argument is that we need to change the balance. Conservative Members and the Minister refuse to address that issue.

I agree with the Minister that the council tax works better than did its predecessor, the poll tax, on which billions of pounds were wasted, but it is also true that there is now so much central Government control that the amount that local government can raise through council tax is very limited. The gearing effect caused by the amount spent by central Government is so huge in some areas that to raise spending even to present capping levels would be impractical. Local people could not afford that amount of money. The problem is that the Government have controlled local government spending to a degree that means that it is not possible for council tax to be used even in the way in which the Government initially intended it to be used.

Mr. Rendel: I appreciate the hon. Lady's attack on centralisation by the Conservative Government, but it is fair to bring to her attention a recent notice sent to every member of the Labour group in Bedfordshire, which states:

"This letter is to give you notice that the decision taken at the Labour Group on 31st January 1996 'not to set a budget' is null and void and that we will be reconstituting the Labour group."

It goes on to show that the central Labour party is taking firm control of the Bedfordshire county Labour group. It is not only the Conservative but the Labour party which is keen to centralise control of local government.

Ms Armstrong: I do not accept that.

I argued strongly in my previous speech that there must be an honest working relationship between the centre and the localities. I have never tried to give the impression from the Dispatch Box or anywhere else that that means that central Government should abdicate any responsibility.

Some things are not acceptable. Corruption is not acceptable and central Government should do something it. Malpractice is not acceptable and central Government must have reserve powers to take action against it. We argued for that consistently through proceedings on the Audit (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, and I shall continue to argue it. Having a relationship does not mean that one side should abdicate responsibility. That is precisely what the Government have done. They have so tried to control local government that they have stifled any opportunity for local differentiation and determination. We want a proper working relationship that is much more balanced than at present, but we will not abdicate responsibility from the centre.

I want to deal with the problems of the current settlement and its dishonesty. We covered some of that ground during the Minister's speech. It is not honest for the Government to say that they are giving 4.4 per cent. more to education, when they know that education budgets last year were higher than the level at which they have set SSAs this year. The Minister kept saying that we have to compare like with like. He went on to say that authorities could use balances and that there were other ways—such as charges, which the hon. Member for Ribble Valley seems to think are not Government policy—through which local government could raise the difference.

The Minister seems not to have read the reports from the Treasury and Civil Service and the Education Select Committees. The Education Select Committee stated:

"We believe that it would not be possible for all local authorities and schools to draw upon reserves in future years in a way that a number of authorities managed in 1995-96".

[Ms Armstrong]

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment, in her submission to the teachers' pay review body, said:

"some schools and authorities drew heavily on their reserves to meet the cost of the 1995 teachers' pay award . . . the Review Body should consider whether reserves in some schools and authorities have dropped below prudent levels".

She would not have said that if she did not know it to be the case. The opportunity to draw on reserves is not there in the way that it was last year. The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee made the same point.

It is dishonest of the Government to pretend that there is money floating around in the system that can be used to meet their priority of more spending on education. Local authorities last year spent substantially more than the level at which Government have set SSAs this year. Even if expenditure were at the capping levels, it would not meet the 4.4 per cent. that the Government are talking about.

Mr. Wilshire: Will the hon. Lady confirm that I heard her correctly? Is she saying that SSAs for education should be increased to existing levels of expenditure, and is she committing the Labour party to funding local authorities up to that new level?

Ms Armstrong: I really am beginning to worry about Conservative Members. They do not seem to be able to listen. I am saying that the Government are playing a con trick on people. Conservative Members have written to schools to say that the Government have given their authorities more money to spend on education—I have copies of letters from almost every authority—which means that the schools should not need to make cuts. That is simply not true.

The Government have not given authorities more money, nor have they enabled them to meet increases. The Government know and admit that the reserves have fallen and that they were fully drawn in some places last year. There is no additional money in the system for school budgets to be increased by that amount in those authorities.

That is not the full extent of the dishonesty, however, because the Government have also admitted that there will be 86,000 more pupils in the system this year. They have approved a pay rise that is above the rise assumed when they set the standard spending assessment. They have legislated for all school transport to be fitted with new seat belts. Those changes alone—with inflation—more than outstrip the additional amount in the SSA, so it is a dishonest con trick to tell schools that there is extra money. There is not, and the Government know it.

They are undermining their credibility, but more than that, they are trying to undermine the credibility of schools, which will have to deal with all those issues because they have a legal responsibility to do so. Whether the Government are prepared to behave responsibly or not, governors need to and will do so. They know that they are being conned.

Mr. Kynoch: By implication, the hon. Lady is saying that she and the Labour party would put more funding into education. Would she answer my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), who asked a sensible and reasonable question. How much extra is she pledging, and where would she get it? Would she take it from health, for example?

Ms Armstrong: I am talking about the Government's honesty. They have made pledges and commitments that they know do not stand up. It is no good trying to brush that off by asking what the Opposition would do. We are talking about the Government's revenue support grant settlement this year and about letters that Conservative Members have sent to schools, saying that this is the money that is there. Yet the Government continue with their pretence. They continue to try to blame anyone else, including people who have not had responsibility for any of the actions of the past 17 years. It is convenient to blame them, because the Government refuse to accept responsibility for anything that they do.

This Tory trick—

Mr. Nigel Evans: How much extra money?

Ms Armstrong: I did not know that we were in government. Would the Minister like to swap sides, so that I can take responsibility for this year's revenue support grant settlement? Then I would be in government. If they want to swap sides, let them do so. Let them call a general election. Then we will take responsibility. I am not going to take responsibility for Government mismanagement and waste this year, or for Government cons about what is going on.

Mr. Jessel: Bring back Ernest.

Ms Armstrong: I will not rise to that, because I might have to tell the hon. Gentleman what he would say to him.

The reality is that the Government have perpetrated that con and pretended that they have given more money when they have not. That is not the only con. We also heard from the hon. Member for Ribble Valley all that business about what it would cost in extra tax and so forth. He accused the Liberals of taking with one hand and giving away with the other in their local income tax plan. That is even more proof that he does not know or understand what has happened this year.

The Government cut income tax by 1p in the Budget. They have said that, at the most modest levels, they expect council tax to rise this year by the equivalent of 0.5p on income tax. In the Red Book, they said that, in the next three years, they expect the equivalent of 2p on income tax to be raised through the council tax. So the Government cannot tell the House that there is no balance between income tax and council tax. Given their assumptions for the development of council tax in the next three years, they know that the amount raised will be the equivalent of 2p on income tax.

We know very well that the Government are giving with one hand and taking away with the other. They are perpetrating the dishonesty that councils can raise more in tax, which will put more money into the budget. Councils will have to raise more in tax, but that is because the Government have deliberately pushed down their contribution this year and pushed councils into putting the tax up, which will be more unpopular. Once again, the Government are saying, pay more locally and get less.

The gearing effect means that councils will have to raise much more money to make up for the money that is not coming from central taxation.

The way in which the Government have approached the issue is totally dishonest. Education spending is already above SSA. To spend at SSA in the next year would mean reducing spending by the equivalent of £41 per pupil. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury has admitted that council taxes will have to rise by an average of 8 per cent. to meet the Government's targets. The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee questioned the ability of some local authorities to pass on additional educational provision to schools, and observed:

"This increase in spending does not, however, have quite the substance the Chancellor claimed for it".

As usual, the Select Committee expresses things in rather modest terms, but it is an important view. The Government have been dishonest in so many ways in the settlement, and that is a consequence of the Government's wish to do down local government and of their feeling that there is no room for local government.

I noted with interest the earlier words of the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration. He claimed success in working with local government. That is true, and he has won the respect of many people in local government, but he has done so because he is seen as out on a limb. The Minister is seen as someone who is not at one with the rest of the Government in their approach to local government. When we remember that the Government contemplated getting rid of local government altogether soon after the Prime Minister became leader and sought ways to get rid of the poll tax, we know just how far out of touch with the rest of the Government the Minister is.

It is critical that local government is able to act in the interests of local people. That is the aim and the whole essence of local government, and that is what the next Government will seek to enable local government to do. However, we cannot allow the Government to get away with such dishonesty, and local taxpayers know that they will pay more and get less. Local taxpayers know that the extra money that they will be asked to pay in council tax is simply a device that allows the Government to pretend that they are reducing taxation by cutting income tax rates. The Government need to pretend that to go into the next election, but we will ensure that people know that taxation has not been reduced—it has increased and will continue to increase.

9 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I am pleased to have the opportunity to take part in this serious debate. We all owe a considerable debt to the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) for introducing the debate, as it has given us an unprecedented opportunity to consider the roots of the Liberal Democrats' failure in local government. I wish to develop my personal theory as to why that failure has been so obvious and comprehensive.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: That is why we control so many councils.

Mr. Waterson: If the hon. Gentleman will have a little patience, I may be able to explain some of his party's present woes.

The fundamental problem is that the Liberal Democrats are a natural party of opposition. We all know that they would do anything for a vote, and all too often they take two sides of the argument on the same issue. That approach, coupled with some quite vicious campaigning techniques, means that the Liberal Democrats run, or have a part in running, a number of local authorities. Unfortunately, fantasy has now collided with reality, and making promises has collided with the need to make decisions.

A document called "Towards 1996" has been much quoted in recent weeks in the Chamber. It was produced by researchers working for the Liberal Democrat Whips Office and contains the following poignant remark:

"Obviously this document will have a very limited circulation."

Life never turns out quite as one plans. However, the document contains some especially interesting comments about local government. It makes the following fair point:

"Due to our strong base it is imperative that Local Government is seen as an unmitigated triumph for the Liberal Democrats."

That is a high test to set, and we should examine to what extent the Liberal Democrats have lived up to it.

Let us take the Liberal Democrats' own words on the subject. The document continues:

"Some of the councillors are new, politically inexperienced and potentially a liability."

Those of us who suffer with Liberal Democrat-controlled councils can agree with that. It also states:

"Our local government power base means that we may get blamed for some of the shortcomings of local government."

That sounds as though the shortcomings of local government were an act of God and nothing to do with those who run it.

The sad truth is that all too often the Liberal Democrats behave as though they were still in opposition. There are three distinct features to that approach. First, they blame everything on the wicked Government, even when the blame lies clearly on a failure in the local authority. In my area, the Liberal Democrats used to blame the county council for all their woes. That is a little more difficult now that the county council is run by a Lib-Lab pact. The second feature is an apparent inability or unwillingness to make decisions about anything really important. The third feature is an abdication of decision making to the general public. The Liberal Democrats will do anything to distance themselves from the possible unpopularity and the responsibilities that flow from actually making a decision.

All those factors, I submit, can be seen at work in the recent behaviour of the Liberal Democrats in East Sussex. Some months ago, the Liberal Democrats began by trailing stories of enormous cuts in spending, long before any realistic notion of actual funding levels could possibly be ascertained. Week by week, drip by drip, they issued press releases to the local media: they spoke of cuts to the fire service; then, a week later, there was a release about cuts in the library service; then there was one about cuts in social services and old peoples' homes being shut down. They also spoke about cuts in policing and, above all, in education. The latter was perhaps the most serious scare story of all, because, next to their own health and that of their families, parents most worry about the future of their children and their children's education.

[Mr. Waterson]

The Liberal Democrats in East Sussex set up what they grandly described as a strategic forum to produce a document of some length establishing how the massive cuts were to be apportioned between the different sectors of education. That consultation drew in teachers, governors and parents, as well as local councillors, and played cynically on the emotions and expectations of parents, teachers and governors.

The Liberal Democrats went further. They demonstrated how they were abdicating responsibility by asking the public to tick various boxes to express an option as to whether French lessons or perhaps music lessons should be cut. That exercise not only showed the inability of elected councillors, acting on the advice of professional officers, to make decisions, but—

Mr. Malcom Bruce: What about the views of the public?

Mr. Waterson: The problem with that approach is that, if a child happens to be doing rather well at music, the last box that his parents will tick is that calling for a cut in music lessons, while the parents of a child who is miserably poor at French are unlikely to call for French lessons to be maintained.

Mr. Wilshire: The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) has asked about the views of the public. Perhaps my hon. Friend would care to comment on the tactic adopted by the Liberal Democrats in Waverley. When they consulted the public, 63 per cent. said that they wanted a standstill budget and 11 per cent. said that they wanted a reduced budget. The listening Liberal Democrats, having consulted the public, put the council tax up by 7 per cent. Is that what they mean by listening to the public?

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for yet another example of such tactics. I learned of a further example from the television at the weekend, which revealed that another Liberal-controlled council in Surrey consulted the public but proceeded to ignore what they said. One of the excuses for doing so was that an unduly large proportion of the respondents were older than the average age of the population. That was somehow supposed to be a reason for dismissing the public's view. In my type of constituency, we are fairly familiar with that kind of fake consultation process of which the Liberals are so fond.

The results of the public spending round on education have been very different from how they were described by the Liberal Democrats in their various documents. I apologise to the Opposition spokeswoman, the hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong), for quoting some of the points that I have made to parents, governors and teachers in an attempt to put the record straight about spending on education.

In East Sussex, despite all the gloom and doom-laden predictions, the education standard spending assessment has been increased by £7.264 million or 3.4 per cent. over the previous year. Just as important, by relaxing the capping criteria, the county council can, if it so chooses, increase its budget by no less than 3 per cent. That goes to the heart of the issue so eloquently described by my hon. Friend the Minister.

Ms Armstrong: How much money was raised in addition to what the council already spends on education?

Mr. Waterson: The reality, and the line taken by the Conservatives on the county council, is that, if that money is transmitted straight into education and schools, there is absolutely no reason for any cuts in school budgets.

Ms Armstrong: There is no extra money for schools.

Mr. Waterson: There is no reason for such cuts, and certainly not of the order trailed by the Liberal Democrats and some of their fellow travellers. I have sought assurances—as have many governors, teachers and parents—that the extra funding will be passed straight on to our schools.

We have heard very little recently from the Liberal Democrats about the alleged cuts in education funding. We also heard about cuts in police funding. That scare story was somewhat exploded by the following headline, which appeared in my local paper at the beginning of January: "£5m Christmas boost for Sussex police force". The Sussex police chief constable was said to welcome a Christmas present of £5.5 million to recruit more bobbies on the beat and to improve technology. The £5.5 million will provide for an extra 110 officers on the beat. That increase is over and above the large increase the previous year. More recently, the various committees have been asked to indicate what are called exemplary cuts of 1.5 per cent. of their budget. Again, a series of local media stories suggested that these were, in fact, the real cuts to be made.

The strategy now emerging, apparently, is that no real decision has been made about any budgeting in East Sussex as we near the end of the budgetary process. At the last meeting of the committee which considered these matters, the Liberal Democrats refused to discuss specifics and sought to rule out of order Conservative councillors who tried to initiate debate on the budget. The truth is that they are currently wallowing in indecision as to how to allocate money in the budget for East Sussex.

We know the problems involved in one of the solutions put forward by the hon. Member for Newbury—the freeing of the proceeds of council house sales. The hon. Gentleman's document states that the policy

"is worthy but no longer stands up".

His document continues:

"The freeing up of council house receipts should be kept as a front line policy as it is easily understood by the masses, however, detailed research should be carried out so that we know how much money still remains from the sale of council houses."

That strikes me as a cynical policy, cynically set out in a cynical document produced by a deeply cynical party.

Mr. Rendel: The hon. Gentleman has ranted on for some time about the inefficiencies and inadequacies of councils run by the Liberal Democrats. Perhaps he will tell the House why, whenever Liberal Democrat-run

councils take over from Tory-run councils, the Liberal Democrats tend to increase their majority at the following election.

Mr. Waterson: I do not know whether there is such a rule. However, I assure the hon. Gentleman that that trend will shortly be reversed. It takes a little while—even in Liberal Democrat land—for the chickens to come home to roost, but coming home to roost they are.

I commended the hon. Gentleman earlier on his choice of subject for the debate, but in fact it was an unfortunate choice for the Liberal Democrats, as it has given us the opportunity to direct a piercing shaft of light on their party's policies on local government and thus to throw into sharp relief the hypocrisy at the heart of so many of those policies. It is local government by scaremongering and it shows, time and again, that there is absolutely no point in voting for the Liberal Democrats in local government because, if they win power, they do not have a clue what to do with it.

9.13 pm

Mr. Chris Davies (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Few things show more clearly the extent of the problems that local councils face than a letter which I received only last week from the governors of Fir Bank county primary school, in which the governors stated:

"Over the last few years the school has seen the loss of two teachers, one by non renewal of contract, the second by redundancy. This has caused massive upheaval in teaching practice.

The budget allocated to the school has been well monitored but the school has to run on a shoe string. There are not sufficient text books and other resources are scarce. The position places a very committed teaching staff under great strain, a situation which cannot be good for them or the school in general."

I endorse those sentiments.

I am sure that hon. Members of all parties have received similar letters. That school is in the metropolitan borough of Oldham. Oldham is not unique among local authorities in difficult financial circumstances. It is not a low-spending education authority, but the position has become worse in recent years. In last year's Budget, cuts of £900,000 were imposed on the education budget, and this year it looks as though the position will get worse. A similar cut seems likely as the council increases its charges for supply teacher cover.

In their letter, the governors entreat me as their Member of Parliament

"to give the funding of primary education your urgent attention".

No doubt the two Labour Members who also represent the borough of Oldham receive similar letters. Given the stand that they took on income tax—"stand" is perhaps the wrong word; I should perhaps refer rather to the sit that they took—when they had the opportunity, I can only suppose that they answer such letters with pious platitudes. In that division, the Liberal Democrats made it clear that we believe that quality public services and, above all, the provision of a good education system are among the hallmarks of a civilised society, and we did not seek to avoid the fact that there is a price to be paid for those services. Conservative Members have tried to criticise us for that tonight.

It is not the Labour party but the Government who must shoulder prime responsibility for the financial problems of local authorities and the cuts that they are being forced to make in services throughout the country. The Government must bear responsibility because they directly control four fifths of local government finance and limit local authorities' freedom of action with what is left to spend. For years, the Conservatives have systematically undermined local government, stripped it of powers and authority to work for the community, robbed it of financial independence and reduced its status to no more than that of a Government agency, and it is obvious why they have done so—why they have repeatedly curbed the powers of local authorities to act on behalf of the best interests of their communities. The reason is that the Conservative party, which used to boast of being a party that supported decentralisation, has become a party of centralisation—a party which supports the concentration of power.

In recent years, far too many decisions have been taken by small groups of Ministers meeting in Cabinet Sub-Committees, and no true challenge has been posed to their decisions in any of the legislative processes through which their decisions passed. Power that used to be dispersed throughout the country has been centralised and locally elected representatives have little chance to influence it.

Over the years, local authorities have been repeatedly described by the Conservatives as profligate, inefficient and even financially irresponsible. I would never defend financial inefficiency in local government—people deserve value for money from their public representatives and public organisations—but for the Government to talk about financial responsibility is the pot calling the kettle black.

In the past 15 years, local government spending has increased by 21 per cent. and central Government spending has increased by exactly three times that amount—63 per cent. Perhaps that is not surprising, considering the way in which some of that money has gone—the disaster of the poll tax, the amount being paid to consultants advising the railway privatisers and the cost of paying for the privatisation of the Property Services Agency.

Central Government is capable of making enormous mistakes and the Government have made them, to the taxpayers' cost. Meanwhile, their policies have put local authorities of every political composition between a rock and a hard place when making financial decisions each year: they have no room for manoeuvre—no opportunity to take local needs into account.

Let us take some examples of local authorities which could hardly be described as run by wild-eyed fanatics. Wokingham district council—a Conservative council, run with the support of some independents—is already spending up to its capping limit, and expects to have to cut 5 per cent. this year. So much for the Government's generosity. Penwith district council in Cornwall, run by independents and Conservatives, is spending up to its capping limit, and cuts this year appear inevitable. Rutland district council, a mixture of Conservatives, independents and Liberal Democrats, is spending up to its capping limit and expects to make cuts of 7 per cent. this year.

I am not knocking the councils that I have mentioned: I merely draw attention to the difficulties they face. Councils of all political compositions face the same problems. The settlement that Ministers have described as

[Mr. Chris Davies]

generous is far from that. The income tax policy announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the autumn of last year is leading to council tax increases and service cuts in the spring of this year. The conclusion is inescapable that in its desire to centralise power the Conservative party's thinking is linked directly to the loss of Conservative influence at local level.

We had a rather predictable attack from the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on Liberal Democrat control in the area that he represents. That is not a new phenomenon. Over the past 15 or so years, the number of Conservative councillors has dropped markedly, from 12,100 in 1979 to 4,800 now. For all the hon. Gentleman's criticisms, the Liberal Democrats have overtaken Conservatives in local government: we have become the second party, while the Conservatives have been relegated to third place. In some authorities, Conservatives are desperate to see the introduction of proportional representation to ensure that there is some Conservative representation left.

The process will continue. In May, not many elections will take place. Again, however, the Conservative party can expect to lose seats. Indeed, they will probably lose 300 or more, while at the same time the position of the Liberal Democrats, the second party in local government, will be duly strengthened.

Liberal Democrats are not acting irresponsibly. Three quarters of my party's councillors either run councils or are part of administrations where there is no overall control. Three quarters of our councillors have influence over the decision-making process within local authorities. Only one quarter of Conservatives left in local government have such influence. Despite what the hon. Member for Eastbourne said, the electors are likely to give their support and endorsement to Liberal Democrat-run authorities in greater numbers in May.

Mr. Waterson: The hon. Gentleman may have misunderstood what I said. I did not contest for a moment that in many local councils, including Eastbourne, Liberal Democrats have control over the decision-making process. I said that they either make the wrong decisions or refuse to make any decisions.

Mr. Davies: I take the point that the hon. Gentleman is trying to make. It does not conflict with my argument.

As we look towards the May elections and as we reflect on the Government's record over the past 15 or 16 years, with declining representation in local government, it is clear that the Conservative party is facing oblivion at local level. It is rotting at its grass roots. It must concern Conservative Members, many of whom have been in this place for many years, that they return to their constituencies and find themselves at civic functions surrounded by Liberal Democrat councillors, their opponents, rather than the Conservative brethren of old.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I have been listening closely to the hon. Gentleman's argument. Macclesfield is a Conservative-controlled authority. It is in the north-west and it has overall Conservative control. Does he agree that in some councils where there is Conservative control, Liberal and Labour councillors will work closely with the controlling group, as they do in Macclesfield? The responsible Liberals in my borough, like responsible Labour people, appreciate that the borough council must live within its means. They understand that they cannot blame central Government for all the problems that face local Government. Will the hon. Gentleman seek to present a balance while advancing his argument? Will he accept that there are good Conservative authorities and good Conservative councillors, who are to be found in my borough and who work closely with representatives of his party?

Mr. Davies: I am pleased to hear what the hon. Gentleman says, and I fully endorse his view about members of different parties working together for the common good of the community. That is at the heart of my party's belief in local democracy. Parties and politics should not always dominate in local decision taking.

I hope that it is a cause for some regret among hard-working Conservative councillors who have lost their seats over the years that, when they had the opportunity, they did not put up more resistance to the transfer of local government powers to central Government. It has certainly been a cause for regret among members of my party who strongly support the principle of local democracy that those Conservative councillors were not heard shouting from the rooftops about what was happening to the authority of local councils over the years.

Britain has a well-established local government base, but it is demoralised, undervalued and confined in its ability to tackle local problems and meet local needs. We need a new constitutional balance, with a clear separation of powers and duties between central and local government. Local authorities must have freedom and must be encouraged to become more innovative, entrepreneurial and dynamic. The Liberal Democrats want local government that is efficient and effective, and which not only provides services such as those specified by the Government but seeks out new ways to meet the needs and aspirations of its communities.

The reform of the financing of local government is essential to that. We seek the establishment of a local income tax because we believe that it would be the most effective means of giving local councils greater freedom and greater flexibility. Of course, it must be matched by commensurate initial reductions in levels of central Government taxation.

As I have said, there must be a clear separation of powers. Instead of curbing the authority of local democracy, the Government should be seeking to build on it, encouraging it to new endeavours and giving local people the opportunity to deal with the problems they face in their own communities in their own way, through the work of their locally elected representatives.

9.26 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I was told earlier that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench warm to the idea of me speaking on local government, probably because they recall that I spent 11 years in it. I hope that they will not be too put out when I say that I agree with the first 12 words in the Liberal Democrat motion. However, I suppose I should hasten to say before somebody on the Front Bench writes something

particularly uncomplimentary about me in the little blue book that those are the only 12 words of the motion with which I agree, and that the remainder of the motion contains some of the worst rubbish that has come before the House in a long time.

From my perspective, the greatest amount of rubbish is contained in the final 14 words of the motion, because they relate to the loss of Conservative local government seats. That is the greatest amount of rubbish I have heard in the context of my constituency, because in May, despite the words of the motion and what we have heard in the debate, my Conservative group kept overall control of Spelthorne borough council. That is splendid, but it gets better.

In May, this great Liberal Democrat party was on the march, on the rampage. That month, it started out with three seats out of 40 and ended up with three seats out of 40—a great Liberal Democrat triumph. The story gets better still, because there was a county council by-election in my constituency in December, and instead of the Liberal Democrat party standing still as it did in May, it went backwards. That was because by December my electors had had the chance to see the Liberal Democrats in action in Surrey and they did not like what they saw.

So much for the last 14 words of the motion; but some earlier parts are not much better. Perhaps in the few moments that are available to me I can give a few examples. First, the motion suggests that reforming local government finance will mean that, somehow or other, there will be a magical ability realistically to meet needs. That is what the motion says, but it is bland claptrap. The hon. Member for Newbury's speech made it crystal clear that the Liberal Democrats are not intent on reforming the local government finance system: they are intent on embarking on a spending spree with local government finance.

We were told about a new system. We were told that the Liberal Democrats want to raise more money locally—I believe that I am quoting—as well as raising more money through income tax to spend on local government.

Mr. Rendel *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Wilshire: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but he said that his party wants to raise more money locally—I wrote it down. The Liberal Democrats' most recent manifesto said that they wanted to put 1p on national income tax to spend on local education. That is what they said; I am not inventing it. Liberal Members have also said in this debate that they want to end capping, so that they can go on a real local spending spree.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce *indicated dissent.*

Mr Wiltshire: The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) shakes his head, but I heard them say that. That is exactly what they intend to do.

Let us see if Liberal Members shake their heads and try to deny that, earlier in the debate, they said that they want to release capital receipts, so that they can have another type of spending spree. They are not denying that, which is quite helpful. Liberal Members have not proposed the reform of local government finance in this debate, but a disaster for local government finance and for local citizens.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Although I have not been in the Chamber for all the debate, the one advantage of the new technology that we have in our offices is that one can follow the debate verbatim, and see the Speaker's face, from one's office. Does my hon. Friend accept that, if the Liberals were to introduce the type of policy that they have outlined tonight, it would be the most devastating form of hara-kiri and political suicide that any party could ever dream up and implement?

Mr. Wilshire: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. His local electors and my local electors are very sensible and do not intend to do that—they continue to elect Conservative councillors.

Let us take another example from the Liberal Democrats' motion which illustrates the truth of the issue. The motion suggests that we should condemn the Government's financial priorities for local government. What are the Government's priorities for local government? As I understand it, having been a practitioner before I was elected to the House and having taken a close interest since, the Government's first priority is to live within our means, nationally and locally. If we do not do that, we will go bankrupt and have no services at all.

The Government's second priority is to focus local government attention on core services, such as education and care in the community. The Government's third priority is to ensure that local government delivers real value for money. I know that the Liberal Democrats do not much like competitive tendering, because they do not believe in providing real value for money.

Let us compare the Liberal Democrats' priorities against those priorities. I shall use as an example my own county council, Surrey county council, which is Labour and Liberal Democrat-controlled. What are the Liberal Democrats' priorities there? They are fascinating, and more people should know about them. The Liberal Democrats on the Surrey county council are quite determined to close fire stations, which even the Labour party does not want to do. The Liberal Democrats on that council have managed to organise the rejection of a £1 million grant for more nursery education in Surrey. That is one of their priorities in Surrey.

The Liberal Democrats on that council have some positive policies, one of which was absolutely magnificent. While trying to cut spending on education, they wanted to spend £20,000 to provide showers for staff who cycle to work. We should all be aware of that Liberal Democrat policy. The Liberal Democrats in Surrey also seem to be very keen on blocking the provision of adequate funds for the proper inspection of nurseries and old people's homes, which is nothing short of a disgrace.

The motion also contains the suggestion that Government action causes cuts in services. Coming from the Liberal Democrats, that is really rich. Since last December, I have heard the Liberal Democrats in my constituency telling my electors that they will have to face £15 million worth of cuts in county council services. I heard it all winter, until a few days ago, when they announced that they would not have to face £15 million of cuts now that they had seen the Government's settlement. But there was not a word of apology to my constituents for those scaremongering tactics. I have nothing but contempt for those in politics who are willing to frighten the elderly, worry parents and upset county council staff, all in the name of cheap and dirty party politics.

[Mr. Wilshire]

I said that I supported the first 12 words of the motion, which are:

"That this House calls for reform of the financing of local councils".

Two things are wrong with the financing of local government. They are not the things that the Liberal Democrats suggest. The first is the use of a formula to distribute money. The second is the passing of funds from the person who puts up the money to the person who spends it, via two or three other people.

We all know the problem of formulae. They are nonsense; they do not work. They are either too simple, and we all complain about them, or too complicated, and we do not understand them. I cannot understand why the money made available for services in my constituency should depend on the number of foreigners spending nights in hotels in London. If that is what a formula means, it demonstrates that formulae simply do not work.

The other thing about local government finance that worries me is the indirect funding mechanism we use. We all know what happens. Let us use education as an example. The Department for Education and Employment decides what the standards will be and how much money will be made available. It then passes the money to the Department of the Environment, which lumps it together with lots of other things, concocts a formula that depends on nights spent by foreigners in beds in hotels in London and many other things, and then passes it on to the councils.

The councils then ask themselves whether to spend the money on what they were given it for. The money has now gone through another pair of hands. The result is the sort of thing that Liberal Democrat Somerset has just done. The Department for Education and Employment set out to provide Somerset with an additional £7 million for education, but by the time it had gone through the Department of the Environment and Somerset county council, the schools in Somerset received only an additional £4 million. That is what is wrong with indirect funding.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, particularly at this late hour and as I have not been present for all the debate. In his reform of local government, will my hon. Friend seriously consider a reform of the way in which we fund education? The funding is not transparent now, as my hon. Friend has said. Would he go further down that road?

Mr. Wilshire: That is exactly where I would go. As the public hold the Government responsible for education and the Government carry the can, they should fund all of it, set the standards and use local education authorities or grant-maintained schools as contractors.

I have confessed that I agree with part of the motion. It falls to me only to work out how I should vote. There are two simple reasons why I will not support the Liberal Democrat motion. First, I have explained that, of all the words in the motion, I agree with just 16 per cent. I hope that even the Liberal Democrats, the great exponents of proportional representation, will accept that, when someone is against 84 per cent. of a motion, that is an absolute majority, and proportional representation becomes bunkum. That is really rather like my majority in my constituency, so they should not get too enthusiastic.

The Liberal Democrats should also understand that I will not support them because I am against a local income tax, which is what they say their motion implies, and I am against frittering away balances and abolishing constraints. It is really rather simple. I am perfectly willing to support the amendment in the name of my right hon. and hon. Friends. I accept that it does not go as far as I would like, but not everything is perfect in this world. It makes a great deal of sense to me, and I commend it to the House.

9.38 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): It has been a lively and interesting debate. The Minister engaged in a very fair discussion of all the points at issue. He acknowledged that there were different ways in which local government could be organised and financed and said that perhaps it was a matter of opinion and judgment which way one chose. Obviously, the hon. Gentleman prefers to support Government practice, but at least he acknowledged the opportunity for a different point of view.

The hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) implied that he was against giving local authorities more freedom to determine their own priorities because they would misuse it. The fundamental problem is that currently between 80 and 85 per cent. of funding for local authorities is controlled by central Government, with the consequence that local government does not have genuine freedom to respond to the different needs of different electorates across the country.

The hon. Gentleman knows, as the Government do—despite their spurious claims about putting money into education when all they are doing is allowing spending assessments to rise—that every 1 per cent. increase in expenditure requires a 6 per cent. increase in the council tax to fund it because of the gearing.

Mr. Wilshire: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bruce: I cannot, because time is limited.

The fundamental problem is that, if we are to ensure that local authorities have genuine responsibility, accountability and discretion, a substantially larger proportion of their budgets should come from their own resources and from an ability to raise revenue from their own communities.

Everyone accepts that there is variation across the country that requires some central Government equalisation. There are considerable difficulties in working out the formula for that. However, the gearing is now completely out of kilter and far worse than it used to be. It is creating real difficulties for local authorities.

A point frequently made is that the Government say that they are increasing the standard spending assessment for local authorities. In other words, they are saying that local authorities can spend more money. However, they are not giving them that money through grants or allowing them to raise it in extra council tax—partly because the gearing is wrong, but also because of the existence of capping. The simple abolition of capping without reforming the system would not solve the fundamental problem.

The Government are deliberately and knowingly misrepresenting the position that they are imposing upon local authorities. The reality is that the amount of Government money going into education is under £100 million—about £80 million, I think. The remainder is simply the Government saying that authorities can spend money—although they have cut their grant and been capped. Of course, no one expects authorities to increase council tax by 30, 40 or 50 per cent. to raise the extra money, so the Government know that they cannot find that money other than through cutting services in other areas. The Government want to claim credit for supposedly putting in additional money while ensuring that the authorities get the blame for not delivering the services. That is what the Government are doing.

The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), is to respond to the debate. He would be disappointed if I did not refer to the position north of the border. Scotland is about to embark upon a completely new system of local government. With effect from 1 April, there will be 32 unitary authorities instead of the current mix of district, regional and islands councils. All those local authorities are facing real difficulties before they are even up and running.

I have made some attempt to discover what difficulties are arising in different parts of Scotland. For example, in Dumfries and Galloway—part of the constituency of the former Secretary of State for Scotland, the right hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang)—which is administered by Liberal Democrats and independents, there is some agreement that, for the first time, the council should spend up to its capping limit. Even so, that represents a 5 per cent. cut in overall spending.

In Perth and Kinross, which is controlled by the Scottish Nationalists, a 10 per cent. cut across the board is expected before the council is even up and running. Highland, which is independent-controlled, is looking at a 10 per cent. cut, as are several other authorities in that area. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) said that the city of Glasgow is looking to a 10 per cent. cut. Those are real difficulties for local authorities.

The Under-Secretary, like me, represents the new council area of Aberdeenshire. It would be much more welcome to his constituents and to mine if he spent less time attacking a council that has not yet even come into existence and more time trying to work with his constituency to ensure the best possible quality of services and value for money. Although I have pointed out to him that his constituents voted overwhelmingly for the councillors who share the administration—Liberal Democrats and independents—he rejoices in his constituency being the sole repository of the four Conservative councillors in Aberdeenshire.

I shall give the Under-Secretary one specific example, which I agree involves an estimate. Aberdeenshire council estimates that the expenditure requirement to meet the housing capital plan for 1996-97 will be £16.5 million. Council officers estimate that capital receipts will total £6.2 million. Even if the Minister disputes the £16.5 million expenditure requirement, he must surely acknowledge that there is a massive disparity, and that local authorities consistently face the biggest increase in homelessness anywhere in Scotland and probably the United Kingdom. He knows too that Aberdeenshire calculates that his estimate of what it should spend is about £24 million adrift of what it will have to spend if it is simply to maintain existing services.

The current administration and officials are looking right across the board for substantial savings, and I know that they will do their best to find those savings, but if the Under-Secretary continues to insist that the spending assessments determined by the Scottish Office bear any relationship to reality, he will find that there will be no budget for clearing the roads of snow or for road repairs and there will be severe cuts in all other areas. He must accept that his constituents would suffer as a result, especially since those service cuts would be accompanied by substantial increases in council tax. He ought to work with us to try to get the best services for his constituents, rather than work against what they have voted for: to deliver that balance of priorities.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) pointed out, one of the fundamental areas in which we take issue with the Government is the extent to which they are trying to squeeze local government to make up for their own failures to budget effectively at national level. In order to fund their own priorities and try to find a shred of credibility in their central budgeting, the Government are squeezing local services so that they can blame the Opposition, which run those councils because the Government cannot win seats on them. That simply will not work.

The Government talk about extravagance, yet they spend £865 million a year on consultants to save—according to independent internal assessments—a few hundred thousand pounds. They spend £250 million a year on advertising and publicity—a 400 per cent. increase since 1979. They are wasting £200 million a year on empty properties—double the figure of two years ago. That is a hell of a lot of waste in central Government that is not being addressed.

I am sick and tired of the Government telling local government about empty properties when 15 per cent. of Government property is sitting empty. Indeed, the Government have a £30 billion borrowing deficit and had an £8 billion overrun on last year's forecast. That is the extent to which they have failed to get their own house in order, and it costs extra money—£2.5 billion a year in interest on the increased deficit.

It is also worth pointing out that, since 1979, Government domestic fuel consumption has risen by 25 per cent. The equivalent figure for local government is an increase of 14 per cent. It is pretty clear which level of government is a good housekeeper. It is not central Government. The conspiracy between the two major parties—in this context, the Labour party's position is deeply disappointing—in their desire to centralise control of all spending and deny local democracy, local accountability and genuine buoyancy of revenues that would enable local councils to do the job that they are much better equipped to do than central Government is deeply offensive. Local councils deliver much better services and provide much better value for money.

In those circumstances, I believe that the motion commends itself to the House, although I have not the slightest doubt that it will not receive the House's support. It is because of the fundamental difference between us

[Mr. Bruce]

and the other two main parties that increasingly people are turning to the Liberal Democrats in local government. They know that we are prepared to fight hard for local services and for a system that will work—something that the Government cannot do.

The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland knows that his party tried to gerrymander the local boundaries to ensure that there would be a Conservative-controlled authority somewhere in Scotland. I listened with envy to Conservative and Labour Members talking about the difficulties of Conservative-controlled councils. We Scottish Members will never be able to testify to that, because there will not be any such councils after 1 April.

Nowhere in Scotland do the Conservatives have any power in local government, because, despite their attempts at gerrymandering, no council supports them. It is sheer vindictiveness that is making them put the squeeze on local government in Scotland and try to blame the Liberal Democrat, Labour, nationalist and independent parties that run the councils, but it simply will not wash.

9.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): We have had a full and interesting debate. I shall try to deal with as many of the detailed points that have been raised as I can in the short time available, but I begin with some general comments about next year's local government financial settlement, north and south of the border.

The impression given, certainly by the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and other Opposition Members, is that local government has been singled out for attack by the Government. The motion refers to an

"assault on local authorities, which continues year after year".

[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I hear some hon. Members shout "Hear, hear," but that is typical of their mental arithmetic and financial controls, because nothing could be further from the truth.

Expenditure by Scottish local authorities, for example, has increased by 20 per cent. in real terms in the past 10 years. As for next year's settlements, local government has been treated very favourably despite the need to constrain public expenditure in order to sustain the economic recovery. In Scotland, the increase in aggregate external finance for local authorities is no less than £148 million. That is 2.9 per cent. up, or £26.5 million more than the Scottish block formula consequences of the English settlement.

Despite all the talk of expenditure cuts, every one of the new Scottish authorities will next year have scope to increase spending by at least 2 per cent. For the majority of councils, the increase is more than 3 per cent. If authorities improve efficiency and effectiveness, as the private sector and the rest of the public sector are having to do, there should be no need for any cuts in front-line services.

Mr. McAvoy: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Kynoch: No; I shall deal with the points that the hon. Gentleman raised in a minute.

Within the Scottish settlement, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has given particular priority to the police and fire services. The police grant-aided expenditure assessment has been increased by some £44 million, or nearly 8 per cent., and the fire GAE has been increased by £13 million, or nearly 10 per cent. I hope that in, budgeting for next year, Scottish authorities will give the same priority to the police and fire services, which are of such great importance. I look to the authorities to take a responsible attitude.

The debate has covered a lot of ground. There has been much talk about the level of Government funding as opposed to local funding. There was talk of 85 per cent. coming from central Government and only 15 per cent. being raised through the council tax. The one fact that all Opposition Members failed to point out was that there is flexibility for local councillors to take decisions locally and to decide how to spend the funds.

As I said, the funds for Scotland next year are some 2.9 per cent. up on the current year, and, in a year of local government reorganisation, there will be an opportunity for local authorities to examine how they deliver services, look afresh at them and build on their experience, to try to find ways of doing things more cost-effectively.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) began by saying that he wanted to do away with capping and to move to a local income tax. The hon. Gentleman and all his Liberal Democrat colleagues are really saying that they want to raise extra funds to spend on local government. That is where the Government and the Opposition parties differ. We believe in trying to get a more cost-effective delivery of services with taxpayers' money. It does not matter whether the funds come from central or local sources—it is taxpayers' money, first and foremost. The difference between us is that the Government believe in trying to give good value for money for taxpayers.

The hon. Gentleman said that compulsory competitive tendering involved endless red tape. He should tell his constituents that a process of competitive tendering to ensure that they get the best possible value for money is endless red tape. They would not agree with him.

Mr. Rendel: My local authority has found that—because of the way in which the system was set up—every time it has gone in for CCT, it has had to go for a higher tender than would have been the case had it been allowed under the rules to go for its own people doing the same job.

Mr. Kynoch: I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would want his authority to go for the lowest tender to deliver the services to the specifications as drawn up.

The hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) seemed to get in rather a muddle as to what she wanted to do. The moment my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) mentioned the word "pledge"—an horrific word for Labour Front Benchers—she ran in fright and was unable to say what she would do on local government expenditure. She says that more money is needed in education, but she does not accept that local authorities have the flexibility to spend. The long and the short of it is that significant amounts of extra spending have gone into local government this year, both north and south of the border.

My hon. Friends the Members for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), for Spelthorne and for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) made valuable contributions on local government expenditure. My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley in particular drew attention to the fact that the extra expenditure advocated by Opposition parties would have to be paid for by somebody—the question was, by whom. He talked about two new or extra taxes that are proposed by the Liberal Democrats. The first is national—a higher income tax—while the other is the local income tax. I have a message for my hon. Friend—in Scotland, we would have a third new tax. The Opposition want a tartan tax and a tax-raising Scottish Parliament that would make us less competitive and would cause major problems for the Scottish people.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) talked about the situation in Glasgow, and South Lanarkshire in particular. Of course, he has a problem. The allocation that is given to local authorities in AEF comes as a result of a formula that was proposed not by the Government, as was suggested by some Opposition Members—

Mr. McAvoy *indicated assent.*

Mr. Kynoch: I see that the hon. Gentleman acknowledges that fact. The formula is well tried, and was drawn up in its present form in 1985 by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in conjunction with the Scottish Office. The formula was discussed in great detail by the distribution committee, and that was the body that decided on the distribution.

The hon. Gentleman said that he did not want the funding to be redistributed within Strathclyde, and I can understand why. While Glasgow may be regarded as a "loser" in this situation, there are many local authorities in the old Strathclyde region—East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Ayrshire and South Lanarkshire—that are "gainers". He will know that there is a transition scheme to take account of the mismatch. That scheme has been agreed by COSLA and was, in fact, its proposal.

The hon. Gentleman referred to Glasgow and the capping limit. Glasgow will be able to increase its expenditure by 4.9 per cent. compared with its notional budget. While the council needs to reduce expenditure to come within the capping limit, it would clearly like to increase expenditure at present by no less than 13.4 per cent.

The hon. Member for Gordon talked about Aberdeenshire, but he has a distinct problem. The notional budget for Aberdeenshire is made up by disaggregating the old Grampian regional budget. That was decided on not by the Scottish Office, but by Grampian regional council which, if memory serves me correctly, was a Liberal Democrat-Scottish National party administration. That administration must be responsible for the existing notional budget of £202 million, while the wish-list budget for the new Aberdeenshire council—a Liberal Democrat council—is some £240 million, a 19 per cent. increase.

The Government believe in good value for money while, I am afraid, the Opposition believe in increased taxation and increased expenditure.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 28, Noes 179.

Division No. 50] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barnes, Harry
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Chidgey, David
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Godman, Dr Norman A
Harvey, Nick
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Lynne, Ms Liz
Maclennan, Robert
Maddock, Diana
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Rendel, David
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. Don Foster.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Durant, Sir Anthony
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, Dudley
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Knapman, Roger

Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Bowen Wells.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MADAM SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates the Government on the priority they have given to education and the police in the 1996–97 settlement for local government; approves the rigorous approach that Government takes towards all public expenditure, including that of local government; commends the flexibility they have given to local authorities to respond to local priorities; and urges local authorities to make the most efficient use of the resources available and to use their freedom responsibly in providing local services.

European Communities (Amendment) Act

10.12 pm

The Paymaster General (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): I beg to move,

That this House takes note with approval of the Government's assessment as set out in the Finance Statement and Budget Report 1996–97 for the purposes of section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993.

The purpose of the debate and the motion is to satisfy section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, which is sometimes called the Maastricht Act. It requires Parliament to approve the assessment of Britain's economic and budget provisions, which the Government then send to the European Commission. The information required is contained in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report", which the House will know as the Red Book. Since the introduction of the unified Budget, that report has contained the Government's tax and spending plans and has described how they are related to our economic and political objectives. Chapter 1 of the Red Book states that the report "will form the basis" of the report required under section 5.

In the past, the Opposition have had difficulty understanding that section 5 debates are not held to approve the Government's economic strategy. That strategy was debated after the Budget statement and continues as part of the Finance Bill proceedings.

My hon. Friends will take pride in the figures in the Red Book and in the stable macro-economic framework, sustainable growth, low inflation, falling unemployment and the firm grip on public expenditure demonstrated in those tables and pages. Those factors were all central to the Budget strategy and have already been approved by the House.

This evening's debate is about the transmission of that information to the European Commission in order to comply with our treaty obligations, and I invite the House to approve the figures.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Madam Speaker: Order. The Minister is apparently not giving way.

10.14 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): According to the motion, the House is invited to take note "with approval" of the Government's assessment as set out in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report". I must say two things straight away. First, I do not approve of the figures and forecasts in the Red Book; secondly, still less do I approve of the treaty obligations under the Maastricht treaty that we have entered into and to which the motion is related.

I do not think that the House and the country have fully understood that, while the Government—in my view, properly—at least negotiated an opt-out from the full acceptance of stage 3 of economic and monetary union and the single currency, they did not opt out of stages 1 and 2 of economic and monetary union. This evening, we are debating our obligations to economic and monetary union under stages 1 and 2.

I wish to draw attention to the obligations that are placed on us by our acceptance of stages 1 and 2 of the treaty. First, and this is the reason for the debate tonight, article 103 states:

"For the purpose of this multi-lateral surveillance, Member States shall forward information to the Commission about important measures taken by them in the field of their economic policy".

It further states:

"the Council shall, on the basis of reports submitted by the Commission, monitor economic developments in each of the Member States".

If the Commission does not like what it sees and if the figures do not conform to what has been agreed, it can put proposals to the Council that may

"acting by a qualified majority on a recommendation from the Commission, make the necessary recommendations to the Member State concerned. The Council may, acting by a qualified majority on a proposal from the Commission, decide to make its recommendations public."

Straight away, we have a bit of coercion in stage 2 of economic and monetary union.

The obligations on us go far beyond the obligation to make reports about our economic policy and to have them monitored and invigilated, because we also come under the terms of article 104c, which, as the House knows, deals with the subject of "excessive government deficits". That article states that the Commission

"shall examine compliance with budgetary discipline on the basis of . . . two criteria".

I think we are all familiar with those criteria—that the public sector borrowing requirement should not be more than 3 per cent. of gross domestic product, and that the ratio between national debt and GDP should not be higher than 60 per cent.

Article 104c also contains a formidable arsenal of coercive measures that are available to the Commission and the Council if in their judgment our progress towards the 3 per cent. borrowing requirement for GDP is inadequate. If it is inadequate, the Council may make recommendations by qualified majority vote and, furthermore, it can make public its recommendations if the member state does not comply.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Shore: I hesitate to give way, because I realise that the House will have many demands on the limited time available.

Article 109m, which the House has never properly considered, applies now, and it states:

"Until the beginning of the third stage"—

that is, during stages 1 and 2—

"each Member State shall treat its exchange-rate policy as a matter of common interest."

The Government are making a report to the Council of Ministers, and presumably they made a similar report last year. What communication have the Government had with the Commission on progress towards economic union? What observations has the Commission made on the fact that the Government's public sector borrowing requirement, standing this year at 4.75 per cent., is well in excess of the reference figure of 3 per cent. contained in the treaty? What have the Government done to treat their exchange rate policy as "a matter of common interest"?

Have they deliberately, as it were, operated on the exchange rate so that it is not a floating exchange rate, but a managed one shadowing the ecu and the currencies of the European Community?

Those are important matters, because they directly affect not only the macro-economic policy, our competitiveness through the exchange rate and our interest rates, because we are also pledged to price stability, but the crucial balance between public expenditure and taxation. The idea that that decision, which has belonged to Chancellors of the Exchequer ever since we have been an independent country, should be in thrall to the opinions of the Commission and the majority of the Council of Ministers is unacceptable to us.

Is that not why we have seen not merely cuts in public expenditure and increases in taxation in the past two years, but why the Government, whatever the immediate argument might be about the size of our PSBR last year, this year and the next, are hellbent on conforming with the criteria in the Maastricht treaty so that they will be able to join the third stage of economic and monetary union just as soon as the decision is made in 1998?

The Chancellor said in a reply to a question that I put to him on Thursday:

"I am a strong advocate of getting down towards a balanced budget and of low inflation. They happen to be the Maastricht criteria as well"—

happen to be—

"but as we move towards achieving them it is doing no harm to this country's economy."—[*Official Report*, 8 February 1996; Vol. 271, c. 452.]

That may be true this year, but what about the next two or three years? What about the circumstances in which, once we are caught within the frame, we have to keep our borrowing requirements below 3 per cent.?

My objection is not only to the effect that is having on British policy but to the general deflationary effects that the constraints of economic and monetary union are having on the economic policies of virtually all our European neighbour states. Two months ago, Paris was in a state of riot as Parisians objected to the growing deflation to which President Chirac has unfortunately agreed in his arrangements with Chancellor Kohl. Just a week ago, Germany announced its highest unemployment figure for more than 50 years at 4.1 million. It is desperately worried about the problem of having to face the challenge of the competitiveness of countries whose currencies are free or floating and not pegged.

I remind the House, in case hon. Members have not seen it, of the interesting statement made by the former socialist Finance Minister of Spain, Miguel Boyer, as reported in *The Times* on 9 February. He said:

"Never has so much damage been done to so many by so few fanatics".

He summed up by saying:

"I do not share the dream of many technocrats and certain elite politicians of maintaining to the death a fiction about dates and conditions of convergence, hoping to catch nations by surprise with economic and monetary union, the significance and costs of which they do not know."

It is clear that a new mood is developing across Europe—a recognition of the nonsense, the madness and the unacceptability of adopting rules that will govern our economic lives and that have been conceived by arbitrary

[Mr. Shore]

decisions in Brussels and elsewhere in Europe. I believe that options are available to the Government and that we must set our ambitions much higher than simply keeping out of an economic and monetary union and a single currency. We should do all in our power—we have the opportunity to do so—to veto the wretched business throughout Europe.

10.25 pm

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): This is a timely debate upon the issues of convergence and the monetary union. Paragraph 4.10 of the Red Book, which sets out the Government's policies on the matter, states:

"The general government financial deficit—which is also the measure used to monitor budget deficits under the European Union excessive deficits procedure—is forecast at £33½ billion for 1995-96, 4¼ per cent. of GDP. By 1996-97, it is forecast to be close to the 3 per cent. reference level for deficits used in the excessive deficit procedure."

That policy sounds fairly innocuous, but it contains economic, political and democratic perils. If we look a little further than the United Kingdom, we find that those perils are manifesting themselves even more strongly in France and in Germany.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Does my hon. Friend agree that he is being most ungenerous? The Chancellor, during his Budget speech, particularly commended his Budget on the basis that it would conform to the convergence criteria. Those of us who have known the Chancellor for a long time know that, for at least 30 years, he has been in favour of further integration into the European Community. His Budget was but a step in that direction. I think my hon. Friend ought to be more generous to my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Legg: My hon. Friend has certainly known my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer much longer than I. I would not seek to quarrel with him on those points. I believe that there are no automatic pilots with respect to economic policy; there are no two or three criteria that one can follow in economic policy to produce economic success. The world is not like that. If we look to continental Europe and, in particular, to what is happening in France and Germany, we see the follies of blindly attempting to follow convergence criteria.

We see the folly of following deflationary policies—both in fiscal and monetary terms. In continental Europe, fiscal conservatism, fiscal consolidation and inflation competition are all taking place at the same time. The terms of the convergence criteria on inflation require member states to be in the top three countries—or as close as possible to the top three countries—in inflation terms. France and Germany have suffered from overtight monetary policies over the past few years.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend agree that the reply that the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) received from the Chancellor of the Exchequer shows that it may be, by chance, that we will comply with those criteria, but that overlooks the fundamental fact that this is a legal framework which is binding upon all the member states under articles 2, 103 and 104c? As a result, we are bound to comply with these criteria, irrespective of whether we want to do so. That is the greatest problem. If we are to retain our determination to achieve our own objectives, we should do so on our own terms and not because it is imposed upon us.

Mr. Legg: My hon. Friend is absolutely right when he says that those are legal obligations that we willingly placed on ourselves—legal obligations under British and European law. I know that my hon. Friend spent some time studying the treaty when we debated it in the House. If we closely examine our legal obligations, specifically article 104c, we find that there is considerable flexibility for interpretation in the excess budget deficit procedure.

Most hon. Members probably believe that there is a 3 per cent. limit to budget deficits, and that countries that enter the single currency will have to meet the 3 per cent. deficit criteria, but that is not the position. A country does not need to have a deficit within 3 per cent. to achieve economic convergence and move to a single currency.

Article 104c says, about the definition of the Government deficit requirement, 3 per cent.

"or, alternatively, the excess over the reference value is only exceptional and temporary and the ratio remains close to the reference value".

Under the Maastricht treaty, that is the definition on which a group of politicians will decide whether we move to a single currency. They will sit in judgment and decide whether Europe's economies have converged sufficiently. They do not have to consider 3 per cent. They need only ask, "Is it close? Is the excess over 3 per cent. only exceptional and temporary?"

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Legg: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow).

Mr. Marlow: I think my hon. Friend can put his nightmare on one side, because I believe that it will not happen. No Conservative Government will take Britain into European monetary union. The economies of France and Germany are so destroyed and distorted that the political will would not endure a sufficient time to take them into economic and monetary union.

Perhaps my hon. Friend would go one further and look at Italy. Does he realise that the debt in Italy is such that to pay the annual interest on that debt costs Italy more than paying for defence, education, social security and health put together? Is there any chance that Italy will be able to join monetary union?

Mr. Legg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those points. I know that he is a close follower of European affairs, and I am sure that it will not have escaped his notice that Mr. Weigel, the German Finance Minister, commented clearly on Italy's financial position in the autumn; it is obvious that the Germans do not want the Italians in the single currency. They accept the argument that my hon. Friend has made, that Italian debt is far too high. I am sure that, when the decision is made in 1998, Italy will not be part of the single currency.

Mr. Budgen: I am sure that my hon. Friend responds most politely to my hon. Friend the Member for

Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), who, of course, is well known as an intellectual with a detailed interest in the minutiae of European politics, but many of us who take a more relaxed and ill-informed view of European politics approach those things with a certain amount of diffidence and say that it is difficult enough to understand the politics of our country without necessarily understanding the politics of what are now the great multitude of members of the European Union.

Is it not possible for us to say, "Perhaps they do want to join a single currency. Perhaps, for reasons of their history and their economies, it is right for them to join a single currency. We rather doubt that it will be in their long-term interests, but it is not for us, in our diffidence and uncertainty, to express an opinion about what is good for them"? Is it not important for us to express an opinion about what is right for our country, and is it not right for us to say—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Interventions should be short.

Mr. Legg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those comments. We cannot altogether forget those countries and their economic affairs because, in 1998, the Prime Minister of this country must sit down with the other Heads of Government and make a judgment about the Italian economy. He has to make a judgment.

Mr. Budgen: Why?

Mr. Legg: It is a requirement under the terms of the Maastricht treaty, which is the law of the land. I should have thought that my hon. Friend would appreciate that by now. The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom will have to make a judgment about the Italian economy in 1998, and he will have to cast a vote when it comes to deciding whether Italy should join the single currency. I suspect, that if the Government cast a vote, it will not be in favour of Italy joining the single currency. That, however, is the procedure that we have agreed. In that sense, the Maastricht treaty has brought Europe closer together.

Convergency criteria are creating deflationary pressures on the continent. Unemployment in France is over 12 per cent. The figures from Germany last week were extremely worrying and disturbing. More than 4 million are unemployed in Germany. These two countries are trying to achieve the criteria, including a budget deficit of 3 per cent. At the same time, however, they are pursuing restrictive monetary policies that are impeding growth in their economies. In having overshot their deficit levels, their growth is much lower than expected—it is only about 1.5 per cent.

The required criteria cannot blithely be followed. If monetary policy is overtight, unemployment increases and the budget deficit rises steadily. The process then becomes self-defeating.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I happen to agree with the hon. Gentleman's most recent point. Earlier, however, he suggested that there was a degree of flexibility. Does he agree that article 104c(2)(b) sets out two criteria? The hon. Gentleman quoted the first, which is to some degree an exception. The second, which is to some extent in parallel, states:

"whether the ratio of government debt to gross domestic product exceeds a reference value, unless the ratio is sufficiently diminishing and approaching the reference value at a satisfactory pace."

Is that not also a constraint that adds to the difficulties that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned?

Mr. Legg: I do not think that it is that strong a constraint. Again, it is a matter of judgment. The ratio is sufficiently diminishing and approaching the reference level at a satisfactory pace. There is tremendous scope for judgment over such phraseology.

If the hon. Gentleman doubts that, I suggest that he talks to German politicians about the prospects for Belgium joining the single currency. German politicians say, "Of course, the Benelux will have to join the single currency." Belgium's debt level is about 130 per cent., but that is not considered to be an impediment. Luxembourg, the only country meeting the criteria, has the same currency as Belgium. In that context, the politicians will not see an impediment in 1998 in bringing in the countries that they believe have sufficiently converged.

So we have deflationary policies on the continent. At the same time, we have the franc fort policy. We all know that it is an extremely damaging policy for the French economy. It is dragging down economic growth in France and driving up unemployment. Why does France continue to pursue such crazy economic policies? Why do the French not look over the continent? Why do they not look to the United Kingdom, where we have a floating exchange rate?

Why do they not recognise that, when the UK came out of the exchange rate mechanism, unemployment started to fall, exports started to increase and there were no worries about the exchange rate with the dollar? Why does France not say, "Floating is the right way to go. Let us abandon the franc fort policy and get our interest rates down"? The base rate is 7 per cent., and inflation is less than 2 per cent. Why does it continue to inflict such punishment on the economy and on the French people? The answer is political: there is a political will in France and Germany to have monetary union.

An objective analysis of the economic criteria and their consequences would lead to a rejection of the whole concept. There is no such analysis because of the political will behind the concept. When French or German politicians are challenged on the subject, they accept that there is economic nonsense in the system, but they then say, "But of course there must be political union as well." The German Chancellor and the President of the Bundesbank are completely frank about it.

We have had the message loud and clear from continental politicians, so why do not we hear it, and say, "Not only is economic and monetary union bad economically, it is not the right course for Britain politically; we do not want further political integration and a European super-state"?

Mr. Cash: My hon. Friend makes a fundamental point. Therefore, does he agree that the only way that we can get out of the situation is not merely to wait for a collapse and the disorder that would follow, but to take the opportunity of the intergovernmental conference to

[Mr. Cash]

renegotiate the treaty and lead Europe back to common sense? We should do that to get away from the madness that is now infecting the whole of the European Union.

Mr. Legg: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point.

Mr. Budgen: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Legg: Perhaps I may be allowed to deal with the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash). It is time for Britain to take a lead on this important issue. That would not only help our partners to abandon the economic nonsense upon which they are engaged, but enable them to look more closely at the political consequences of their action.

The French Government still believe that there is a good prospect of Britain joining the single currency. From the British and French points of view, there would be nothing better than to make our position clear and say no to a single currency. The French would then understand that, if they wanted to go into a single currency, they would be going in with Germany.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Perhaps my hon. Friend would clarify one matter. Some of my colleagues suggest that this problem will go away because the convergence criteria cannot be satisfied and that, at the very least, France and Germany will probably seek a delayed start date to economic and monetary union. Does my hon. Friend share that opinion, or does he think that, because of their political objectives, France and Germany will drive ahead, come what may?

Mr. Legg: I think that France and Germany will drive ahead because of their political motives.

Mr. Budgen: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Legg: Perhaps I could finish dealing with the point before giving way.

Many times in the past, this project seemed to have been derailed. In the Danish referendum, the Danish people voted against the whole project, but it was afterwards put back on the rails. We thought we saw the break-up of the exchange rate mechanism in August 1993, but the ERM was reconstructed with 15 per cent. bands and the project went on. As I have said, political will and legal obligations are driving this project and I cannot see it being derailed unless Britain explains the economic and political disadvantages.

Mr. Budgen: Why do we have to keep waiting for it to be derailed in Europe? Many people concede that it may be right for some European countries. It would be a great impertinence for us to tell them what was right for them. Surely it is the role of political leaders in this country to decide what is right for Britain and simply to say, diffidently and kindly, "It may be right for you but it is wrong for us."

Mr. Legg: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The British Government should certainly say that they consider that the single currency is wrong for Britain and for the British people. However, we cannot look at ourselves as an economic island. Many of our exports go to France and Germany. In the Red Book, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has forecast that we will have 3 per cent. economic growth this year. I believe that that is extremely unlikely. One of the reasons is that economic growth in France and Germany is so poor because those countries are following their current policies. I see no harm in Her Majesty's Government talking about not only the constitutional but the political aspects.

Economic and monetary union would be damaging economically. I do not believe that the idea of a single currency will work, even between Germany and France. Last week, we had an extremely serious development in the concept of the single currency. The Bundestag acted to reduce the mobility of labour in Europe. It passed a law ensuring that foreign workers could not be paid less than German national workers. That will impede the mobility of labour in Europe.

When one is committed to the concept of a single currency, to take measures to reduce mobility of labour is highly irresponsible in economic terms. It is particularly so, given that the German Government and people do not want to raise their taxes to make higher levels of fiscal transfer payments around the single currency area.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): My hon. Friend has suggested that the mechanism is being driven by a political, not an economic, agenda. He and I are both accountants. Does he suggest that the only way in which economic and monetary union between France and Germany is likely to come about, especially if it is to involve some other countries, is if the convergence criteria are fiddled? A number of countries cannot meet the criteria in the next five, 10, 15 or possibly 20 years. If that is the case, the only way in which economic and monetary union can come about is by fiddling the books.

Mr. Legg: Like my hon. Friend, I am extremely reluctant to predict precisely economic conditions in the coming few years; to predict deficits or inflation levels for any country. However, I think that he has grasped the point that the only way in which the criteria are likely to be followed and monetary union is likely to take place is if there is flexibility and, in my hon. Friend's terms, the figures are fiddled and countries do not stick to the letter of the legislation. That is a great danger.

If the treaty were inspired by a desire to achieve true economic and monetary union, we would not have these odd convergence criteria. We would look at all sorts of convergence criteria within the real economy. We would look at levels of unemployment, how financial markets worked in different countries, trade flows and so on if the desire was genuinely economic. If it were genuinely economic, would we need the criteria? If countries are coming together, markets will produce convergence. If we trade more and more with Germany or with France, convergence will take place naturally. It is not for states to enforce convergence on themselves and other states.

I believe that the EMU project is political. It is politically damaging. It is damaging for democracy. In France, President Chirac was elected on a manifesto that involved promises of lower taxes and a pledge to cut unemployment. Within six months of taking office, he has

reverted to the disastrous policies of Francois Mitterrand. He has put at the forefront of his policies the reduction of the budget deficit and adherence to the franc fort. Those are dangers for democracy, with politicians having the same agenda, and an agenda in France which is not in the interests of the French people.

Pursuit of the convergence criteria is economically damaging across Europe and politically dangerous for Europe. If we are to avoid what I believe to be the catastrophe of a single currency, we need to exercise a countervailing political will. My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) made a good point—that Britain must be firm and exercise countervailing political will to save Britain from the single currency and to help our partners to realise the dangers they face.

10.50 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) referred to Germany. I do not know to which German politicians he has been speaking, but certainly Mr. Waigel wishes to lay down a law that, once we get to 3 per cent., we find another peak ahead and have to get to 1 per cent. If we cannot get to 1 per cent., we are denied regional development grants and payments out of the budget.

Mr. Legg: That perfectly illustrates my point about political union. It cannot stop at monetary union. The Waigel proposals are an example of the political union that will have to follow. There will have to be central direction of fiscal policy following on from a single monetary policy.

Mr. Davies: That may be the case. I merely make the point that it is in the interests of many in Germany, and certainly of business men, to devalue the deutschmark. For years, the German economy has benefited from a slightly undervalued mark. Once unification took place, interest rates had to rise and, if one can talk about undervaluation or overvaluation in a free market, the mark is now probably overvalued. That is something that the Bundesbank has tried to avoid over the years.

With an overvalued mark, German exports to the economic area of Europe will suffer. There is a certain schizophrenia—if I may use that word—in Germany as German business men wish for a weaker currency. There is no doubt that the euro, if it happens, will be weaker than the current value of the mark.

To some extent, this debate is about paragraph 4.10 of the Red Book. It refers to

"The general government financial deficit".

In a curious phrase, written carefully by the Treasury, there is then a dash and the paragraph continues,

"which is also the measure used to monitor budget deficits under the European Union".

Perhaps even when I was at the Treasury many years ago there was something called the general Government financial deficit, but it certainly was not computed in accordance with a European system of accounts. We get the feeling that the Treasury is a little worried about suggesting that paragraph 4.10 exists because of the Maastricht treaty, but it is there for no other reason. There is no need to compute those figures according to something called the general Government financial deficit.

I want to make a pedantic point to the Paymaster General. We do not have the figures for the calendar year 1995. With the Maastricht treaty, the final hurdle to be overcome will be the figures for the calendar year 1997, which will come out some time in 1998. We are on calendar years. According to the Commission, its estimate of Britain's general Government financial deficit for 1995 is 5.1 per cent. of gross domestic product. In paragraph 4.10, we are told that for 1995-96—which goes into the fiscal year—the Government's deficit will be 4.75 per cent. It then says that it is forecast to be close to 3 per cent. in 1997.

As 1995 is over, and it is not terribly difficult to work out the figures, could we have tonight, if possible, the figures for the general Government financial deficit for the calendar year 1995? On the Commission's figures, which were forecast before the end of the year, the average for the 15 countries of the European Community for 1995 was 4.7 per cent. of gross domestic product. The British figure was 5.1 per cent, slightly higher than the 5 per cent. forecast for France. Will the Minister tell us the present position? Those ridiculous figures are to be entrenched—indeed, are entrenched—in law. I do not know what the deficit in Britain should be this year or next year. Perhaps it is correct to estimate 3 per cent., 1 per cent. or 8 per cent. Nobody can judge what the figure should be. Nobody wants to borrow too much if possible. Why entrench such figures in law?

I believe that there was an attempt in the United States by Mr. Newt Gingrich and others to try to entrench the concept of a balanced budget into the American constitution of all places. The attempt was thrown out because the Americans could not possibly stomach the concept that economic fashion and figures for it should be entrenched in their marvellous constitution. Yet that is what we are doing. We are entrenching figures that have been plucked out of the air by fanatics, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) said, in a fundamental law—a kind of natural law—of the European Community. Not only will they be law; they cannot really be changed—they can be changed only after 15 countries agree that they should be changed.

Mr. Cash: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, if the arrangements are met for entering stage 3—if the Maastricht criteria are fully complied with—a central bank will be created, the governors of which will not be allowed to seek or take instructions from their member states? Does that not add a great deal to what he is saying?

Mr. Davies: As the hon. Gentleman and the House will be well aware, the whole premise is that the power is reserved for the European central bank. A few weeks ago, I read a rather pompous editorial—I think that it was in *The Independent*—which suggested that it would be marvellous if the European central bank fixed interest rates for the whole economic community. How on earth can one fix one rate of interest for that whole area with its diverse economies? Presumably that is what the bank would have to do. Otherwise, it might have to set different rates for different areas.

Mr. Marlow: The right hon. Gentleman talks about fanatics fixing the figures in law. Is it not a cause of great chagrin to him that among those fanatics are his own Front-Bench team?

Mr. Davies: Certainly not—I would never suggest such a thing of either my hon. Friend the Member for North

[Mr. Davies]

Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) or, indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain), who could never be described as a fanatic in any capacity. I repudiate that charge completely.

Mr. Budgen: On the general problems of how excessive deficits might work out, let us suppose for the sake of argument that we were in the single currency and we had a war—over the Falklands, for instance—which initially did not turn out very well, cost us a great deal of money and we had to run a very large deficit for two or three years. Let us also suppose for the sake of argument that many of the Latin countries in the European Union disapproved of the war.

Would we not find ourselves exposed to very considerable pressure from people who disapproved of that war to change our national policies so as to conform with their idea of what happened to be a reasonable deficit? Am I wrong in thinking that that could be a major infringement—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is wrong to make interventions lasting well over a minute.

Mr. Davies: I shall not answer the hon. Gentleman's intervention in detail, but I should have thought that, once one had transferred levers of economic policy and economic power from one's own Government, one's capacity to wage war must be extremely limited. I do not believe that one can divorce economic matters from matters of defence and foreign policy.

Mr. Spearing: A few moments ago, my right hon. Friend talked fantastically and ridiculed the idea of setting a single interest rate for the whole Community. Does he agree that people who insist on the beneficial effect of a single market will probably insist that that may well be the aim? They will claim that without it there will not be the great level playing field for competition that they crave.

Mr. Davies: That may indeed be the case. I am not clear in my own mind whether the European central bank will fix one interest rate or more than one. I presume that it will fix one for the whole area. We talk about a single currency, but if we get to 1999 and only two or three countries—France, Germany and Luxembourg—have met the necessary criteria, we shall not have a single currency. We may have something called the euro, which is merely one currency in a very large area. That, too, creates problems.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney has been in correspondence with the Prime Minister and the President of the Commission regarding one of the other convergence criteria—membership of something called the European monetary system. Clearly, my right hon. Friend will deal with the matter in another debate and I do not want to steal his thunder, even if I could. I simply ask the Paymaster General what is happening to that criterion.

Mr. Iain Duncan-Smith (Chingford): It has disappeared.

Mr. Davies: It has not disappeared, because it is mentioned in the treaty. I am a pedantic lawyer, and I believe in law, words and treaties. I do not think that treaties should be torn up. Article 109j refers to

"the observance of the normal fluctuation margins provided by the exchange-rate mechanism of the European Monetary System, for at least two years, without devaluing against the currency of any other Member State".

In reply to my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister said that he did not know what had happened to it. Jacques Santer does not seem to know either.

Mr. Duncan-Smith: It has gone.

Mr. Davies: It cannot have gone; it is in the treaty. We can make it go if we wish, but only by amending the treaty. The Commission does not know what to do. Presumably, the embryo bank does not know either, but it has to produce reports on the basis of those criteria.

Articles about the European Union tell me that it is based on the rule of law. Indeed, in Luxembourg a splendid building—the European Court of Justice—was built to the rule of law. It has an Advocate General, judges, rapporteur judges, registrars and a legal secretariat. It is a veritable empire of the rule of law.

There is clearly a problem, because in 1988 neither the Commission nor anyone else will know what to do about this criterion.

Mr. Legg: That is what they want.

Mr. Davies: That cannot be so, because the treaty must be based on the rule of law. Treaties have to be interpreted, and the only body that can tell us whether a criterion has been met must be the European Court of Justice. When the European Union sought to come to an agreement with the European Free Trade Association, the first agreement was thrown out by the European Court of Justice. In fact, the Commission asked the court to give a declaratory judgment. I am sure that in the continental system it is perfectly possible to get a declaratory judgment. I suggest to the Paymaster General that the Government would be doing everyone a favour by sending the matter to the European Court of Justice for a declaratory judgment as to whether this criterion is in or out.

Mr. Legg: The point that the right hon. Gentleman is making adds to my argument that politicians will seek to interpret the criteria as flexibly as possible. They are not supposed to, but that is what they will want to do. What sort of judgment does the right hon. Gentleman think is likely from the European Court of Justice, when part of its objective is to achieve ever closer union?

Mr. Davies: I do not know—perhaps we should reserve that matter for another occasion. I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but I am merely trying to be helpful to the Government. The poor Prime Minister does not know, Jacques Santer does not know—nobody knows. The people who should know, however, are the judges in the European Court of Justice.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the judges in the European Court of Justice frequently disagree among themselves? In a recent case, Advocate General Karl-Otto Lenz offered a 23-page opinion that was totally rejected by his fellow judges. That is not all that uncommon.

Mr. Davies: My hon. Friend is not a lawyer, and I can see that he is not an expert on European law. If he were,

he would know that the judges are separate from the Advocate General. The Advocate General is a concept imported from the French system; I believe the French translation of Advocate General in the conseil d'état is "the Government commissar". From time to time, the court overturns decisions from the Advocate General, but the contrary has mainly been the case in the past 20 years.

Let us not digress, however. All I am saying is that we should give these guys a chance, as it is their job to tell us whether the criteria apply or not.

Mr. Marlow: The convergence cri[illegible]re set out in a protocol. The right hon. Gentleman [illegible] be aware of protocol 6, which says:

"The Council shall, acting unanimously . . . lay down the details of the convergence criteria . . . which shall then replace this Protocol."

How does the right hon. Gentleman react to that?

Mr. Davies: I do not understand that very well, either. Perhaps that is a subsidiary question that we could send at the same time to the Court of Justice for the judges to answer. The Paymaster General should consider that the only body within this troika of institutions—the Council of Ministers, the Commission and the Parliament—that can adjudicate is the court.

Finally, I find it quite extraordinary that, in an age when the slogan very often is "Power to the people", when politicians are held in considerable disrespect, when people feel that they are losing power and when we have a global economy, we are debating proposals that would entrench undemocratic power in various institutions. I should have thought that, as politicians, our concern should be that there is a gap developing between us and the public. This proposal would merely make it worse, as it removes all hope from general elections and all possibility of democratic change. I do not know what the Paymaster General can do on the matter, because it is law already. Perhaps he could send that to the European Court as well.

11.7 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): The time is late, and I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for keeping you up late, as I know how hard you work. On the other hand, I usually turn up at this time, first because Governments usually do nasty things after 10 pm, and secondly because I find that the gentlemen of the press who often report these matters have all gone home, despite the fact that something rather devious is happening.

It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies). He is an optimist, whereas I, as he knows, am very much a pessimist. The issue he raised is fundamental—what happens in 1998 if we have to find new criteria? If we look at the treaty, we see that every member state that wanted to join apparently had to have fixed exchange rates for two years. We were told that that was irreversible, but we know now that it has been totally scrapped.

Article 6 of the protocol on page 218 of the treaty states that if we want to create new criteria, we must do it by unanimity. To that extent, it would appear that Britain has some kind of veto. But I can honestly say to the right hon. Gentleman—whose attendance and commitment I never doubt—that Members who think that that is the case can forget it.

I received a letter this morning from the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, whom I asked a question on that point in a debate that we had some weeks ago. I asked what will happen when we come to consider the issue of new criteria, and my hon. Friend replied in her letter that the

"Heads of Government will decide in spring 1998"

which countries qualify. Basically, she said that as the exchange rate mechanism no longer operates within the same bands as it did when the treaty was drafted, it is not clear how the criteria may be interpreted, but the Government do not believe that we need an interpretation now.

When 1998 comes, it will not be a case of unanimity for new criteria. Member states will sit around and decide. Britain will not have a veto: no country will have a veto. As happens time after time, hon. Members think that they have been given assurances. They think that something is in writing, and that they can go to the courts, but basically it is all a dead loss.

I am sorry that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is not present. We had a debate on economic and monetary union on a Wednesday morning—we talked of nothing else—but, sadly, the Chancellor was unable to attend. I am told that he is busy in the mornings. Now we are having another debate on a vital issue. I should have thought that the Chancellor could be present. While I have immense respect for the Paymaster General, I feel that the House deserves some factual guidance on issues such as this.

My constituents thought that they were voting for someone who would support Conservative policies. No doubt people who voted for Opposition Members—respected Members, when they stood for election—thought that they were voting for Labour economic policies.

Mr. Jenkin: And the same applies to Liberal Democrats.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am sure it does. They have some policies on this, as on everything else.

Article 103 shows us the position in regard to economic policy. Broad guidelines for all member states are laid down, on advice from the Commission, by the majority of the Council of Ministers. The purpose is to check on whether Britain is following the guidelines. Nothing could be clearer: if we do not do so, we shall get a rocket from the Commission. That is set out clearly in paragraph 4.

I am sure that the Minister will not say this, because he is one of the honest guys, but other Ministers might say, "Do not worry about it. It is just guidance." However, whether people vote Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, Scottish National party, Communist, Trotskyite or anything else, the economic policy of the UK Government must be in accordance with broad guidelines laid down by the Council on the advice of the Commission. People should be told what is happening.

I wish to blazes that, instead of sending the Commission this ridiculous Red Book, the Government would give some idea of the damage being done to the

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

United Kingdom by European Union policies. What has happened to our trade as a result of EU membership? Is it or is it not true that, since we joined the EU, where we used to have a positive balance of trade, our accumulated deficit is now £100,000 million? That is a vast amount, and great damage has been done to the UK economy, not through our fault but because of the burdens that we have had to incur.

When will the Government tell us the truth about the common agricultural policy? They have put lovely words in the Red Book, saying that expenditure is up this year and they are sorry about it, but there are balancing items. Is it or is it not true that the cost of the CAP this year—1996—is £9,000 million more than it was in 1994? That is a massive increase. Time and again, stupid Agriculture Ministers—along with people speaking at party meetings, and even Liberal Democrats at their conferences—say that reform is upon us and the cost is falling. The plain fact is that it is going up and up.

I was appalled to see in the Red Book—I do not think that we can possibly send this to the Commission—that contributions this year will unfortunately be higher, although they will be lower thereafter. I have seen Red Books for about 31 years. Every year in which we have been in the EU people have said, "Unfortunately, the position is worse this year, but do not worry—it will be better next year." It is like the Bob Marley song: "Don't you worry about anything baby, because everything's going to be all right."

This year, the figure will be £2.89 billion—£5 every week for every family. If the Government send the Red Book without revealing the damage that the EU is doing to Britain, they will not be giving an honest assessment.

My last point concerns the massive burden on Britain of all the directives. I am honestly sick—and I have been here for 31 years—of hearing Ministers say that the burden of EU administration is going down, that it is less this year than it was the year before and it is going to be even less next year. We know the facts. We have seen the superb pamphlet produced by some of my hon. Friends, which points out the dangers to the economy of that mass of legislation.

I wish that the Labour party, most of whose members I honestly respect as good, hard-working people, and the Conservatives—who are indeed waking up—would start to ask themselves, "What the blazes are we doing to our people?" What about the poor people of France, where extra unemployment is being created every day because of a mad policy of artificial exchange rates?

If only we had more Ministers like my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General—who, in all sincerity, is one of the good guys—instead of some of the twits on both sides of the House, who would tell people the truth. Is it true that our economic policy is now guided by Europe, no matter who people vote for? Is the cost of the common agricultural policy going through the roof? Is it true that our country is being damaged and that our poor friends in Europe are suffering? Is it true that, no matter what hon. Members think, they can control, when 1998 comes, a little group of Ministers will decide who goes forward to economic and monetary union? It is time we played straight and told the truth and it is time that the nation woke up.

11.15 pm

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): This debate has been worth attending if only to hear the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) quote Bob Marley.

I shall deal first with the domestic economy and then monetary union and convergence. Whatever the Minister says, Britain is foundering a long way from the economic miracle proclaimed by the Government and of which the Paymaster General invited us to be proud. Inward investment last year was only 40 per cent. of its 1989 peak. The tiger economies are growing by 8 per cent. while Britain averaged 7.1 per cent. in non-oil growth between 1979 and 1993—the worst growth record of any post-war Government.

When the Tories say that we have never had it so good, the trouble is that many of our competitors are having it much better. Our growth is lower than was predicted last year; business investment is half what was predicted last year; borrowing is higher than was predicted last year and tax revenues are falling.

Mr. Jenkin: Why is it that, whenever Labour spokesmen get the opportunity to discuss the real issues of economic and monetary union, they want to talk about something else?

Mr. O'Brien: As I said, I will come to Labour's position on EMU in some detail. I realise that the hon. Gentleman will not be interested in the damage that has been done to the British economy—the loss of jobs and businesses, the way in which our economy has been undermined by the Government—because he does not have a fundamental concern for the British people or the economy.

Let us consider the claim by the Conservatives that Britain is the enterprise capital of Europe. There are 15 countries in the EC. How well does the UK measure up to its competitors?

Mr. Budgen: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Brien: I shall give way after I have told the House how Britain fares. On growth, Tory Britain is the third slowest-growing economy in Europe. On inflation, Tory Britain has the fifth highest figure after Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece. On long-term interest rates, Tory Britain has the sixth highest in the EC, which reflects our weak economy and lack of investment. Tory Britain has a trade deficit in manufacturing—a tragedy for a manufacturing economy.

Tory Britain has the lowest proportion of young people aged between 15 and 24 in education in Europe. On unemployment, Tory Britain has the seventh highest unemployment level overall and the fourth highest for men. On job growth, Tory Britain has the fifth lowest over the period 1979 to 1994. On investment, in Tory Britain investment per head is the fourth lowest in the European Union. On prosperity, GDP per capita is the ninth lowest in Europe. Britain in the wider world has fallen from 13th to 18th place in the international prosperity league.

Mr Budgen *rose*

Mr O'Brien: I give way to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) so that he can deal with that indictment of the Tory Government and their record in Europe.

Mr. Budgen: Would the hon. Gentleman concede that there has been a clear division in the Government's economic policy between what happened before 16 September 1992 and what has happened since? For about two years, there was an extremely harsh squeeze, when the money supply dived down to a very low level and a great number of businesses went to the wall. Things have locked up enormously since then. The economy has expanded and the money supply has been allowed to expand somewhat—some would argue, too much—recently. But we have had a period of sustained growth and falling unemployment and most people make a clear division between those two periods.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is making his third speech this evening.

Mr. O'Brien: I accept what the hon. Member says. There are divisions in the Government and in Government policy. After all, the Prime Minister, as Chancellor, brought Britain into the exchange rate mechanism, presumably a policy that the hon. Gentleman would condemn. Consider the way in which the Prime Minister has been running the economy, with 1 million fewer people in employment since he became Prime Minister.

The Red Book discloses Britain's economic recovery. It was so precarious that the Chancellor had little room for manoeuvre on tax cuts in the Budget. He ended up with a combination of a penny off income tax and putting £9.5 billion on borrowing next year. The public sector borrowing requirement forecast for 1995-96 has been revised upwards from £23.5 billion in the Treasury summer forecast and from £21.5 billion in the Budget before last. It is now £6.5 billion higher than expected in 1995-96, at £29 billion. It will be £9.5 billion higher than expected in 1996-97, and £10 billion higher in 1997-98.

The reason that the economy is in such difficulties is clear. Throughout the past 16 years, the Conservatives have neglected investment, squandered the proceeds of North sea oil and, in a display of boom and bust economics, put us into the two worst recessions since the war. That in turn has damaged the ability of industry to respond to recovery.

The Budget forecast for investment growth in 1995 is now 1 per cent. The recovery—such as it was—is in danger. It was based upon an export-led drive, fuelled by a—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is clear that the hon. Gentleman at the Dispatch Box is not giving way.

Mr. O'Brien: I may give way a little later, but not at the moment.

The recovery was fuelled by a 20 per cent. devaluation of the pound, following our ignominious withdrawal from the ERM, but there is still a limit to how long we can run an economy on devaluing our currency.

The Government have not dealt with some of the long-term problems of the British economy. They have just put off resolving them until after the next election, when Labour will have to deal with them. It is the ordinary families of Britain that the Government have really let down—the workers on the assembly line or in the office. For them, right-wing economics has too often meant few or no wage rises in the name of competitiveness, job insecurity to make labour flexible and the fraying of the safety net. Middle and lower-income people are spending more hours working, less time with their children and bringing home an income inadequate to meet housing and other costs. They saw the Government impose the biggest tax hike this century in the year after the 1992 elections, beating even Geoffrey Howe's 1981 Budget when personal allowances were not indexed.

The overall tax burden will be 36.5 per cent. next year, up from 34.75 per cent. in 1992—more than when Labour left office. It is forecast to rise each year until the end of the century, reaching 37.5 per cent. by 2000. That is the burden of Tory failure paid by the British people.

Mr. Marlow: I wonder whether we could get back to the topic of the debate. This is a major constitutional debate about economic and monetary union.

Could the hon. Gentleman say why his party, which is going to turn the constitution of the United Kingdom upside down, totally ignores the major constitutional issue of the day, which is the powers that we have already transferred to Brussels and the powers that would be transferred to Brussels if those on the Labour Front Bench had their way and transferred our currency, sovereignty, control over our exchange rates and interest rates and control over taxation? Will the hon. Member come to the point and tell us what he thinks about it, what he would do about it and why his party is going down a narrow road on constitutional issues and missing out that major constitutional point? It will not be missed out when the election comes.

Mr. O'Brien: I wished to rise before the hon. Member completely lost his cool. The position of the Labour party on European economic and monetary union is quite clear. We approve the principle of economic and monetary union, but we have questions about the practicalities which still need to be resolved. In principle, Labour believes that in the longer term a move towards economic and monetary union through the creation of a single currency will produce significant benefits for the people of Britain and Europe.

In particular, a single currency would remove the cost of currency transactions, which have been variously estimated. It is hoped that it would boost inward investment by reducing exchange rate risks and, in the longer term, would create a more stable economic environment for industry by reducing currency speculation.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. O'Brien: Unlike the Government, the Labour party has a clear principle to guide it when it assesses the criteria for and practicalities of entry into a single currency. We must get the circumstances right, and that is

[Mr. O'Brien]

what is important for us. Labour will take a hard-headed, businesslike view of the costs and benefits of a single currency. Wrongly approached, a single currency could damage the British economy.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cash: What a sham.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman does not like what he is listening to, he can go outside and have a rest. In the Chamber, hon. Members will listen to any contribution from any hon. Member. Those who do not like it can go elsewhere.

Mr. O'Brien: I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We should not have this catcall of "Give way." The hon. Gentleman has told the House that he will give way a little later. I suggest that hon. Members wait until that point.

Mr. O'Brien: Labour's criteria for judging the issue are clear. We believe that convergence of the real economic performance of member states is a vital precondition of economic and monetary union. Convergence must be based on improved levels of growth, jobs and productivity, and not just on monetary objectives alone. That is why we have long argued that the Maastricht convergence criteria need to be applied flexibly and that real economic convergence is of primary importance.

Labour also believes that, on entry, we should be confident that British industry will be able to compete effectively in a single currency. Further, Labour wants the Economic and Finance Council of Ministers to be developed as the political counterpart of the proposed European central bank to give the public a voice in shaping economic policies.

We also say that the move towards a single currency must be based on the consent of the British people, whether that consent be given by referendum or by general election. What is necessary is to ensure that popular consent is present. A referendum is one means of obtaining consent, but it is not a substitute for government. The Government must lead, and they must have a principled view on that issue. The Government lack a view and clear principles on that issue and, as a result of the divisions in the Government, they are becoming isolated and marginalised in Europe.

Labour's first commitment in Europe is to jobs for our people. We back the Swedish proposal to write into the Maastricht treaty a clearer commitment to full employment. Labour's vision is not of a Europe just for bureaucrats or politicians. Our view is of a Europe that is a community for ordinary people. We want workers to have better rights at work., and that is why we will sign the social chapter and join our European partners in introducing a minimum wage. We are proud of that policy. We want the unemployed to have jobs, and that is why we put economic convergence before monetary criteria for joining the EMU.

Labour has a clear vision of the sort of Europe that we want to create. We oppose any unitary, federalist or centralised European state. We seek co-operation between member states in a common enterprise. We want power decentralised through subsidiarity, and we reject the idea that the European Union is a threat to our culture, language or character.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. O'Brien: We have a firm belief that Britain will not only hold its own in the European Union—

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You assured us a few minutes ago that, as a consequence of a pledge given earlier by the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), he would give way. He is obviously approaching the end of his speech and he has not yet honoured that pledge. Do you think that you could encourage him to give way at least once?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I did not assure anyone that there was any promise of the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) giving way. I said that the hon. Gentleman might give way later. It is entirely up to the hon. Gentleman whether he chooses to give way, and to whom.

Sir Peter Tapsell: I invite the hon. Gentleman to give way just once.

Mr. O'Brien: I gave way to the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), but as the hon. Member for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell) is so persistent, and I am generous, I will give way to him.

Sir Peter Tapsell: I am most grateful. The hon. Gentleman has made an interesting speech and he said that the Labour party was in favour, in principle, of economic and monetary union, but had many difficulties about the practicalities. He went on to spell out some of those difficulties. It is perfectly clear from what he said that those difficulties could be overcome only if the Maastricht treaty was substantially renegotiated. Is he saying that a future Labour Government would seek to renegotiate substantially that treaty?

Mr. O'Brien: Our position relates to the criteria on which we will judge moving forward on European economic and monetary union. The hon. Gentleman should heed the following words:

"There is no more important issue facing the European Community than the path we choose towards economic and monetary union. We are all committed to this goal."

That is what the Prime Minister said. The hon. Member for East Lindsey should also take note of the following words:

"No truly unified market can exist without a single currency. A close association of monetary policies will be needed if the single market itself is not to be put at risk."

That is what the Deputy Prime Minister said. Is that Conservative policy? Hon. Members may shake their heads, so let me put five clear questions to the Government and the Paymaster General, which he can consider in the White Paper that he is trying to put together.

First, do the Government agree with the Chancellor, who said that a single currency is not

"a threat to the nation state"?

Secondly, do they think, like the Deputy Prime Minister, that a single market needs a single currency? Thirdly, can they say whether, in the unlikely event of them being re-elected, a single currency will be a possibility in the next Parliament, given that the economic conditions are right? Fourthly, if the economic conditions were right, would they in principle be in favour of persuading the country that it was right to join a single currency? Fifthly, are they prepared to agree with the following statement:

"Some observers hope—and others fear—that economic and monetary union as set out in the Maastricht Treaty will be a step in the direction of a federal Europe . . . I believe that such . . . fears are unrealistic."

Do they agree with that statement by the Prime Minister? I do not think they do. I do not think that they know what they want. I do not think they know where they are going.

The country needs principle and direction. It will get it from a Labour Government, and it will not get it until we have one.

11.32 pm

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) has asked me five questions. I will answer all of them if he will give me a clear answer to any one of them in return. As those on the Opposition Front Bench are in the biggest muddle about their approach to economic and monetary union, I will instead endeavour to answer the points raised earlier in the debate.

All we had from the hon. Member for North Warwickshire was a Budget speech, which he read out at great speed, interlaced with some highly dubious international comparisons. Any responsible international comparisons use dates that are comparable in the economic cycle, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) said. If one takes the years 1981 to 1993, a complete economic cycle, the United Kingdom grew almost as fast as Germany and faster than France, Italy and the European Union average.

My main purpose in the few minutes remaining to me is to endeavour to answer the points raised. The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) asked a few questions that have been echoed elsewhere in the House. In particular, he asked whether the information that we are providing to the European Commission could be used against us to require policy changes. He asked whether the fact that European economic policy is a matter of concern between member states imposes an obligation on us.

For many years, the economic policies of the constituent parts of the common market—now the single market—were a matter of concern. That concern dates back to the days when the right hon. Gentleman was a member of the previous Labour Government. Indeed, a council decision of 1974 provided a mechanism to strengthen economic convergence, and it has been developed over the years.

In fact, the Single European Act added an article with respect to economic and monetary co-operation. In turn, that led to the multilateral surveillance arrangements, about which I think the right hon. Gentleman was complaining. It is true that these can, and do, result in recommendations from the Council of Ministers to the United Kingdom. If my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) objects to that, I am afraid that I cannot meet his objection.

However, I assure my hon. Friend and the House that the recommendations do not tie the Government, as is made clear in the treaty. Article 189 of the treaty states:

"Recommendations and opinions shall have no binding force."

That is an important distinction. Of course, that is true only of stage 2 of the economic and monetary union. It is also true that if we were to move to stage 3, the recommendations become binding in the way that they are set out in the treaty.

Mr. Shore: With respect, I believe that there is a distinction which the hon. Gentleman has not got quite right. It is true that severe penalties could be imposed upon us in stage 3 if we break the rules of the Community. In stage 2, there is provision for the Commission and the Council to recommend by a qualified majority vote to take a number of actions which could be to the disadvantage of the member states, particularly the United Kingdom. For example, they could make it plain that they condemn different aspects of Government policy, when they know very well what effect that would have on the international financial markets.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: These communications have not exceeded that status of a recommendation, and as such they are not binding upon us. I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to such a recommendation, which related to the excessive deficit procedure, and which was received in July of last year. We can accept the recommendation because it simply stated that the United Kingdom should adhere firmly to its current budgetary policies. The council also took note of the policy of strict control of public expenditure and stressed that this should continue to be implemented. These recommendations are not binding, but they are to be welcomed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) complained about the rigour with which the convergence criteria were being applied, and the damage which he said was being caused to the economies of Germany and France. He also complained about the laxity with which the criteria were being applied and interpreted elsewhere. Indeed, he would not have been pleased to hear from the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) that the Labour party believes in a lax and liberal interpretation of those criteria.

The main point I wish to make is that the four listed criteria—inflation, long-term interest rates, deficits and exchange rate stability—are set out in the treaty. The treaty also refers to other factors which may be taken into account, such as the balance of payments, the development of unit labour costs and the development of a single market.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I have only three minutes in which to complete the debate.

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

There is an important point there because Conservative Members know that labour market flexibility, which is not specifically laid out in the treaty but is a subject of growing interest to those who debate those matters, is a crucial ingredient in, and possibly an impediment to, the introduction of stage 3 of economic and monetary union.

In a single currency zone, the adjustment mechanisms of exchange rates and interest rates are removed or would be given up by the participating member states, so the strain of adjusting for different rates of development in different parts of the single currency area must be taken by the wage-price mechanism unless there are to be compensatory flows of structural funds, which undoubtedly would be beyond the scope of the present European budget to finance. It follows that the flexibility and responsiveness of markets is an important element in any decision that might be taken by this or any other Government whether to move to stage 3 of EMU.

The crucial fact to bear in mind is that we have an opt-out. We are not committed; we can watch the development and the unfolding of the implications without being committed.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I do respect my right hon. Friend's interest in the subject, but he must forgive me because of shortage of time.

I shall try to reply briefly to a couple of arguments made by the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies). There is nothing sinister about the fact that the general Government financial deficit is included in the Red Book. That is a widely used international measure, and it is included not simply at the behest of the European Commission. As regards the outturn for 1995, it is true that our accounting is on a financial year basis and most of the European Union accounts on a calendar year basis. In fact the figures are available, and the one that the right hon. Gentleman seeks will be published by the Central Statistical Office next month.

The right hon. Gentleman asked whether the fact that we are not members of the exchange rate mechanism alters the criteria that we or any other member state must fulfil to move to stage 3. It is true that the exchange rate mechanism no longer operates in the way foreseen when the treaty—

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents).*

The House divided: Ayes 75, Noes 11.

Division No. 51] **[11.42 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Cash, William
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Devlin, Tim
Duncan, Alan
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
French, Douglas
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lidington, David
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Merchant, Piers
Neubert, Sir Michael
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Waller, Gary
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Bates and
Mr. Gary Streeter.

NOES

Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Chidgey, David
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Godman, Dr Norman A
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
Rendel, David
Salmond, Alex
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nigel Spearing and
Mr. Harry Barnes.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note with approval of the Government's assessment as set out in the Finance Statement and Budget Report 1996–97 for the purposes of section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993.

TRADING SCHEMES BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Trading Schemes Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under the Fair Trading Act 1973.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

M5 Widening (Whittington)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

11.53 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): I am glad to have the opportunity to raise this subject, which is of great importance to my constituents, who are directly affected by it.

Since its widening near junction 7, noise levels from the M5 have often been intolerable at the village of Whittington. They are also a problem for other Worcestershire residents. For example, at Harvington, similar noise problems have resulted from the construction of a bypass. I am aware of the keen interest of my hon. Friend the Member for South Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer) in that issue. The House may understand why I am closely following events at Harvington.

The systematic failure of the Highways Agency to act on the issue of noise, which is apparent at Whittington and Harvington, must not be repeated in other road-building projects. We need new roads and road widening, but the case for those roads will be weakened if events at Whittington and Harvington are repeated.

Often it is only complaints that come to the Floor of the House, so I shall begin with tributes. My first is to the Minister and to those in his private office for their close personal interest in the matter. I am sorry that the Minister's only reward is to be dragged here tonight at this uncivilised hour, but that is politics.

Secondly, I pay tribute to the chief executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, who recently visited Whittington to see the situation for himself. As luck would have it, he chose the quietest day for about a year. Thirdly, to be fair to the Highways Agency, I pay tribute to it for the spectacular success of the widening project, the side effects of which we are discussing tonight.

What genius originally designed the M5 through my constituency as a two-lane highway, I do not know. Holidaymakers and business traffic from the south-west to the midlands and the north, and vice versa, came to regard the two-lane section as one of the worst experiences known to drivers in the United Kingdom. Increasing congestion and tailbacks made the widening project essential. It has transformed journeys for the better. It was completed ahead of schedule and significantly below budget—an important point for my hon. Friend the Minister to consider. The congestion that obtained on the M5 deterred use of the motorway, as other routes were found by those who had to make the journey from north to south, and reduced speeds. It is logical that widening has increased use and speeds, with serious consequences for my constituents who live near the motorway.

Tonight I intend to concentrate on issues for the Highways Agency, not the issue of cash compensation for the loss in property values that resulted from the noise, which is a matter for the district valuers. However, it is fair to record in parenthesis the dissatisfaction of the people of Whittington with the approach of the district valuer. He seems—I realise that this may be an uncharitable interpretation—to have sought to pick off those whom he could get to settle for low sums first and use them as precedents for future settlements. I believe that some people have settled for ridiculously low sums as a result.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will bear that aspect in mind. The many tenants of the local housing association who live in Whittington are, of course, not eligible for compensation and neither cash compensation nor secondary glazing can insulate a garden or restore the semi-rural calm of a village.

Tonight I want to do two things—to describe what has happened and to seek an undertaking from the Minister to settle the facts of the resultant noise increase by persuading the Highways Agency to measure the noise over a sustained period. We shall then know who is right and who is wrong. To me, it is a simple matter of common sense that the villagers are right, but I accept the need for proof, which the agency has so far been unable or unwilling to provide.

I have been able to pursue this case only because two particularly diligent residents have procured and used their own noise meters, which have consistently proved the Highways Agency wrong. The story of the noise impact on Whittington village is a catalogue of errors and omissions by the agency. For example—there are shades here of British Rail's handling of the early channel tunnel rail link plans—when it did its initial work, the agency did not include on its plans houses that were already built.

The motorway was widened using the so-called parallel widening technique. The need for some noise mitigation measures was always recognised, and the original plans allowed for an intermittent small mound on the old carriageway, which was made redundant as a result of the widening technique used.

The calculation method used by the agency led its noise consultants to conclude that the measures would dramatically reduce noise levels at Whittington from the pre-widening level of about 60 dB to a post-widening level of about 56 dB. In a letter to one of my constituents written on 8 July 1992, during the construction of the widened motorway, the agency stated:

"when the motorway widening is complete the traffic will be further away from your property and a noise reduction mound will have been built along the end of Berkeley Close. Although the amount of traffic will increase, the effect will be a reduction in noise".

How wrong can one be?

During construction, residents expressed concerns about the likely effectiveness of the proposed measures and the agency agreed to use spare rubble to make the proposed intermittent mound, into a continuous one from the A422 to 80 m from the so-called Church farm overbridge, where there was no room for a mound as there was no redundant carriageway.

In fact, a letter from the agency dated 30 September 1993 suggested that this extension was undertaken at the request of the Department. If so, I am grateful for its early interest. It also said—this is an important point to bear in mind in my later remarks—that any further extension

"would be too remote . . . to make any further difference to noise levels."

Thousands of tons of rubble were generated by the works, which sadly were often dumped where there were no houses to protect. That could all too easily have been used to protect Whittington with a much more effective bund at little or no extra cost, but that opportunity has

[Mr. Peter Luff]

been lost. As I drove along the widened section of the M5 on Saturday night, I looked at what seemed to be much higher bunds protecting much smaller communities than Whittington.

After the opening of the widened motorway, noise levels in Whittington went up sharply. The response of the agency was simply to refuse to believe my constituents. The 80 m gap that it said would be left was in fact 200 m—a huge miscalculation that the agency could not explain.

Months of lobbying got the agency to come back to measure noise levels for the first time. That was finally agreed at a site meeting on 17 December 1993. Representatives of the agency who came to the meeting were visibly surprised by the level of noise in Whittington. The meeting enabled us to settle a number of important misunderstandings—for example, that the road is in a cutting at this point, which it is not. The agency also accepted that the road surface was considerably higher than it was pre-widening, which it had consistently denied. In my view, that increased height is a major factor in the increased noise levels.

The promised monitoring took place between 20 and 26 January 1994. It happened only because two of my constituents—Barrie Redding and Stuart Cottam—borrowed a crude noise meter and did the agency's work for it, hanging from bedroom windows and touring the village with the meter.

Over a week—once again, sadly and inevitably, a quiet week because of weather conditions—the metering survey was conducted. The Highways Agency at last accepted that its original predictions were grossly inaccurate. One official said: "Off the record, we made a horrible mistake." That mistake was discovered only because of the diligence and perseverance of my constituents.

A decision was rightly taken to mitigate retrospectively rather than to undertake wholesale insulation of the village. Obviously, that was the preferable solution. Gardens cannot be insulated. Reducing the noise levels overall is the preferred solution for my constituents.

On 15 April 1994, the agency wrote:

"The result of these calculations is that in the Church Lane-Berkeley Close area noise levels can be returned to their pre-widening levels (or better) by the erection of a 3 metre high noise fence for 250 metres northwards from the overbridge and this is what we now propose."

At this point, the agency formally apologised for its errors, and gave this undertaking:

"We shall seek to rectify the situation as indicated as soon as we can."

The House will understand the fury of local residents when they read in the *Worcester Evening News* on Tuesday 6 February, when news of this Adjournment debate became public, that a spokesman for the Highways Agency had said to that newspaper the previous day:

"We remain to be convinced the noise levels are worse than prewidening. The motorway was widened away from the village."

From what I have already said, the House will know that the agency has conceded that noise levels are higher than pre-widening, both in writing and at private meetings. It would not have done the inadequate things it has done if that spokesman was right.

In a letter to me on 16 June 1995, my hon. Friend the Minister said:

"The Highways Agency has accepted that the original noise calculations were an under-estimate".

What on earth, or who on earth, did that spokesman consult? How incompetent can an agency get? It has formally conceded that noise levels are at or around 66 dB, and that pre-widening levels were around 60 dB. My constituents maintain, with good evidence, that noise levels are actually much higher. Is it any wonder that my constituents are so cynical about the agency's intentions?

The agency has since proposed merely to fill in the gap with fencing at the point where it originally said that there was no room for a mound and that a mound would have no effect. It said that that would reduce noise levels in the whole village to pre-widening levels or better. That conflicting advice came from the same individual in the agency. Confronting the agency with its conflicting advice led it to accept that the new proposal would be inadequate. Residents of Whittington came to the conclusion that the agency was trying to fob them off, and who can blame them?

Eventually, the agency settled on a further proposal: an extra fence on top of the 2 m bund and the 3 m noise fence in the gap. That measure was installed only after much and totally unacceptable delay. The reasons for the delay are well documented, and as they are not central to the debate I shall not labour them. The Minister will understand, however, how the delay has infuriated my constituents.

Although the villagers felt that the new proposal would also be inadequate, the agency said that it would assess its efficacy. At a meeting, the director of the motorway widening unit promised that more work would be done if the fence was ineffective. My hon. Friend the Minister said in a letter to me on 23 August:

"The best way forward now is for the Agency to erect the additional noise fence and wait to see its efficacy."

On 18 October 1994, almost a year earlier, Mr. Oddy of the Highways Agency, had written:

"Let us get the mitigation in place"—

it took a year to get it in place—

"if there is doubt after that about the extent of immediate and future noise reduction we can consider repeating the noise metering we did before, and further mitigation if that seems justified"

Only one inference can be drawn from those statements: if the measures are inadequate, more will be done.

The villagers wanted a 5 m fence throughout, but were restricted to 3 m because of the agency's concern not to spoil their view. If only the agency were as concerned about noise as it is about my constituents' view. The fence has finally been erected, many months late. Not surprisingly, there has been no reduction in noise levels.

The final straw is the new refusal of the agency to honour previous commitments to monitor the situation, which were clearly implied in meetings and ministerial correspondence. On 1 November, my hon. Friend the Minister, presumably on the advice of the agency, wrote to me to say that the result of the work would not be monitored. He said:

"The Noise Insulation regulations require that predicted noise levels are assessed (by calculation) . . . not by noise measurement."

In other words, not only will previous commitments not be honoured by the agency, but the methodology that will settle the whole matter is the one that failed to predict

noise levels accurately in the first place. Since the amelioration measures were put in place, further noise measurements with more sophisticated noise meters conducted by my constituents have found very high noise levels—often reaching 70 dB and higher.

I recently attended a special meeting at Whittington village hall organised by the parish council, which was attended by 50 people from 40 households. Many apologies for absence were made. As the total number of residents on the electoral roll is 427, that is an extremely high turnout for a Saturday morning. The summary of a note read to that meeting says it all:

"we are the victims of a horrible mistake by the highways agency. They have now had two attempts at effective noise mitigation measures and have failed miserably both times."

My constituents are no longer prepared to settle for the promise of further amelioration measures. They require—I hope that the Minister can promise it in his speech—a sustained measurement of the noise levels in their village to prove who is right and who is wrong. A return to pre-widening noise levels across their village remains their ambition, and rightly so. All I ask is for a repeat of the January 1994 exercise, but for rather more than a week. I would suggest a month, and in varying meteorological conditions—relating to both wind direction and atmospheric pressure. After all my constituents have been through, I also hope that there will a reasonably generous interpretation of any results.

I hope that the agency will then act on the spirit of the findings and not necessarily the letter of the law. Involving in advance the parish council with the methodology will be crucial to its eventual acceptance by my constituents. They want to know that the chances of the monitoring being done during a freak quiet period are minimised.

My hon. Friend the Minister and his office have been consistently helpful to me throughout the whole sorry episode. I very much regret the fact that he has been called to the House tonight to answer for the errors of the Highways Agency, which has failed completely in its duty to my constituents. Such failures will lead to more resistance to bypasses and to widening schemes. It is essential to sort out this mess once and for all.

12.9 am

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I thank, or at least congratulate, my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) for raising this issue and for his kind words about my private office. I am aware that my hon. Friend has taken a keen interest in the matter since the widening of the M5 was completed. He has with his usual diligence taken up the case on behalf of his constituents at Whittington.

His constituents are concerned that the volume of traffic noise has increased since the completion of the widening of the M5 between Warndon and Strensham in 1993. I sympathise greatly with the concerns of local people because I know that excessive traffic noise can be intrusive, although it has to be said that we can never fully eliminate it.

The motorway was widened from two to three lanes between 1991 and 1993 to relieve congestion and enhance road safety along the 13-mile section between Warndon and Strensham. My hon. Friend confirmed how necessary that widening was. As he explained, the widening was carried out by the innovative parallel widening method, whereby one completely new carriageway is built without affecting traffic on the existing motorway. The original carriageway is then converted into the other carriageway of the newly widened motorway. As he said, the new carriageway was built further away from the village, so that, under normal circumstances and assumptions, one would have expected some reduction in noise intrusion. Part of the old carriageway was broken up for an earth mound to be constructed on it.

There was wide consultation with members of the public before the scheme was implemented, and a public inquiry was held. Objections and representations were considered fully and a number of measures were incorporated into the scheme to try to reduce its impact on the environment. We took particular care to try to reduce the impact from noise on the communities by providing earth mounds and fencing and by offering noise insulation. The objective was to limit noise levels as far as possible to the level prevailing before the widening took place, despite the growth in traffic.

To help assess the need for those measures, our consultants calculate the noise likely to be generated by traffic using the widened motorway at a future date, usually 15 years after the road has been opened. This was done by taking the known traffic levels and increasing them to take account of forecast traffic growth. Account is taken of topography and any other barriers to sound that would reduce the noise before calculating the level at, for example, a house close to the road.

The detailed methods used in the calculations are laid down by the noise insulation regulations. Those calculations showed that noise from the new road would be around 56 to 57 dB in the design year of 2008 at the facades of buildings in Church lane, assuming that the mound was built. However, I acknowledge that there was inconsistency in the figures, although the broad range was considered a reasonable indicator. Based on those figures, we provided various noise mounds and fencing, including a noise mound to screen properties in Church lane and Berkeley close near Whittington. We also offered noise insulation to 13 properties in the Whittington area, although some of the offers were declined.

Following the opening of the widened motorway, a number of complaints were made by people living nearby. Officials from the Highways Agency visited the area, and it was clear to them that the actual noise levels were higher than expected. They therefore arranged for measurements to be made, which confirmed that the noise levels were, at around 63 to 66 dB, substantially higher than those calculated, and were expected to increase further by about 1.5 dB 15 years after opening.

It became clear that mistakes had been made in calculating the noise impact of the scheme. Clearly, I regret that. We are pursuing that matter separately with our consultants. Given those new facts, we agreed to increase the length and height of the screening for Church lane and Berkeley close to provide a barrier aimed at screening the properties in Church lane against noise.

The screen now runs for a distance of 733 yd northwards from Church farm overbridge along the motorway. Through a combination of fencing and earth mounding, it is now 3 m—or, as I prefer to say, almost 10 ft—high. The residents had asked for a 6 m, or 19.5 ft, high fence, but I am afraid we could not agree to this,

[Mr. John Watts]

because the cost would have been disproportionate to the benefits that it was predicted to provide. It did take a while to put the work in hand, partly because of the need to obtain planning permission. The work itself was not straightforward. There were delays in obtaining materials of the specified quality. Nevertheless, the work was eventually completed in accordance with the design.

I know that the residents of Whittington remain sceptical about the effects of the noise mitigation measures, in particular the noise fence already provided. In view of the history, one can quite understand why they should be so sceptical. They maintain that, if we had had more accurate noise assessments before construction, we would have increased the height of the bund. At this stage, that has to be regarded as speculative.

However, in view of their continuing concerns, I have—as my hon. Friend has asked in the debate—told the Highways Agency to appoint a firm of independent consultants to carry out a fresh noise survey and to take further noise measurements over a period of four to five weeks. My hon. Friend's request for a one-month survey will be met by that. The survey will establish what the actual noise levels are, and will also honour the undertakings that he said were given previously.

I recognise that the local residents are genuinely concerned that we have not done enough, but I hope that the further work will prove to my hon. Friend and his constituents that we take this seriously. Once the survey results are available, we shall look at all the issues again and decide whether any further action is justified. We shall, of course, let him and the local residents know the outcome of the further surveys.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Tuesday 13 February 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

INHERITANCE TAX

THE VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported Her Majesty's Answer to the Address, as follows:

I have received your Address praying that the Double Taxation Relief, (Taxes on Estates of Deceased Persons and Inheritances of Gifts) (Netherlands) Order 1995 be made in the form of the draft laid before your House.

I will comply with your request.

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

Life Expectancy

1. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average life expectancy in 1979; and what it is currently. [13304]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): Life expectancy in 1979 was 70.4 years for men and 76.5 years for women in England and Wales. By 1993, those figures had risen to 74 years and 79.3 years respectively.

Dr. Spink: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the blessing of a longer life results from two factors: first, Government policy, which has meant that an additional 1.5 million patients have been treated each year, 800 major building projects in hospitals have been brought on board, a greater range of treatments have become available and quality in hospitals has improved; and secondly, the skill and the dedication of nurses, doctors, carers and managers who operate hospitals?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is precisely right. We have seen a dramatic improvement in life expectancy and the quality of life enjoyed by many citizens as a result of the success of the national health service. He is quite right to draw attention to that measure of its success, which is in the end the measure that matters to the patient.

Mr. Galbraith: Is the Minister not aware that life expectancy has improved in every decade this century? Since it improved less in the past decade than in some previous decades, what is so special about the figures?

Mr. Dorrell: I would have hoped that the hon. Gentleman, who has not only worked in the health service but espouses its cause, would have wanted to join an all-party celebration of the success of the NHS.

GP Fundholders

2. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of NHS patients are covered by general practitioner fundholders in the Northern and Yorkshire region. [13305]

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): Forty per cent. of the population in the Northern and Yorkshire region are registered with general practitioner fundholders. We expect that to rise to more than 50 per cent. in April.

Mr. Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that fundholding has driven the way through and enabled greater emphasis on a primary care-led NHS, from which all patients benefit? Is he aware, for example, that one first-wave fundholding practice in my constituency has its own consultant clinic for neurology, which treats patients from other practices, whether fundholding or not? Does that not show just how good the NHS is becoming under the Government, and that the best way to secure it is to vote Conservative at the next election?

Mr. Malone: I disagree with my hon. Friend only in one respect. Voting Conservative is not the best way to secure fundholding GPs under the next Government: it is now the only way, because the Labour party is pledged to abolish fundholding.

My hon. Friend is quite right to cite one example of an improvement in primary care through GP fundholding. I congratulate him on espousing the service. Indeed, I understand that, as recently as 10 days ago, he took the cause to the British Medical Association in Scarborough, where he won by 16 votes to 12 a debate on the question "Is the health service safe in this Government's hands?" despite being opposed by the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley).

Madam Speaker: Order. I must tell the Minister that his comments did not relate to the question. I may shortly have something to say about hon. Members and Ministers who stray far away from the questions on the Order Paper.

Mr. McLeish: Does the Minister acknowledge that, in the Northern and Yorkshire region, a two-tier health system is operating? Will he confirm that the Central Sheffield Universities Hospitals trust provides conclusive evidence that there are two tiers? Cardiology patients of fundholders wait nine weeks, while those of non-fundholders wait 26 weeks. For hip replacements, patients of fundholders wait 12 weeks while those of non-fundholders wait 26 weeks. Can the Minister justify that, or is he saying that fair waiting lists and a one-nation health service have been abandoned for a two-tier health service—a fundamental part of the unacceptable face of Tory health policy?

Mr. Malone: No, I will not attempt to justify those figures, because they are wrong. Had the hon. Gentleman bothered to read his newspapers this week, he would have seen the purchasing authority's precise reply, which stated exactly what happens between fundholders and non-fundholders and in relation to waiting lists. I shall return to that topic in today's debate. The truth is

that non-fundholders' patients are doing marginally better than those of fundholders, so the hon. Gentleman had better be careful when he peddles muddled facts.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Will my hon. Friend give the House an undertaking that he will not give funds to fundholders in the Northern and Yorkshire region, or anywhere else for that matter, towards the costs of surrogate motherhood on the NHS? Does he agree with me that, sad though the circumstances are surrounding the woman in question, the estimated cost of £15,000 would be better spent on other priorities?

Mr. Malone: I understand the point made by my hon. Friend. That matter raises difficult ethical issues. I can tell her that we shall carefully examine the issues which have been raised in the British Medical Association document and look at those which have been raised more widely.

Private Health Market

3. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the growth in the private health market since 1979. [13306]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): The value of the private acute health-care market has increased from an estimated £132 million in 1979 to more than £2 billion in 1994 according to Laing's "Review of Private Healthcare".

Mr. Banks: I cannot recall which party the Minister was in when Margaret Thatcher stood at the Dispatch Box and said that she wanted to make the NHS so good that no one would want to take up private medicine. However, that really has not come about—he has just told us of the enormous growth in the private medicine market. Since Tory reforms, about £1.5 billion has gone out of the NHS to pay for private treatment. Does the Minister accept that that is obscene when people who are waiting for operations can hear radio advertisements which tell them that, if they go private, they can get an operation, and, moreover, that they can borrow the money to pay for it under a finance arrangement? That is obscene, and the Minister should feel ashamed. He has not only let the people of this country down: he has betrayed the words of the blessed Margaret Thatcher.

Mr. Horam: I thought that, these days, the Labour party believed in choice. The hon. Gentleman said in today's *Evening Standard* that he would like to spend his money on skin toners and vitamins. Why are not other people allowed to make their choices and have waiting times cut and their surgery earlier?

Mrs. Roe: Is my hon. Friend aware of the recent Institute of Fiscal Studies report which found that long waiting times for NHS treatments boost the take-up of private health assurance? Does he agree that the dramatic decrease in 12-month waits, from 20 per cent. of patients to only 2 per cent., is a stunning achievement which strengthens the NHS?

Mr. Horam: Those figures are absolutely right, and they reinforce the point that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who tabled the question, should have done his homework. He will find that the private sector is, in fact, getting extremely tough competition from the NHS for precisely those reasons.

Regional Health Authorities

4. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates have been made of the savings resulting from the abolition of the regional health authorities; and if he will make a statement. [13307]

Mr. Dorrell: By 1997-98, total annual savings from the abolition of regional health authorities are expected to be around £100 million a year. A further £50 million a year has also been saved from the creation of single health authorities at local level. These substantial savings will be retained by the NHS and spent on improved patient care.

Mr. Evennett: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply, and warmly endorse his determination to remove an unnecessary tier of bureaucracy in the NHS. Will he reaffirm that Conservative Members believe—that the Government strongly believe—in putting patients first, in putting money into medical provision, and not into unnecessary bureaucracy?

Mr. Dorrell: Yes, my hon. Friend is right. We believe in an efficiently run health service, in which the administration function is subject to exactly the same efficiency scrutiny as that to which managers subject all the other activities of the NHS. It is because we are engaged in that activity that, over the next few years, an extra £300 million will be devoted to improving patient care in the NHS.

Ms Harman: How can we rely on the figures that the Secretary of State has just given the House, given that he misled the House during the previous Health Question Time? Will he now admit that, contrary to what he said last time, no new beds have been opened in Consett, no new beds have been opened in Good Hope, no new beds have been opened in Newham general and no new beds have been opened in Chester? We believe in a Secretary of State who tells the truth about the national health service.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady is wrong on every one of the examples that she cited. What I told the House was exactly what happened—that, faced with an increase in the emergency work load, the managers in each of those hospitals provided extra bed space to ensure that it was dealt with. I should have thought that the hon. Lady would recognise that as good management delivering a good service to NHS patients.

Sir Terence Higgins: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, as a result of changes in the regional structure, it was expected that some £11 million extra would be available for patient care in West Sussex? This is a matter of great importance to my constituency, because Worthing is the most underfunded district in the country—13 per cent. below capitation compared with 9 per cent. elsewhere. It now appears that a high percentage of that money will not

go to reduce underfunding in the most underfunded district, but will go elsewhere. If the matter cannot be resolved, will my right hon. Friend receive a deputation?

Mr. Dorrell: Of course, I am always ready to receive a deputation led by my right hon. Friend, who has been a relentless and assiduous exponent of the interests of Worthing. I am sure that he will recognise that, as a result of last year's public expenditure survey settlement, West Sussex district health authority's allocation reflected a growth rate that is very much faster than the national average, reflecting the fact that Sussex is a below-target area. Worthing will benefit from that reallocation of resources in favour of Sussex, reflecting the operation of the weighted capitation formula, but I look forward to receiving my right hon. Friend's delegation.

Royal Liverpool Hospital

5. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were transferred from the Royal Liverpool hospital to Broadgreen in the last six months. [13308]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): Between 1 April and 31 December last year, the most recent period for which figures are available, the total was 483.

Mr. Loyden: Is the Minister aware that since the closure of Broadgreen's accident and emergency centre—against the wishes of community health councils and, indeed, of the local communities which fought a long battle to retain that particular facility—all patients now have to go to the Royal Liverpool hospital for assessment before they are moved on? That includes stroke patients and those with heart problems. They have to ride in an ambulance from one side of the city of Liverpool to the other which, as anyone with any common sense will agree, puts them at risk. That is especially true of the type of patients to whom I referred. Is it not a fact that the Minister and the Government do not know what is going on in the national health service? They have abrogated responsibility for accountability. When will they tell us why the chief executive would not answer a very simple question—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat. This is not an Adjournment debate, but Question Time.

Mr. Bowis: If I am allowed to say something, perhaps I could calm the hon. Gentleman down. We do know what is going on. The hon. Gentleman talked about the 483 people who were transferred between the two hospitals which are, after all, in the same trust. Only two were A and E transfers; 238 were being transferred to the recently opened rehabilitation unit at Broadgreen. I thought that the hon. Gentleman might have welcomed that, as well as the fact that, as a result of recent investment, the Royal Liverpool hospital's A and E capacity has increased from 80,000 to 120,000 patients a year.

Cardiac Arrest

6. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to increase the speed at which those who suffer a cardiac arrest receive treatment. [13309]

Mr. Malone: The Department will continue to work with the national health service to find ways of speeding the delivery of treatment to patients.

Mr. Sheerman: What kind of national health service is it when a man collapses with a heart attack in the centre of one of our major cities, is refused by 12 or 14 hospitals, and has to be helicoptered to a far-off town to receive treatment? That is not an isolated incident, because, as the Minister knows, there is a lack of slack—that is what the British Medical Association calls it. There are not enough intensive care beds to deal with that kind of emergency, and there are not enough nurses to support the intensive care units. Last week's decision to give nurses a measly 2 per cent. will not help recruit many more.

Mr. Malone: I beg to differ from the hon. Gentleman. That incident was isolated, but important. Isolated incidents are vital for those involved, and I understand that the hon. Gentleman will meet my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 23 February to discuss that matter. Intensive care has grown rapidly in recent years, and the number of intensive care beds has risen by 100 since 1989. The number of nurses working in intensive care has increased by more than 1,000 since 1990. Other bodies of work are being undertaken by the Department of Health that will show us how we can better use the intensive care facilities that we have.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Will my hon. Friend send congratulations to the Lancashire Ambulance Service NHS trust, which I visited last year? It has invested a vast sum of money in a sophisticated tracking system so that it can deploy ambulances around that large county to ensure that they get to those patients who need ambulances most urgently.

Mr. Malone: Yes, I am happy to do that. My hon. Friend raises an important point about the need to provide care as quickly as possible to people who suffer from cardiac problems. Some of the essential components include improving response times—that is happening, as my hon. Friend points out—and putting paramedics in ambulance teams. The whole question of the provision of emergency care outwith the context of an acute hospital is being considered by the chief medical officer, who will report to Ministers in due course.

Ms Eagle: If there are no beds to receive patients, it does not matter how good the ambulance service is, because there is nowhere for the patients to go. Is not the difficulty that, since the NHS has been run as a business, new, lean-production techniques have abolished all the spare beds, so there is no capacity if sudden accidents or emergencies arise? Is not that the basic problem that is now emerging in our health service?

Mr. Malone: It is rather bizarre that the hon. Lady makes that point in the context of the number of intensive care beds rising steadily in recent years. She makes a false

point. Much of the work that has to be done is to make better use of the facilities that are available. For example, following the Wells report, procedures have been set up to share intensive care beds in London. Sensible use of existing facilities can improve performance in an expanding service.

Private Finance Initiative

7. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the impact of the private finance initiative on the hospital building programme. [13310]

Mr. Dorrell: The NHS has so far seen schemes worth more than £200 million approved under the private finance initiative. The momentum is increasing, and is providing modern tools to NHS professional staff to allow them to deliver an ever-improving quality of health care to patients.

Mr. Lidington: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the warm welcome that has been given in the South Buckinghamshire NHS trust, which I visited last week, to the £35 million rebuilding programme for High Wycombe and Amersham hospitals, announced under the private finance initiative late in 1995? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that welcome project will provide improved services for patients and better working conditions for NHS staff? Does he also agree that the project provides a telling contrast to the policy of savage cuts in hospital building that was imposed by the Labour party when it was in office?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is precisely right on each count, and I shall add one more. The project to which my hon. Friend refers has commanded widespread support among the clinical fraternity working in the same hospital because they understand that the PFI route that has been chosen by the trust offers the best prospect for them to improve the quality of care provided to their patients.

Mr. McLeish: The only one.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman says "the only one"—the Government have increased state-funded capital expenditure in the NHS by 80 per cent. in real terms over the figure that they inherited. We have further improved the prospect of capital investment by abolishing the controls that were the necessary concomitant of the old-fashioned means of capital planning.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: Does the Secretary of State recognise that that sort of initiative is often not appropriate in many scattered and rural communities? Will the Secretary of State make it clear that public finance should be available where trusts start to adopt that policy and find that the necessary money is not available?

Mr. Dorrell: Public finance remains available to support the capital investment programme of the NHS. But we are looking for partnerships with the private sector to allow us to modernise the capital stock for NHS patients wherever they need their health care. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman that there is any reason to sign rural patients out of that deal. The PFI offers the best prospect for improving the capital stock of the national health service wherever its patients need health care.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the PFI is an excellent way to lever capital from the private sector into the health service? Could he rationalise the recent actions by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) with her statement on the "Today" programme that the PFI provides a ramp for privatisation in the health service?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is on to an important point. The Labour Front-Bench team seems to be in difficulties. The Leader of the Opposition said in the House that the PFI was "right in principle". The hon. Lady says on the "Today" programme that the PFI is a new trick to privatise the health service. Presumably they cannot both be right.

Mr. Barron: Are not clinicians in this country suspicious of the PFI and what is behind it? A few months ago, the Secretary of State said that clinical services would not be run by private companies. But clinical services are currently being privatised by the use of market testing. When will the Secretary of State stand up in the House and give a definition of clinical services? He knows, as I do, that many clinicians are suspicious that the measure is no more that a vehicle to privatise the national health service.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman is completely wrong. In my answer to the original question I referred to the fact that where a set of clinicians was presented with a specific proposal for the modernisation of its hospital, it did not simply accept it, it warmly embraced it because it saw an opportunity to improve the service available to its patients. As to the hon. Gentleman's question about what a clinical service is, and, indeed, what a clinical support service is—which the hon. Gentleman did not mention, although he might have done—they are both well-known terms of art within the health service. The scope of those terms is well defined.

Mr. Garnier: My right hon. Friend will know from the county that we both represent that there have been tremendous improvements, both in terms of new building and rebuilding, at the major acute hospitals in Leicestershire: the Glenfield general, the Leicester general and the Royal infirmary. Will he confirm that he will do all in his power to influence the health trusts in that county to make use of the PFI further to improve the capital building project system in our county?

Mr. Dorrell: I can certainly assure my hon. and learned Friend that exactly the same opportunity is open to all the Leicestershire health trusts, as to every other trust throughout the national health service, to use access to both private capital and private management of health service facilities to give NHS clinicians the tools to improve the quality of care available to NHS patients. The PFI offers the national health service an escape from the bind in which it has been caught since the day it was established—short-term capital planning being dictated by short-term, Treasury-inspired horizons. We are now free of that as a result of the PFI, and I should like to have seen Labour Members celebrating that freedom.

Care of the Elderly

8. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the provision of care to elderly people living in the community. [13311]

13. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines he has issued about the provision of care to elderly people living in the community. [13316]

Mr. Bowis: Various guidelines have been issued to local and health authorities in relation to the care of elderly people.

There is clear evidence that community care is a success both from our own monitoring and from independent reports.

Mr. O'Hara: Can the Minister confirm that 40,000 old people have had to sell their homes to finance their care in old age, and does he agree that, therefore, a whole generation has been betrayed, especially those who fought in the second world war, who were promised a better Britain and care from the cradle to the grave? They now find that they must pay twice for their care in old age; they have already paid once through their taxes, and now they must pay once again through private provision.

Mr. Bowis: The people who fought through the war then lived through a Labour Government, and it was the Labour—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman may think that that is funny now, but many people remember that with horror.

Let me remind the hon. Gentleman that it was that Labour Government in 1948 that introduced the charging system for residential care that applies to this day. The Labour party has made no proposals about that. As a Government, we have made proposals on occupational pensions and on the capital disregard and, as announced in the Budget, we are consulting on partnership schemes to alleviate the problem that some people have in that respect. If Labour Members would make constructive proposals instead of sniping from the sidelines and trying to frighten people, they would do a lot better.

Mrs. Fyfe: Would that we had the welfare state that was introduced by Labour in 1945.

Does the Minister agree that, if Beveridge were alive today, he would be horrified to think of what is happening to old people? If the Minister disagrees with that, does he agree with me that a royal commission should be appointed to inquire into the condition of old people and care in the community?

Mr. Bowis: May I welcome the hon. and Scottish Lady to English Health questions? I suggest to her that, if Beveridge, Bevan and others were alive today, they would be astonished at the rates of investment by the taxpayer in the care of elderly people, and they would notice that, in the past six years, investment in personal social services has increased from £3.6 billion to £7.4 billion—I suspect, more than either of those two gentlemen would ever have dreamed of.

Mr. Sims: To ensure that the resources devoted to community care are used in the most cost-effective manner, should not local authorities be required to publish the true cost of care in residential homes run by local authorities, so that a comparison may be made with similar residential care provided in the private sector?

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend makes an interesting and valid suggestion. When those who are interested in value-for-money reviews of social service provision—not least the Audit Commission and district auditors—seek to discover whether that value is being provided by a local authority, they need to be able to compare like with like. It is easy to see the price of residential care in the private or voluntary sectors; it is very difficult to see the price in the state sector. That is something that we shall certainly inquire into and which may emerge from our review of inspection regulation as a whole.

Sir Jim Spicer: On the subject, not of residential care but, care in the community, does my hon. Friend agree that the social services budget has doubled in the past six years? Can there be any excuse for county councils such as Liberal-controlled Dorset increasing their charges for home care help and all other aspects of care in the community and spending the resulting funds on unrelated services? Is it not time to reconsider responsibility for social services? Is there not a strong case for social services to move over to community trusts, which are non-political and not manipulated by Liberals?

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend makes a long-term suggestion of a solution. It is true that, in the county of Dorset, during the last six years resources have increased from £43 million to £93.8 million. Those resources are fair by anyone's standards.

As to the county's charging policy for domiciliary and day services, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that that is entirely at the discretion of the elected local authority. If anyone is unhappy with that authority's charging policy, he or she knows where to look—the elected leaders of the council are accountable and responsible for it.

Mr. Milburn: By passing the buck to individual health authorities and allowing them to decide eligibility criteria for long-term care, have not the Government created a lottery in health provision for elderly people? Do not the care that elderly people receive and the price that they pay for it now depend on where they live? When will the Minister take responsibility for defining the boundaries between provided and paid-for care, so that once again we have a one-nation national health service where access to care is a matter of right and not a matter of chance?

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Gentleman is right to point out the distinction between social care and health care, which was introduced by the Labour Government in 1948. We want a fair system and we shall be as open as possible about the definitions on either side of the dividing line. That is why we have introduced our guidance in that regard, which has been widely welcomed, and why authorities up and down the country have been consulting on the future eligibility criteria for those services.

The truth is that the hon. Gentleman and his party want a standard society: they do not like flexibility or choice and, above all, they do not like the independent sector. As new Labour marches on, it reminds us ever more of "Nineteen Eighty-Four".

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's commitment to the care of the elderly in the community. However, does he accept that today many elderly people must pay for services which, until relatively recently, they received free under the national health service? Will my hon. Friend join me in campaigning for some form of assistance for those people—whether it is through fiscal means or other ways—which will help them to meet the cost that they must now pay for care that is essential for their health and well-being?

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend is right: one of the great successes of our health service is that many people who would have spent their last days in geriatric wards are now able to have operations, receive treatment and take new medication which allows them to return home or to a homely setting. That is a triumph for the health service. Taxpayers—and the Government on their behalf—must now plan ahead to ensure that the cost is reasonable and affordable and that they make the necessary preparations to meet it. I believe that we have taken those steps through our various announcements, both before and in the Budget.

The other side of the coin is that we must keep pressure on the authorities to ensure that they provide services at a reasonable cost. That means using the independent sector as well as the part 3 sector—which is something that the Opposition are remarkably reluctant to do.

Accident and Emergency Waiting Times

9. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the average waiting time of accident and emergency visits at hospitals in London; and if he will make a statement. [13312]

Mr. Malone: Information is collected to monitor patients charter standards, which cover initial assessment and accident and emergency departments. Patients requiring emergency treatment are always treated immediately. National health service trusts and health authorities are working together to ensure that all patients attending accident and emergency departments are seen as quickly as possible.

Mr. Corbyn: Is the Minister aware that there is increasing concern all over London about the length of time that people spend in accident and emergency departments awaiting treatment? In view of last Friday's tragedy in east London, should not the Government reappraise the proposal to close Edgware accident and emergency department and consider reopening St. Bartholomew's accident and emergency department, so that Londoners may be secure in the knowledge that at least they will receive treatment at a nearby casualty unit, rather than being shuttled miles away in ambulances through a very congested city?

Mr. Malone: The accident and emergency and all other services performed magnificently in light of last Friday's tragedy, and I add my thanks to those that have been expressed already in the House.

The hon. Gentleman tries to generalise from a particular incident. I shall give him the overall figures for accident and emergency attendances at Whittington hospital, in which he has a constituency interest. From April to June, 75 per cent. of patients were seen within two hours and 96 per cent. within four hours. From July to September, 81 per cent. were seen within two hours and 99 per cent. within four hours. From October to December, which is a tough period, 60 per cent. were seen within two hours and 96 per cent. within four hours. The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues try to characterise the service as insufficient; if they look at the overall record, they will find that they are precisely wrong.

Mr. Dykes: Does my hon. Friend accept that we need no lectures from the Labour party on how to run a modern health service, as when the Labour party was last in power it closed or reduced 60 hospital units a year? Does he agree, however, that there are legitimate anxieties about future provision at Edgware general hospital, and that there is every reason to keep its accident and emergency facilities intact?

Mr. Malone: I understand that there are legitimate anxieties, but they have been discussed with my right hon. Friend and properly taken into account.

NHS Nurses

11. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take measures to improve the morale of nurses in the national health service. [13314]

Mr. Dorrell: High-quality health care requires high-quality clinical staff. That is why NHS trusts have greater freedom than ever before to reflect and reward the valuable contribution of highly motivated and skilled nurses.

Mr. Jones: Is not the Government's commercial approach to the health service making the professional lives of nurses quite intolerable? Is it not time that the Secretary of State took action to help our nurses, who are now under great strain because of Government policies?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman says that it is time that the Government took action. The Government have taken quite a lot of action over the past 16 years to improve the lot of nurses in the national health service. If the average nurse were now paid what he or she was paid in 1979, he or she would be paid £186 a week. A nurse now receives £311 a week. On average, nurses in the national health service today are £125 a week better off at today's values than they were when the Labour party left power. That is a single proposition for every nurse in the national health service to think about this evening.

Mr. David Evans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that nurses' pay was reduced by 23 per cent. in 1976? When that lot were last in power, not one hospital was opened in 1979, thanks to the National Union of Public Employees and the Confederation of Health Service Employees, and if a loved one died in 1979 we could not even get him or her buried? When that lot were last in power, the national health service was a total fiasco.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend, as ever, is accurate and rapierlike in his comments. Once again, he has underlined

the central fact that, when nurses compare the records of the two parties, they will remember that the Labour Government cut nurses' pay and that the Conservative Government have increased the average earnings of a nurse in the national health service by £125 a week in real terms. Those are 125 reasons for supporting the Government in the development of the national health service.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The figures that the Secretary of State gave the House may be correct, but if two thirds of hospital trusts report difficulty in recruiting nurses, 75 per cent. of nurses regard staffing levels as too low to give adequate care to patients and 20 per cent. of nurses regard staffing levels as dangerously low, how will a below-inflation award of 2 per cent. assist either the recruitment of the additional nurses we need or the retention and morale of the nurses still in the NHS?

Mr. Dorrell: I have always thought that, like the Labour party, the hon. Gentleman and his party supported the principles of review bodies. The review body looked at exactly the case that the hon. Gentleman has set before the House—the proposition that there is a shortage of nurses in the NHS. It found there was not a generalised shortage, but isolated local shortages. The review body recommended in unambiguous terms that the right way to deal with the shortages was by locally negotiated pay in a national context. That recommendation has been accepted by the Government in full, and we are acting on it.

Mr. Thomason: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the worst thing for nurses' morale would be the election of a party that had no policy on NHS revenue funding, capital funding or primary health care?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is exactly right. It becomes more and more obvious, week after week, that where there should be a national health service policy among Labour's Front Benchers, there is a vacuum.

Residential Beds

12. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the provision of long-term residential beds for the elderly in the Cambridge and Huntingdon health authorities. [13315]

Mr. Bowis: Cambridge and Huntingdon health authorities, in common with all others, have been consulting on and reviewing local provision for people with continuing health care needs.

Mrs. Campbell: Why will beds be lost at Brookfield and Chesterton hospitals in Cambridge, when there is already an estimated 1,350 shortage of nursing home and long-term residential beds? What will people in the Cambridge and Huntingdon health commission areas do if no alternative provision is made before those beds are lost?

Mr. Bowis: People will be pleased to know that the local health commission has decided to invest a further £1 million in the area, and that the region is considering further support from the strategic charge levy fund—which will enable exactly that sort of planning.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 13 February. [13333]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Turner: Will the Prime Minister accept from me that the national health service is holding together at this moment only because of the dedication and good will of its professional staff? In Wolverhampton, beds and wards have been closed, staff have been made redundant, and accident and emergency services have been closed dozens and dozens of times in recent months. May I assure the Prime Minister that the good people of Wolverhampton do not regard the health service as safe in his hands?

The Prime Minister: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman chooses this day of all days to make that old charge. As was announced yesterday, the number of patients facing waiting times in excess of one year has fallen yet again. There are now only 20,000 people waiting more than 12 months. Five years ago, the figure was 187,000. People are getting treated quicker, better and more comprehensively at all levels in the health service than ever before. It is about time that Opposition Members—I do not mean only the hon. Gentleman—realised the tremendous advances made in the health service by doctors, nurses and administrators in the treatment of people from one end of this country to the other.

Sir Giles Shaw: Is my right hon. Friend aware, from *The Mail on Sunday*, that the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) was persuaded to vote against the new clause IV relationship on the ground that it was only a change of words?

Hon. Members: Oh.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask the Prime Minister a question on a matter for which he has responsibility.

Sir Giles Shaw: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the change in words with which the hon. Member for Dundee, East disagreed was typical—[HON. MEMBERS: "Order."] Does my right hon. Friend agree that a change in words often disguises a change in meaning?

The Prime Minister: I do not regard the hon. Member for Dundee, East as the only voice of the Labour party, but I am sure that my hon. Friend is correct: we are increasingly learning that we get a different Labour policy depending on which Labour Member writes it.

Mr. Blair: Will the Prime Minister agree to the request that has been made by Members of Parliament on both

sides of the House—and now, very strongly, by Sir Richard Scott—that the Scott report be published at 2.30 pm rather than 3.30 pm on Thursday? Members of Parliament will then have an opportunity to study the report before commenting on it.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman knows that that is not the way in which the Government, or our predecessors, have conducted business in the House. The proposed arrangements are in line with the usual practice of publishing a report and making it available to hon. Members at the same time. The Government have arranged for there to be a debate, in Government time, 10 days after the publication of the report. Hon. Members will therefore have time to absorb and to understand the report and will be able to speak to it with knowledge rather than with ignorance—which is what Labour Members have done for the past three years. There will be a full and open debate on the report.

Mr. Blair: The Prime Minister has relied on precedent. I suggest that a report containing 1,800 pages and of this complexity is almost without precedent. Ministers having a report for eight days before anyone else is also without precedent. The campaign to discredit the judge who conducted the inquiry—before the report has been published—is also without precedent. Will the Prime Minister reconsider the request? The refusal to allow Members of Parliament this facility, on the day that the report is published, effectively disables them and prevents them from holding the Executive to account and discharging their duty both to Parliament and to the country.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is quite mistaken, and he knows that. The Government will answer questions about the Scott report on the day that it is published, and we will debate it when all hon. Members have had time to study it. The right hon. Gentleman referred to a campaign to discredit the report before it is published. That campaign has come from the the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) and the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), the deputy leader of the Labour party. Without a single scruple, time and time again, the Labour party has made it clear what it believes will be the outcome of a report that has only just been concluded. If anyone has prejudged the report, it is not the Government but the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues—and the right hon. Gentleman knows that to be the case.

Mr. Blair: Does not what the Prime Minister has just said—in a ridiculous attempt to blame Opposition Members—underline why we should have the Scott report early, so that people can comment on it? In the interests of proper parliamentary democracy, will not the Prime Minister reconsider hon. Members' request, especially as it is backed by the inquiry judge?

The Prime Minister: As for the Government having had the report, the right hon. Gentleman knows that the House will expect my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade to be at the Dispatch Box to answer questions, quite properly, put by the House when the report is published. That is why the Government have the report in advance. The right hon. Gentleman knows that that has been the position under both Conservative and Labour Governments for as far back as he may care to remember. He is trying to twist public opinion before the report is published, just as his hon. Friends have done for the past three years. The report will soon be published, and Labour Members will have to consider the issue on the basis of fact.

Dr. Hampson: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the privatised utilities are such a good investment that, while slagging off British Gas and Yorkshire Water, a group of Labour councils in West Yorkshire—notably Leeds, led by the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Trickett)—were investing £170 million of their pensioners' money in those companies? Is that not a classic case of saying one thing and doing another?

The Prime Minister: I congratulate the unions on making a successful investment. I live in hope that the day will yet come when the Opposition recognise that, if they talk about the virtues of the market, they ought to support private ownership, not attack it on every conceivable occasion as they have been doing.

Mr. Ashdown: Leaving aside for a moment the interests of the House, will the Prime Minister at least consider the interests of his civil servants? How can it be right that Ministers, who can defend themselves in public, have eight days in which to read this 1,800-page report and prepare their defences, while civil servants who are criticised may not get even six hours?

The Prime Minister: Let me explain what has been agreed, so that I can remove the misunderstanding from the right hon. Gentleman's mind. At present, the report has been made available only to Ministers or civil servants who need to see it in order to help to prepare the Government's response to questions in the House—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order and listen to the answers.

The Prime Minister: That is the fact of the matter. Other Ministers and former Ministers and civil servants have not had access to the report. That is how the matter has been dealt with; it is an entirely proper way to deal with the report—we have dealt with it entirely properly.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he has no plans to introduce a parliament in Edinburgh? It would leave Westminster Scottish Members with very little to do, because most of their business would be devolved; so they would become part-time, and should probably be paid part-time. They would also avoid paying the tartan tax, because they would be based in London.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a sound point. The advocates of a Scottish Parliament among the Labour party who live in London would not themselves have to pay the extra tax that would be levied on everyone else living in Scotland. I can certainly confirm that we have no plans for such an assembly, or for such a tartan tax, or to allow Scottish Members to vote on matters in Scotland on which English Members cannot vote, and then to permit Scottish Members to come to the House

and vote on similar matters for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. I can also confirm to my hon. Friend that, were anyone to introduce such plans, that would be the most blatant gerrymandering of the constitution that we have ever seen.

Royal Docks

Q2. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Prime Minister when he next plans to visit the royal docks. [13334]

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Mr. Spearing: When the Prime Minister does visit the royal docks, will he also visit the adjacent Silvertown fire station, whose crews joined their colleagues in Millwall on the Isle of Dogs at the tragic incident on Friday? Does he know that crews at both stations, not to mention the inhabitants of docklands, face the prospect of having the two appliances at each station reduced to one? Does he recall that his name appeared at the top of a successful motion at 10 o'clock last night, calling on local authorities to exercise their freedoms responsibly? If he were charged with denying them those freedoms, because of the policies of the Government towards the public services, what would he say?

The Prime Minister: Of course the hon. Gentleman is right to say that we require councils to exercise their freedoms and opportunities responsibly, but there must also be fallback powers for when that does not happen:

"we believe there must be fall-back powers to enable central government, in extreme circumstances, to protect council tax and business rate payers".

Mr. Spearing *indicated dissent.*

The Prime Minister: I was quoting a Labour policy document, so I am sorry to see that the hon. Gentleman disagrees with it.

When looking at the royal docks area, the hon. Gentleman might also like to look at the dramatic improvements there: the 5,000 new homes and the 2 million sq ft of commercial property. The whole area has been revolutionised by policies that we have followed but many of his colleagues have opposed.

Economic Indicators (Lichfield)

Q3. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Prime Minister what recent analysis he has made of economic indicators and their effect on Lichfield; and if he will make a statement. [13335]

The Prime Minister: Lichfield has benefited fully from the Government's policies, which have given this country the lowest mortgage rates for 30 years, the lowest basic rate of tax for 50 years and the longest period of low inflation for 50 years. Unemployment in my hon. Friend's constituency has now fallen by some 40 per cent. from its peak.

Mr. Fabricant: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Lichfield is not only a beautiful cathedral town but a centre for light industry? Is he further aware that people in Lichfield will be heartened by the report in *The Times* today which showed that the average net take-home pay of production workers in France, Italy and Germany is now less than that in the United Kingdom? Is that not because we have consistently refused to enter into an agreement on the social chapter? Does my right hon. Friend agree that, under a Labour Government, workers would suffer, because the Labour party's idea of negotiating in Europe is rather like the Trustee Savings bank—it is the party that likes to say yes?

The Prime Minister: They certainly were very startling figures to set out what net take-home pay will purchase, which was the basis on which they were done. That stands in stark contrast to the claims of a sweatshop economy about which we so often hear from the Labour party. It is no coincidence that those figures were achieved. Business is attracted by flexible working practice and low cost—precisely the benefits that would be wrecked by the social chapter as it is and by the social chapter as it would be if any Government were to sign up to it in this country. This Government will not.

BILL PRESENTED

COMMONWEALTH OF BRITAIN

Mr. Tony Benn presented a Bill to establish a democratic, federal and secular Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Wales dedicated to the welfare of all its citizens; to establish fundamental human rights within that Commonwealth; to lower the voting age to 16 years and to make other provision with respect to elections, including equal representation for women; to prescribe a constitutional oath; to establish a Commonwealth Parliament consisting of the House of Commons and the House of the People and to make provision for the term of a Parliament and for legislative and other procedure; to establish the office of President, and a Council of State, and to prescribe the powers of each; to provide for the formation of governments; to amend the law relating to official information, the armed forces and the security services; to make fresh provision for the participation of Britain in the United Nations Organisation and the European Communities and European Union; to make the basing of foreign forces in Britain dependent upon the approval of the House of Commons; to make new provision with respect to the judicial system and to establish a National Legal Service; to set up national Parliaments for England, Scotland and Wales; to amend the law relating to local government, the district auditor and the accountability of police forces; to end the constitutional status of the Crown and to make certain consequential provision; to abolish the House of Lords and the Privy Council, to end the recognition in law of personal titles, and to provide for the acknowledgement of service to the community; to disestablish the Church of England, abolish the offence of blasphemy, and to provide for equality under the law for all religions and beliefs; to end British jurisdiction in Northern Ireland; to provide for a Constitution and for constitutional amendment; and to make transitional and related provision: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 12 July and to be printed. [Bill 57.]

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(4) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

AGRICULTURE

That the Hill Livestock (Compensatory Allowances) (Amendment) Regulations 1996 (S.I., 1996, No. 27) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

PRISONS

That the Prisons and Young Offenders Institutions (Scotland) Amendment Rules 1996 (S.I., 1996, No. 32) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Question agreed to.

Point of Order

3.32 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): I seek your guidance, Madam Speaker, not on the point about which you so kindly wrote to me this morning, but on the rights of Back-Benchers, which you are always so keen to protect. My question relates to the use of Adjournment debates by hon. Members on the Front Bench.

I notice from the Order Paper of Thursday 8 February, page 1488, that the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) sought to raise with the House the question of the roads programme—a matter for which he has responsibility as shadow spokesman. I see that, subsequently, the debate has been changed and now the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) will raise the question of the 1994 Coventry air crash. Did you encourage an Opposition Front-Bencher perhaps to be more respectful of the rights of Back-Benchers, or was it the Labour Whips, who were worried about the ways in which the debate might expose the bankruptcy of their party's policies?

Madam Speaker: I would not know what action anyone else took, but I encouraged nobody. Hon. Members have asked before to withdraw Adjournment motions. Indeed, that occurred the other day, with the hon. Members for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) and for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins). Many hon. Members have withdrawn their Adjournment debates, so it is a perfectly usual thing to happen.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. May I point out that I was a beneficiary of someone removing their Adjournment debate? I benefited from it.

Madam Speaker: I am delighted to hear that.

I believe that the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) withdrew two Adjournment debates in a matter of three weeks. Hon. Members often find that they have other things to do.

National Parks (Scotland)

3.33 pm

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to confer upon the Secretary of State powers to establish national parks in Scotland.

National parks were given to the world by a Scotsman, John Muir, yet today Scotland is one of the few nations that still has no national parks.

In 1945, two committees were set up to look into national parks in the United Kingdom. They produced the Balfour report for England and Wales and the Ramsay report for Scotland. The recommendations of the report for England and Wales were implemented, but those for Scotland were not. The reasons for that difference are not difficult to discern. The mountains, the wilderness and the beautiful areas in Scotland are much more extensive, and there was little pressure on them at that time. The distances from the population were large and visitors to Scottish areas were relatively few.

In 1952, the Scottish Health Department, which was responsible for such matters, introduced plans for national parks. Again, they fell by the wayside. In 1970, the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs asked that plans be brought forward for national parks, but nothing happened. In 1988, a Scottish Office Minister, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), asked the Countryside Commission to introduce plans to manage Scotland's mountain areas. That resulted in the Countryside Commission's 1990 report, entitled "Scottish Mountain Areas". It proposed national parks for the Cairngorms, Loch Lomond, Ben Nevis, Glencoe, the Black Mount and Wester Ross. I think that the proposal should have included Skye, where pressures are increasing, particularly in Sligachan and Glen Brittle. I am undecided, however, about the case for Wester Ross.

Ben Nevis, Glencoe and the Black Mount is an important area requiring protection. Inappropriate development and bad planning are leading to significant blight and degradation. A national park is essential there.

There should be no doubt in anyone's mind, however, about the absolute and overriding necessity for national parks at Loch Lomond and in the Cairngorms. The problems of the two areas are different—at Loch Lomond they are of people management and, in the Cairngorms, of land management. It is clear in both areas, however, that the problems cannot be solved other than with an overriding authority that has planning powers—in other words, a national park.

The Cairngorms are of exceptional nature conservation and scientific importance within Britain and the European Union for a range of bird species associated with mountain plateaux, open moorland and Caledonian pine forest. Breeding birds of prey are particularly important and include hen harrier, golden eagle, osprey, merlin and peregrine. Breeding on the mountain plateau are ptarmigan, dotterel and snow bunting. Specialist pinewood birds include capercaillie, crested tit and Scottish crossbill. The Cairngorm lochs have been designated as a non-bird Ramsar site, and it is a candidate for special protection area and special area of conservation status.

The position has moved on since the Ramsay report of 1945. As I have said, in those days visitors to the mountain and wilderness areas were few. Even in the 1960s, I could climb the north face of Ben Nevis, both in winter and in summer, and rarely see another person. That is no longer the position. With motor cars have come people to enjoy the outdoors in all its glory. I welcome that, but we must deal properly with the realities.

The plans proposed by the Countryside Commission for Scotland are not those for replicating the system in England and Wales. Such replication would not be appropriate. Scottish areas need Scottish solutions. In Scotland, national parks will be based on an amalgam of local communities and conservationists, who will work together in eliminating conflicts that sometimes arise between the two.

Parks will be organised into zones. There will be a core mountain zone, which will be protected from any development and used only for recreation. There will be a countryside management zone, where recreation will be developed close to the roadside. There will be a community zone, where visitors will be catered for.

These useful plans were put out to consultation and gained universal support. Unfortunately, the Government are against them. They fear their landowning supporters in another place and, as a result, no progress has been made in establishing national parks in Scotland.

The Government recognise that there is a problem, but they do not understand how serious it is. They maintain that areas of wilderness can be managed solely on the voluntary principle. The voluntary principle has failed in the past, however, and has resulted in the desecration of the countryside, such as the punching of roads through Glen Feshie.

In response to pressure, the Government have set up a joint board for the Cairngorms, working on the voluntary principle. There is no doubt that that is an improvement. There are members on the board who never expected to be on it, and that in itself has been a victory for conservation. The difficulty, however, is that the board has no land management powers. Indeed, that is the main problem in the area. That power is left in the control of landowners, and it is difficult to deal with the problem.

Loch Lomond is under considerable pressure, where the problem is one of people management. Despite universal support for national parks from everyone, including the landowners in that region, the Government have simply proposed another joint committee. Not even Scottish Natural Heritage wants it. Its response to the Loch Lomond and Trossachs working party report states:

"The joint committee . . . would depend on the voluntary delegation of powers and functions by the local authorities involved. We are concerned that, on present indications, this may not materialise."

The problems in Loch Lomond are becoming desperate. The road on the east side to Balmaha must often be closed due to traffic volume. Cars are driven down on to the loch side, eroding the bank. With boating restrictions being imposed in the Lake District national park and with the improvement in the M74, more and more traffic and boats are moving to Loch Lomond. Even though the road on the west side—the A82—has not yet been closed, it has functionally come to a halt on a number of occasions, with huge traffic jams extending from Luss to the Balloch roundabout.

The water is now crowded with speedboats and jetskis zig-zagging across its surface, interfering with fishing and polluting the air. Their engine whines can be heard even high up in Ben Lomond. Surely it is now time to call a halt.

[Mr. Sam Galbraith]

In both the Cairngorms and Loch Lomond, there are too many authorities and too many agencies. Co-ordination is difficult, if not impossible. It is time to sweep them all away and to replace them with a body with real planning powers. It is time to replace them with a national park.

3.40 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): This important subject has been debated regularly since the war. I reluctantly cross swords with the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith), because of his particular interest in the countryside in Scotland, which I share. As we have often said in the House, however, if something works, do not try and fix it. He has underestimated what is happening and has happened over many years in Scotland towards solving the problem that he raises in his Bill.

The hon. Gentleman overstates the problem, bearing in mind developments in recent years. The theme that has been developed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang) and is being developed now by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is one of partnership. That has been highlighted through the Cairngorms Partnership, the investigation into Loch Lomond, the recommendation of the committee to local authorities and the many people involved in the community.

We must also bear it in mind that we have a sound planning system in Scotland for our scenic areas of national beauty and that we should not implant a bureaucratic system such as that which exists in many of the national parks in England. At one time, I was responsible for them so I know the difficulties there, as I have known about the issues in Scotland.

The hon. Gentleman underestimated what has been achieved in Loch Lomond. I am glad that byelaws are in place to deal with the problems that he raised, especially those relating to speedboats. The quick action taken by the Government in introducing legislation so that byelaws could be used speedily shows what can be done with co-operation. We have something in place for this summer. The regulations and the ranger services should have an important impact on the Loch Lomond problem.

The partnership system in the Cairngorms, the other extremely sensitive area, is working well and has an important part to play in current issues such as those involving Aviemore, the funicular railway and skiing developments. The breadth of experience in the partnership—involving environmentalists, the governing bodies or those involved with economic development—should go a long way towards the right decision being made.

We must always remember that many people must live and make an economic living in all these sensitive areas, which are not just to be admired. It is therefore important that we let this develop before we consider any further way forward, which is not essential at present.

In relation to all the developments, we need to consider what is going on in terms of the access concordat, which stems from good work by Scottish Natural Heritage. That organisation resulted from the Government putting together the Countryside Commission for Scotland and the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland and has been a great success. I am glad that the Government have been able to fund it far above the funding for the two organisations before they were amalgamated.

Moreover, there have been immense developments in agriculture, and help for environmentally sensitive areas in the form of substantial grants and management agreements. There have been improvements in policy relating to forest development, including the community forest and the central Scottish woodland.

All that shows that the Government are working hard to improve Scotland's environment. We should not throw it away by introducing legislation establishing a whole new system when that has been shown to be unnecessary.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Sam Galbraith, Mr. Norman Hogg, Mr. John Maxton, Mr. John McFall, Mr. Brian Wilson, Dr. Lewis Moonie, Mr. Elliot Morley, Ms Joan Ruddock and Mrs. Maria Fyfe.

NATIONAL PARKS (SCOTLAND)

Mr. Sam Galbraith accordingly presented a Bill to confer upon the Secretary of State powers to establish national parks in Scotland: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 1 March and to be printed. [Bill 59.]

Opposition Day

[6TH ALLOTTED DAY]

National Health Service Staff

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.46 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): I beg to move,

That this House notes with concern the growing demoralisation of those who work in the National Health Service; recognises that those who work in the NHS are dismayed that they cannot provide the quality of care that they and their patients want and that they feel that, without consultation, changes in the NHS detrimental to patient care are forced upon them; notes that NHS staff are concerned that they are spending more time on paperwork and less time with patients; notes that the number of managers is growing while the number of beds and nurses is cut; deplores the unfairness that saw the pay of chief executives rise by more than twice that of nurses; notes that there are now staff shortages both in hospitals and in the community and there is an increasing reliance on unpaid overtime, locums and agency staff; and calls on the Government to recognise demoralisation in the NHS, affirm that the NHS staff are its most precious resource, affirm that there should be fair pay and proper attention to staff security, end the growing use of short-term contracts, ensure that all NHS staff should be able to speak out about their professional concerns, and that at all levels of the NHS the views of staff should be heard and acted upon.

I make the usual declaration: all declarable interests appear in the Register of Members' Interests, as required.

Today's debate is about one of the most important problems facing the national health service today. It is about the demoralisation of doctors, nurses and the rest of the health-care team, the large number of vacancies caused by NHS staff voting with their feet and leaving the service and the damage to patient care. It provides a chance for the Secretary of State to admit that there is a crisis in NHS morale, and to set out the action that he plans to take to tackle it.

The NHS team—from porters to professors of medicine, from catering assistants to consultant cardiologists—are the most important resource of the NHS, our most precious public service. Yet this Tory Government have systematically trampled on them, and on the service in which they serve. Doctors and nurses see their work as a vocation, not just a job.

When NHS staff look at the Secretary of State, they do not see a man who recognises or reflects their concerns. He is going in the opposite direction from NHS staff. They want beds to stay open; the Secretary of State closes them. They want more nurses at the patient's bedside; the Secretary of State wants more managers. They want to spend more time caring for patients; the Secretary of State makes them spend more time on paperwork. They want a public sector NHS; the Secretary of State wants commercialisation and privatisation. Doctors and nurses work longer and longer hours to cover vacant posts, as advertisements for staff remain unanswered month after month.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I am fascinated. The hon. Lady is telling us, with great authority, what various people in the national health service think. Only a short while ago, she was busy telling us that doctors did not want fundholding practices to be introduced. Can she explain why more than half the GPs in the country are now fundholders, and making a success of it?

Ms Harman: I think that the hon. Gentleman is in the wrong debate. I explained at great length why GPs joining fundholding represented not a vote of confidence in fundholding but an attempt to get the best for their patients in an unfair system. He should listen.

The last straw for NHS staff is the Secretary of State's refusal to recognise the damage that he is doing, as he is in this debate. "Crisis? What crisis?", he says. "Morale? It is fine," he tells us. "Recruitment? No problem." The debate will illustrate two different approaches to NHS staff. On one hand, we see staff as the most vital asset of the NHS and a resource on which to draw. On the other hand, the Government see NHS staff as a nuisance and a cost to be reduced as far as possible.

Demoralisation affects doctors and nurses throughout the NHS. In hospital and in the community, the evidence is overwhelming. The shortage of doctors in accident and emergency departments has worsened the casualty crisis. I spoke to an A and E consultant in the south-east. Unfortunately, he asked not to be named. Increasingly, that is a problem among NHS staff, who are concerned but not able even to speak out.

The consultant works in a busy casualty department that treats 60,000 patients a year—from a toddler with a squashed finger to an old lady who has had a heart attack. There are supposed to be two A and E consultants in that hospital; there is only one. The other post has been vacant for 12 months; they have found it impossible to recruit. As a result, the consultant has to work longer and longer hours. He says that he is spread too thinly to be supervising and training junior doctors and that he spends less and less time caring for patients. He works at least 60 hours every week and is able to spend only nine hours seeing patients. Yet caring for patients took him into the NHS.

I asked the consultant what would happen if he left his post. There was a long pause before he said that there would be a major crisis, the department would probably no longer be recognised for training purposes, they would lose their junior doctors, it would probably be run on locums for a bit and then it would shut. That is what people on the front line feel. It is the same story around the country.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): The hon. Lady has cited the experience of a particular health service doctor who does not wish to be named. He has no reason to fear being named.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Consultant.

Mr. Dorrell: Consultant. If on the basis of total confidentiality the hon. Lady wants to send me details of the experience and the hospital to which she has referred, I will have the case examined and reply to her in detail about the background. I will protect the confidentiality of the doctor. The doctor need have no concern. Instead of shadows and innuendo and erecting a theory to which it is impossible to respond, the hon. Lady should allow us to examine the specifics of the case and respond to them.

Ms Harman: I shall discuss with the doctor to whom I spoke—I have a verbatim account of a discussion that

[Ms Harman]

I had with him at the end of last week—how his confidentiality can be protected. The Secretary of State says that the doctor has nothing to fear, but people do have something to fear and they are afraid to speak up.

Mr. Dorrell: Send me the facts.

Ms Harman: It is no good saying, "Rubbish"; it is a fact that people are afraid. I will make sure that the Secretary of State is satisfied that I am citing a real circumstance. We will get back to the doctor and sort the situation out. They may say, "Rubbish," but staff tell the same story around the country.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): The case that my hon. Friend mentions is not unique. We have all heard of similar experiences. I sent details of the case of one woman, whose doctor told her to write to me, to the Secretary of State for Health. She was trundled across the M62 from an intensive care bed where she had been told that she had only a 50:50 chance of survival, brought back a few days later and dared not speak out. I received the most unsatisfactory answer from the Secretary of State. He thought that that was good practice.

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend raises a very important case. It is a tragedy when those caring for patients are unable to speak out about what they face because they fear not support, sympathy and action from the Government, but retribution and gagging.

The morale of NHS staff has never been lower. Those who can leave do so. It has become ever more difficult to recruit staff to vacancies; posts are covered by locums and unpaid overtime. Staff are under stress, and their morale falls further—it is a vicious circle. It is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit GPs. According to Dr. Ian Banks of the BMA:

"The problem of GP recruitment has now reached crisis proportions and is bound to affect the quality of care to patients."

Nearly one quarter of newly qualified young doctors are considering not entering the profession for which they have trained. Those who have become GPs want to quit. Almost half of Britain's GPs are leaving general practice, and those who stay in general practice want to quit early. Six out of 10 GPs plan to take early retirement because, for them, there is more time spent on paperwork and less time spent with patients. They are unable to keep up with medical developments, and they are angry at the damage to patient care that has been caused by the Tory NHS reforms.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Is the hon. Lady aware that, by April, every GP in Lichfield will be a fundholder? Is she aware that several GPs have told me that, were a Labour Government elected who would abolish GP fundholding, they would wish to quit the NHS?

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman fails to address the issue. There is a serious problem of recruiting GPs, and not enough GPs are going into training to enter general practice. Is the hon. Gentleman trying to tell the House that there is not a problem? The situation is not acceptable.

The same story applies to nurses. Nurses' morale is at an all-time low. More than one in three nurses have said that they would leave nursing if they could, and one in five say that they will leave nursing in the next two years. They are overworked, but they feel insecure. It is hardly surprising that 78 per cent. of the nurses who were surveyed by Unison felt that morale in their wards had worsened during the past year. It is tragic that 46 per cent. of nurses no longer enjoy going to work, and that 28 per cent. of them regret their decision to go into nursing.

Those nurses dread the occasion when the next person leaves—the next vacancy that cannot be filled except by unpaid overtime by those who remain. I shall give the Secretary of State an example of somebody who, fortunately, is prepared to be named. A district nurse in south London, Jane Tierney, told me about working in her community last weekend. On Friday, with the increasing pace of discharge from hospital, a patient had been discharged with a feeding tube inserted. They had been in such a hurry to discharge the patient that they had not performed the normal test feed.

When the patient arrived home, Jane was there to nurse him. She discovered that she could not feed him because a bit of the feeding apparatus was missing. She spent her whole weekend ringing round and trying to get the piece of equipment that was unsatisfactory, because of the patient's early discharge. The patient was desperate: he could not be fed.

Jane Tierney joined the NHS to care for her patients, not to spend all weekend telephoning the hospital. She even telephoned the manufacturer. She said that she is spending increasingly more time battling with hospitals about discharge—they, too, are under pressure—and battling with social services about who will do what. Social services are under pressure; hospitals are under pressure; and the nurses get squeezed in the middle.

There is a vacancy on Jane's team which has been empty for 18 months, which is not surprising. She is therefore working increasing amounts of unpaid overtime. Her team is dreading the time when the next person leaves and there is yet another vacancy.

It is clear to everyone that the Tories value managers more than front-line staff. Last year, chief executives' pay increased at twice the rate of nurses' pay increases. Chief executives' pay rose by 7.6 per cent., while nurses' pay rose by 3.2 per cent. Since 1989, there have been 20,000 more managers recruited, while the number of nurses has been cut by 50,000.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): Is the hon. Lady including in her attack on NHS managers those who used to be called ward sisters? Technically, they are probably managers according to her description, yet they are on the front line of health and patient care. The hon. Lady should be careful when using such statistics, because the regrading of staff means that ward sisters may be included as managers although they are in the front line of patient care.

Ms Harman: The new managers have been recruited to run the internal market. I am not talking about those who manage NHS staff and who have always been there. The Secretary of State says that he will cut bureaucracy, but it is ironic that he is cutting not the sales or finance

directors—even more of them are being appointed—but the very nurse managers to whom the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) referred.

Since 1989, 20,000 more managers have been recruited whereas the number of nurses has fallen by 50,000. That is the Government's record. When the Government can afford to spend an extra £1.5 billion on bureaucracy to run the internal market every year, it is hard to understand why nurses should have to accept a below inflation 2 per cent. pay increase without having lower morale and without more of them voting with their feet and leaving the NHS. It will only make matters worse if the pay award has to be funded by further bed cuts.

It is not that the Secretary of State has not been told about staff shortages; it is simply that he has refused to listen and is still refusing to do so. The Medical Workforce Standing Advisory Committee reported last year that 25 per cent.—one quarter—of consultant posts were unfilled and that 12 per cent. of advertised consultant posts received no applications at all.

Most trusts are struggling to appoint doctors. According to a survey by the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts, the worst problems are in psychiatry and anaesthetics. A third of trusts are now offering recruitment incentives. Hartlepool hospital was so desperate to get an anaesthetist that it paid for his jeep and Rottweiler to be flown over from the United States.

As doctors leave the NHS through early retirement, the shortages get worse. Consultants and specialists are being driven out of the NHS by the intolerable pressure put on them by the Tory market in health.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Ms Harman: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane).

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Chicken.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Is my hon. Friend aware that the district general hospital in Rotherham has had to spend £250,000 to recruit accident and emergency doctors from South Africa where they are desperately needed? Half their salaries go to a private agency—such is the poor morale and unwillingness among our junior doctors to work in A and E departments.

Ms Harman: As my hon. Friend says, the staff shortage is leading the NHS to spend huge sums of money. When people leave, their replacements have to be advertised for and then trained. Expensive locums and agency staff have to be used, so the failure to retain staff in the NHS is paid for not only in terms of patient care but in terms of hard-pressed NHS cash.

Let me cite the example of a consultant who was prepared to allow me to use his name in the debate. I am grateful to him. Dr. Peter Fisher is a consultant at Banbury who has been in the NHS for more than 30 years. He says that he is the only person he knows of his age who is not seeking early retirement. He says that the bed cuts have profoundly affected the quality of care that doctors are now able to provide. All over the hospital, patients are shunted around—

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman although I think that I heard him call me a chicken, which is rather an odd description of me. I do not quite know how to describe him.

Mr. Dunn: I did not call the hon. Lady a chicken; perhaps she should have her ears syringed. Does she remember the debate on health during the week in which she was having a little local difficulty with her party? A member of her staff contacted Dartford and Gravesham health authority to ask how many beds it had cut in the previous six to 12 months. Will she please tell the House the answer that she was given, because it might reveal that the facts that she is using today are highly selective?

Ms Harman: I have quoted from surveys by nationally accredited organisations, including the Royal College of Nursing, the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts and the British Medical Association. I have quoted from every national, independent source possible, so I do not think that the hon. Member's intervention is to the point.

I was in the middle of talking about Dr. Peter Fisher—

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: I am certainly not going to give way to the hon. Gentleman who, I understand, called me a chicken.

Mr. Arnold: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The hon. Lady referred to my district and I would like to give her the answer.

Madam Speaker: During the course of speeches, hon. Members refer to many districts. The hon. Lady has said that she will not give way at this stage.

Ms Harman: I referred to Banbury, if the hon. Gentleman will listen. He is referring to a previous speech and he is two weeks late with his intervention. I know that Tory Back Benchers have difficulty getting their act together, but that is ridiculous.

Mr. Dunn: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I would be grateful if you would ask the hon. Lady to withdraw that disgusting remark. She would not give way in the last debate or in the one before, when I raised the issue.

Madam Speaker: I think that the hon. Gentleman may have misunderstood. If I understood correctly, the hon. Lady referred to the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr.

[Madam Speaker]

Arnold), who tried to intervene. Is that right? *[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady referred to the hon. Gentleman who was trying to intervene. Is that correct?

Ms Harman: Yes.

Madam Speaker: So it was not the hon. Member for Gravesham.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. What is the point of order?

Mr. Arnold: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The hon. Lady referred to me when she said that the point was a point of debate two weeks ago. However, the point I wished to make was precisely the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn).

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order. It is a point of debate and, if the hon. Lady allows the hon. Gentleman to intervene, he can make the point.

Ms Harman: I do not think that I can help the hon. Members for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) and for Dartford (Mr. Dunn). They need to discuss with each other what is going on. Neither of them is from Banbury, and the point that I am trying to make is about Banbury hospital.

Dr. Peter Fisher says that morale is at rock bottom. I shall explain the situation, because the Secretary of State does not talk to doctors who are working in the NHS so he does not know the circumstances. When beds are closed and more and more patients come in, surgical patients are put in medical wards and medical patients are put in surgical wards. The surgical team of nurses, who are experts at dealing with surgical patients, end up missing problems with medical patients, and vice versa. The nurses hate that situation and the doctors hate it. It breaks up the team and it undermines the quality of patient care. Danger signs are not noticed, and the patients suffer.

Doctors and nurses also hate the misrepresentation that is constantly perpetrated by the Secretary of State. He has done it again. The Minister of State tried to challenge the Sheffield memorandum in questions today. I remind the House that the Sheffield memorandum shows that there is a two-tier waiting list for out-patient prospective waiting times in the Royal Hallamshire hospital, the Nether Edge hospital and the Jessop hospital for women.

Mr. Dorrell: That is an important point. The hon. Lady said that my hon. Friend the Minister of State misled the House. My hon. Friend drew the attention of the House and of the hon. Lady to a letter written by Mr. Kevan Taylor, the head of contracting for Sheffield health authority. He is a person who presumably knows what is going on in Sheffield, and he says:

"There are no marked differences in access times for fundholder and non-fundholder patients."

Those are not the words of my hon. Friend or the words of anyone divorced from the situation. They are the words of the person who is responsible for the quality of care delivered to the patients whom the hon. Lady has mentioned. The letter says "no marked differences". That is not what the hon. Lady told the House last week.

Ms Harman: I told the House last week—I stand by what I said and repeat it to the House today—that the average out-patient prospective waiting times show a two-tier list. The Secretary of State has quoted from a letter in *The Independent* that is not from the hospitals that are making the appointments and carrying out the operations, but from the purchasing organisation. If he looks at the letter from Kevan Taylor, he will see that it does not contradict the Sheffield bulletin.

Mr. Dorrell: The service being delivered today to patients does not reflect the difference that the hon. Lady talks about. I shall quote from another passage in the letter, which states:

"The facts about the current situation are shown in the fully validated waiting time data for December 1995"—

that was five weeks ago, which is fairly recent by most statistical standards. The letter continues:

"This data shows that at the end of December 85 per cent. of fundholder patients and 83 per cent. of non-fundholder patients had been waiting less than 13 weeks."

Those are the facts as reported by the people on the ground. They are wildly at variance with what the hon. Lady said to the House of Commons last week.

Ms Harman: The Secretary of State has once again made the position worse. Only this afternoon, my assistant spoke to the deputy chief executive of the hospitals running the waiting lists. He confirmed that the differentials between the waiting lists that we quoted are absolutely right. It does the Secretary of State no credit when he seeks to conceal the situation instead of finding out about it and sorting it out.

Mr. MacShane: As Member of Parliament for a constituency in the catchment area, I can assure the Secretary of State that that list is in every doctor's surgery and in most hospital doctors' hands, and is causing outrage and scandal. The Secretary of State would not dare to come to Rotherham or South Yorkshire with the mendacious nonsense that there is not a two-tier waiting list system for fundholding and non-fundholding GPs.

Ms Harman: Last week, the Secretary of State acknowledged that there was a two-tier waiting list in Sheffield, and tried to defend it. This week, he has changed his position and is trying to deny it. There are two-tier waiting lists—he is not quoting the facts. We are right on this point and he is wrong. He does himself no credit by continuing to deny that.

Mr. Dorrell: When the hon. Lady can produce an example of one patient from a fundholding practice and another patient from a non-fundholding practice whose waiting times show the differential to which the hon. Lady referred, I shall withdraw my remarks in the House. Until the hon. Lady can produce a specific case where that difference has been established, I shall rest on the

evidence from the statutory health authority, whose job it is to deliver good-quality care to patients of the Sheffield area.

Ms Harman: I do not need to produce a patient; I can produce the deputy chief executive who runs the hospital that provides the services. When will the Secretary of State recognise a fact?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will my hon. Friend call on the Chairman of the Select Committee, who last week said that, as Chairman of that Committee, she was prepared to look at the list? Will my hon. Friend call on her to have a Select Committee inquiry so that we can establish the facts?

Ms Harman: When we know that the facts are that there are two-tier waiting lists in the national health service and when the Secretary of State, even when confronted with documentary evidence, cannot admit it, it is indeed time for the Select Committee to look into the matter.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): As a member of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration Select Committee, I asked a few weeks ago whether the ombudsman would be prepared to look at complaints that non-fundholder patients are being put behind fundholder patients on waiting lists. Does my hon. Friend agree that her evidence and that of other hon. Members should be put before the ombudsman so that he can investigate it?

Ms Harman: The only person who denies the evidence is the Secretary of State. Perhaps the Select Committee investigation and a reference to the ombudsman will clarify the facts that we all know, but which the Secretary of State still tries to deny.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South) *rose—*

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne) *rose—*

Ms Harman: I give way to the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), the Chairman of the Health Select Committee.

Mrs. Roe: As the hon. Lady knows, the Select Committee has already been considering the purchasing element of—

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Look at the list.

Mrs. Roe: I prefer not to be constantly interrupted by the hon. Gentleman, who never allows anyone to say anything.

The Committee has considered the purchasing element of the purchaser-provider split and has already produced a report on that. One of my colleagues who serves on the Select Committee is already sitting in the Chamber and will no doubt contribute to the debate later, and we have heard the arguments of the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon). I am sure that members of the Select Committee will take heed of what the hon. Lady says as well as the hon. Gentleman, and in due course they may well wish to take those opinions into account and conduct an inquiry, but it is for them to decide. In my Committee, we act democratically and the whole Committee decides, not only the Chairman.

Ms Harman: I am sure that the House will be grateful for that intervention, and we look forward to hearing the later contribution.

Mrs. Mahon *rose—*

Ms Harman: I give way to my hon. Friend again.

Mrs. Mahon: I thank my hon. Friend for once again giving way, and for her patience.

I would welcome an inquiry into the two-tier system that is developing, but when I sent the Secretary of State a letter, of which my hon. Friend has a copy, showing clearly that one cannot have access to clinical psychology services in Calderdale unless one is on the list of a GP fundholder, I received an unsatisfactory answer from the Secretary of State. He has a copy of that letter.

Ms Harman: I believe that that letter was submitted in the previous debate and, once again, the Secretary of State refuses to acknowledge it. He also refuses to acknowledge the shortage of nurses.

Two thirds of hospital trusts find it difficult to recruit nurses. Leighton hospital in Crewe has 76 unfilled vacancies. Glasgow Royal infirmary delayed opening its winter medical ward by two months because of a problem in recruiting nurses. One thousand Australian nurses are being recruited by the British Nursing Association. "Golden hellos" of £2,000 each are being offered as incentives for nurse recruitment. King's College hospital in my constituency in south London has sent managers to Ireland, Australia, Finland, Canada and Hong Kong.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford) *rose—*

Ms Harman: It is not only that hospitals cannot fill the vacancies; they cannot even bring agency staff to the patient's bedside, and staff shortages are affecting patient care. The Queen Elizabeth hospital in Birmingham had four intensive care unit beds, two of which stood empty for six months because it was impossible to obtain specialist intensive care nurses. With the two intensive care unit beds always occupied by emergencies, patients waiting for heart surgery had to have their operations cancelled repeatedly.

Mr. Duncan Smith *rose—*

Ms Harman: Will the Secretary of State admit to the House that there is a national shortage of nurses and doctors? Will he admit that there is too much reliance on unpaid overtime, locums and agency staff?

Mr. Duncan Smith *rose—*

Ms Harman: In parts of London, one in 10 hospital doctors is not part of the team but only temporary. Consultants work 30 per cent. more hours than contracted by the NHS. More than half of all nurses work unpaid overtime to keep the service going.

[Ms Harman]

What is the Government's response? Where is their action to lift staff morale and to retain staff?

Mr. Duncan Smith *rose—*

Ms Harman: Opposition Members recognise the low morale in the NHS and regard it as being of the utmost seriousness. We propose today five steps that the Government might take to start to rebuild the confidence of NHS staff.

First, the Government should give health professionals a say in planning the NHS.

Mr. Barry Porter *rose—*

Ms Harman: Instead of trampling over their opinions, they should respect their expertise and experience and involve them in planning the future development of the NHS. Trust must be rebuilt—

Mr. Porter: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It would be extremely helpful if the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) would confirm whether she intends to give way to any hon. Member at any stage. If not, I shall not continue to waste my time here.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): That is not a point of order for the Chair. The hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) knows full well that right hon. and hon. Members must decide whether they wish to give way.

Ms Harman: I am putting before the House five proposals that I believe would lift the morale of national health service staff and help to stem the tide of staff leaving the NHS which is threatening patient care. I shall not give way to any more Conservative Members today.

Trust must be rebuilt, because no one trusts a word that the Government say about the NHS. Trust is built on dialogue and dialogue starts with listening. Labour listens to nurses and doctors, but the only doctor that the Secretary of State listens to is a Dr. Mawhinney.

Secondly, the Secretary of State should act to end the gag on NHS staff. Health professionals should be able to talk about their work in the way that they used to. Doctors, nurses and health professionals are now afraid to speak out and express their views. Labour believes that all health service staff should speak freely about their professional concerns—that is in the public interest. We endorse consultants' freedom to speak out and we wish to see that right respected and extended to all health professionals in the NHS.

Thirdly, safety at work for NHS employees is becoming a major issue. The Secretary of State should address NHS employees' growing concern about their personal safety at work. It is a problem for GPs, for staff working in the community, those working on their own and going into people's homes, community psychiatric nurses, staff working in accident and emergency departments, and particularly for women staff. The NHS should ensure their safety at work and it should always prosecute assailants when they are identified.

Any staff member who is injured at work should receive the support of the NHS, but, in reality, staff believe that that support is not there. A London GP, Dr. Anthony Inwald, went to the defence of a colleague who was being threatened by a patient wielding a kitchen knife, and he was stabbed by the patient and seriously wounded. The incident caught the attention of the nation, but it did not attract the attention of the Secretary of State: he was not interested.

Fourthly, there should be fair pay and conditions in the NHS. Will the Secretary of State agree to ending the short-term contracts that are now spreading throughout the national health service? In some trusts, almost a third of nursing staff are on fixed-term contracts, and one in six nurses are on a bank or an agency contract. That is no way to create a sound basis of teamwork in patient care. Many trusts are going even further, proposing contracts which allow the hospitals to alter work locations, working hours and working patterns. Zero-hours contracts are beginning to appear in the NHS. That must stop.

On top of that, the Government are diverting scarce NHS resources away from front-line staff who are caring for patients to managers who are running the internal market. We believe that there must be fair pay and conditions. A national service needs national pay—local pay bargaining, as it currently stands, is divisive and wasteful. It leads to hundreds of different pay negotiations across the country and it takes nurses away from the wards. This morning I met a nurse who said, "I joined the NHS to nurse, but I am spending all my time negotiating".

Fifthly, there should be a moratorium on the bed closures that are causing the casualty crisis and an end to two-tier waiting lists, which are damaging morale in the NHS.

The test today for the Secretary of State is whether he is prepared to acknowledge that NHS staff morale is at an all-time low. The eyes of 1 million NHS employees are upon him. Will he rise to the challenge and pledge action to tackle the NHS staffing crisis? We have proposed measures to start rebuilding staff morale; we have offered the solutions. Does he have the courage to take that action?

4.23 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'pays tribute to the dedication and commitment of the NHS's staff; welcomes the investment in professional development for all NHS staff made by the Government since 1979, in particular the investment in high quality nurse training represented by Project 2000, the development of new nursing specialties, for example, in general practice and paediatric intensive care nursing, the increase in the number of doctors, nurses, midwives and consultants, the reduction in on-call hours for junior hospital doctors, the establishment of an independent Pay Review Body for nurses, the increase of nearly 70 per cent. in nurses' earnings, the establishment of the principle of local pay for nurses which has delivered fair and flexible settlements and the development of high quality NHS general management; commends the recent announcement by the Secretary of State for Health of an 8 per cent. real terms cut in administration budgets for health authorities and trusts next year, together with an efficiency scrutiny which will identify and eradicate unnecessary paperwork; and looks forward to the further development of the National Health Service.'.

The title of the debate is: "Morale of National Health Service Staff", and I shall have quite a lot to say about that. However, it was clear from the speech by the

hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) that the substance of the debate is morale in the Labour party. The Opposition are really concerned to give their troops something that they can talk about. They have had some difficulty with that this year, and they have been casting around for an issue that they can approach.

The Leader of the Opposition went to Singapore to talk about stakeholding, but that did not work. Then he started talking about the tartan tax and the Scottish Parliament, but that did not work either. Now he puts the hon. Lady in to talk about morale in the NHS. On the basis of her speech this afternoon, that does not seem likely to work any better than it did last week, when she tried to secure the support of her right hon. and hon. Friends in rejecting the words of her predecessor as Opposition health spokesman, the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), in a Labour amendment.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Those are selective quotes.

Mr. Dorrell: Mr. Enoch Powell once said that a quotation is, by definition, out of context. I challenge the hon. Gentleman to find a quotation that is in context.

Mr. Dunn: Will my right hon. Friend cast his mind back to the question raised by the hon. Member for Peckham? During a recent debate, a member of her staff, presumably paid for by Unison, rang the Dartford and Gravesham health authority to ask how many beds had been cut in the past six to 12 months. *[Interruption.]* I wish that the hon. Lady would listen for a moment. This is a debate. The answer that was given to a Mr. Ross, who works for the hon. Lady, was that no beds had been closed in the past six or 12 months, and that 22 extra beds had been provided to take account of the winter influx of patients. The hon. Lady did not use that statistic—why not?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend asks what I think is a rhetorical question, and the answer is that it did not suit the hon. Lady's argument. When I used that as an example of the national health service responding to the increase in the emergency work load by providing extra medical bed space to allow extra medical admissions during the peak of winter demand, the hon. Lady said that I was misleading the House. She is quite wrong about that. It beggars belief that anyone could seriously believe, as the hon. Lady apparently does, that, if a hospital has a short-term peak of emergency work load, it should respond by building a brand new ward block.

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): That is silly.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman is quite right to say that is silly. Perhaps he should persuade the hon. Lady of that, as she attempted to use that argument.

The hon. Lady is in some difficulty. She is trying to rebuild morale in her own party. I am setting out to destroy that morale, and there is not much of it left. When she tried to advance her arguments a week ago, 32 of her hon. Friends chose not to support her in the Division Lobbies, including the deputy leader of the Labour party.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Rubbish.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman says, "Rubbish," but he was not there.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I was paired.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman says that he was paired, but the Government majority at the end of the debate rather gives the lie to that proposition.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Did my right hon. Friend hear the hon. Lady saying that there should be no short-term appointment of nurses, but that there should be large-scale, permanent recruitment to cover every possible event and shortage in the event of a sudden disease? Surely that would require the most enormous increase in expenditure. I thought that the Labour party was being very careful not to make any public expenditure commitments. Surely the hon. Lady has blown the gaff in that direction as well.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady blows the gaff in that direction most times when she is on her feet. My hon. Friend was absolutely right to say that the good management of a NHS hospital, now as in the past, must ensure not only good employer provision for the majority of the long-term work force in that hospital, but the capacity to respond in a short-term way to short-term needs. If the hon. Lady does not understand that, she has not reached first base on how to deliver good value out of the resources available to the NHS.

I will deal now with the substance of the arguments that the hon. Member for Peckham put before the House. I begin by reflecting that, given the pressures to which the health service has been subject over the past couple of months with the increase in its emergency work load—there is no argument about that—I might have hoped for an acknowledgement from the lips of the hon. Member for Peckham this afternoon of the debt that every NHS patient owes to health service staff—doctors, nurses, midwives and administrators.

They have delivered through the winter emergency care at the time that it was needed, in the overwhelming majority of cases, to an extremely high clinical standard. They have done so while at the same time maintaining progress on the elective surgical work load, maintaining the development of primary care and maintaining the development of mental health services.

This winter, the NHS has been working under strain, and I had hoped that the hon. Member for Peckham might have seen fit to recognise the skill, dedication and commitment of NHS staff in a debate of this nature. However, the hon. Lady did not. I simply observe that she did not, and I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends—and, I suspect, most Opposition Members—join me in reflecting that debt in the House this afternoon.

Mrs. Mahon: Is the Secretary of State aware that, at Halifax general hospital, men were put on the

[Mrs. Mahon]

gynaecological ward because of the shortage of beds? How does the right hon. Gentleman imagine that things will carry on after Northowram hospital is closed and another 300 beds are lost in the next couple of years?

Mr. Dorrell: I have already acknowledged that the health service has been working under unprecedented pressure this winter, in responding to the emergency work load.

Mr. McLeish: What about the bed cuts?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman asks about bed cuts, but the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) asked whether it was ideal for a man to be treated on an obstetrics and gynaecology ward. The answer is no, that is not ideal—but if I were a man in need of emergency medical care, I would prefer to be in one of those beds than in no bed at all. That response is one that the health service has always provided—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is no use asking the Secretary of State questions if he is not allowed to answer. I am having great difficulty hearing the right hon. Gentleman, so I am sure that the rest of the House is having the same difficulty.

Mr. Dorrell: I hoped also that the hon. Member for Peckham might have recognised some of the progress that we have made over the past few years with a number of key issues that must be addressed if the NHS is to be a good employer.

Mr. Fabricant: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dorrell: I should like first to make some progress.

The hon. Member for Peckham talked a lot about nurses. One key improvement over the past few years has been the dramatic rise in the quality and record of training NHS nurses.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South) *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: I want to make more progress; then I will give way.

I remind the House of the starting point on nurse training. The Judge report in 1985 recorded the position that prevailed then in NHS nurse training, and which had prevailed for some time. In 1983-84, 25,000 students of nursing were admitted to training. The report commented:

"The best available evidence suggests that 15-20% will not even complete the course, and of those that survive some 30% may fail the qualifying examination at their first attempt. Of those who do eventually qualify, many are disillusioned with the preparation they have received, enjoy only a minimal engagement in clinical practice, change jobs with disconcerting regularity, find themselves caught in a machine".

That was the assessment of the position prior to the Government's introduction of Project 2000 in 1990, which led to an improvement in nurse training. In those days, 30 to 35 per cent. of those who commenced nursing training did not continue in nursing practice. Today, the fall-out rate is 20 per cent. Since 1990, the Government have cut the fall-out rate by almost half as a result of the improved training and employment terms available to nurses. In a debate such as this, the hon. Lady might have mentioned this fact. The national health service is investing in its most precious asset: the professional staff who deliver the health care for which the Government are responsible.

Mr. Gunnell: Does the Secretary of State agree that the number of people who undertake nursing training has decreased dramatically? For example, between 1992 and 1995, it decreased from 21,000 to 13,000.

Mr. Dorrell: The figure for next year's commissions is 17,000. The Government have improved nurse training, resulting in a decrease in the fall-out rate of 35 per cent. to 20 per cent. We may therefore need to take in fewer nurses at the beginning of the training. That was the purpose of the improvement, as recommended in the Judge report. The Government accepted that recommendation in the context of Project 2000, to ensure that the professional staff of the NHS receive the high-quality training needed if we are to deliver high-quality health care.

Mr. Fabricant: Is my right hon. Friend aware that a hostile reporter from a local newspaper contacted senior nurses at the Victoria hospital in Lichfield? A senior nurse said that, because of the health care reforms, for the first time she is able fully to use the valuable training that she has received. She said that this is because money is following the patient, because of general practitioner fundholding and because of greater integration between GPs and the hospital. She is now able to be a real nurse, whereas she said that, in the 1970s, all she could do was think where to send the next day's sheets to be laundered.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend has put his finger precisely on the point: nurses receive a better quality of training as a result of the changes that the Government have introduced in the health service. The Government have invested an extra £60 million to improve the quality of nurse training. Professional development for nurses allows a more rewarding practice and a better use of those higher-quality skills that we pay to provide through the training programme. The national health service is investing in the training of its nurses.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I do not question the improvements in the training and qualifications of nurses. However, there are still severe shortages of staff, and senior nurses report that they regularly cannot recruit or retain staff. Recently, a senior nurse at Guy's told me that Guy's and St. Thomas's NHS trust is down by 40 intensive care nurses. What do the Government propose to meet the severe current shortfall in qualified nurses, which is not being met from agency and overseas sources?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman makes a number of points. What has happened with respect to intensive care nurses employed in the national health service during the last five years? In 1989, there were 32,500 intensive care nurses, whereas this year there are 40,500—an increase of 24 per cent. The Government will continue to ensure that we have a nursing work force that is able to meet the intensive care needs of the health service.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the shortage of nurses in the health service. In the past week, independent advice has been published on this issue. The review body examined precisely the point that the hon. Gentleman raised. Its report stated:

"We have carefully weighed all the evidence presented to us and we are not persuaded that there is a general nationwide shortage of nursing staff at the moment."

There are clearly local difficulties and problems with particular specialties, and we believe that local pay may be part of the solution to these problems."

So the review body examined the hon. Gentleman's point and recognised, as the Government have by accepting the report, that there are some local shortages. Furthermore, the review body recommended a way of dealing with them which the Government have accepted. I hope that that satisfies the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I know what the review body recommended, but the Secretary of State must accept the consequences. If the Government have stipulated that there should be a 2 per cent. national increase, and that additional increases should be funded by local hospital trusts, depending on the circumstances, how can the right hon. Gentleman assure us that there is enough money in the kitty for the trust to be able to pay for the increases that it will need to adopt in order to recruit all the nurses it needs?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman has asked another question that the review body has already examined: whether there are enough resources to provide for a decent deal for nurses. Once again, I quote the review body's report:

"The allocation of resources to the NHS for 1996-97 means that most providers should be able to reward staff for improvements in efficiency and effectiveness while delivering increased volume and quality of care to patients. This 'win-win' outcome can, however, be achieved only if purchasers and providers work constructively together."

I agree. I want local staff groups and local managers to address the issues of each health provider locally—precisely to meet the concerns that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey has expressed.

Pay is clearly at the heart of much of the issue that the hon. Member for Peckham raised this afternoon. The key thing about pay—nurses understand it, but the hon. Lady did not refer to it at all—is the fact that average earnings of nurses have increased by £125 a week in today's values compared with the figures that we inherited in 1979.

Nurses should look at what the Government have done for them over the past 16 years, and in the shorter period since 1990—since when they have enjoyed a 10 per cent. real-terms increase. As for the future, nurses must also bear in mind the improved living standards with which the Government have provided them; and they should recognise that no nurse in the NHS has yet received a pay offer for next year. The Government have accepted the recommendation of the review body. Furthermore, the Government are working within the terms of the agreement that we signed with the nursing unions four months ago. Both arrangements provide for local pay in a national context.

This is not, contrary to what is sometimes suggested, a low-pay agenda. The proposition that local pay equals low pay was examined by the review body and explicitly rejected:

"The experience of other industries, and our reading of the limited evidence so far available about Trust contracts, suggest that local terms and conditions as a whole are unlikely to be less favourable than those embodied in national agreements, and may in some respects be more favourable. Local pay can be expected to lead to new pay structures and working arrangements but we do not see it as a 'low pay' agenda".

That is also the position of the Government.

The hon. Member for Peckham said that she was hostile to local pay and local flexibility. She is going to have real difficulty squaring that with the first proposition in her five-point plan for the Government—the idea that we should listen to health professionals and allow them a say. It defeats me how we can allow them a say at local level and insist at the same time on national structures—contrary to our agreements with the nursing unions and with the review body. I will happily give way to the hon. Lady if she can enlighten me.

Ms Harman: Does the right hon. Gentleman think it fair that chief executives should get twice the pay increase of nurses?

Mr. Dorrell: I gave way to the hon. Lady to allow her to reconcile the two propositions—that we should listen to local staff groups, and that we should have national pay determination. How can she reconcile that with her five-point plan—or with the words of the leader of her party? Speaking about the British political system only last week, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) said:

"In part . . . the disaffection is because people feel no ownership, no stake"—

that wonderful word—

"in much of the political process. The citizen feels remote from power, because he or she is remote from power. Britain is THE most centralised government of any large state in the western world."

This afternoon, the hon. Member for Peckham has come here to argue for further centralisation: a national formula for dealing with nurses' pay that would prevent health service employers from listening to local staff groups and bring more power to the centre. In short, this would prevent local solutions being found for local problems. It is impossible for the hon. Lady to reconcile her support for centralising national bargaining with her speech today or with the words of her leader in his much-trumpeted constitutional lecture of last week.

As for managers' pay, the answer is straightforward. As the hon. Lady well knows, I have imposed an 8 per cent. real-terms cut on the budget out of which chief executives' and administrators' pay in the health service comes. I have provided growth money, on the other hand, for the payment of doctors and nurses. As the review body found, that will provide for a proper balance of growing demand and growing service provision, as well as fair terms for nurses and all other clinical staff in the health service.

Ms Harman: Will the right hon. Gentleman answer one simple question? Does he think it fair that chief executives last year had double the percentage pay increases the nurses had?

Mr. Dorrell: First, they did not; secondly, I have clearly set out the arrangements under which the budgets

[Mr. Dorrell]

for these different parts of the health service will work in the next 12 months. The budget out of which administrators are paid is being cut, the budget from which nurses and doctors are paid is growing.

Nurses are not the only people to benefit from this dramatic improvement in the investment in human resources available to the health service. Exactly the same is true of the doctors. It will be within the memory of everyone in this House that, until a very short time ago, the NHS used to rely on absurdly long hours being worked by junior medical staff. That is why the Government, at the beginning of the decade, introduced a new deal for junior doctors. It is worth reminding the House of the progress that we have made in improving the terms of junior doctors in the NHS.

There used to be 13,000 posts in the NHS in which doctors were on call for an average of more than 83 hours a week. Now there are no such posts. There used to be 14,000 hard-pressed posts in which doctors were on call for more than 72 hours a week. Now there are virtually none—295, to be precise. By the end of this year, we are on course to have eliminated every junior doctor post with an on-call requirement of more than an average 72 hours a week. *[Interruption.]*

Opposition Members may find this funny, but no junior doctor does. Neither does any junior doctor find it remotely funny to have had £65 million in extra resources provided to ensure that the work load placed on junior doctors in training is kept within reasonable bounds. Nor do they think that it is funny that we have created an extra 2,500 medical posts—consultants and juniors—to ensure that the workload is more fairly spread around the medical work force of the health service. Nor do they think that it is funny that the number of consultants has grown over the past five years—

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Dorrell: Not at the moment, because the hon. Member for Peckham seems to think that it is funny that we have cut the excessive workload of junior doctors throughout the health service. The hon. Lady says that we have not. She will not find many doctors who do not agree with the proposition that we have cut the unreasonable, excessive workload for junior doctors, and, furthermore, that we have increased the consultant work force in the NHS by 14 per cent. over the past five years.

The Government are committed not just to good training for nurses, which I have described, but to high-quality training for doctors, to a reasonable workload for doctors and to investment in the continuing education to ensure that doctors, nurses—all the professional staff of the health service—keep their skills up to date to ensure that medical and other professional practice continues to develop within the NHS. That is the most important single investment that the NHS can make.

More important than all the buildings and expensive kit, we must ensure that the health service has the best quality human skills that we can muster to deliver health care to our patients. The professional staff of the health service will have noted that Opposition Front-Benchers, who bring the subject of NHS morale to the House, find it a subject for private entertainment.

Mr. Campbell: What would the Secretary of State say to a gynaecologist who wrote to me in these terms:

"Having observed the midwives on the ward on several occasions, I am struck by the fact on many occasions they are tired, exhausted, confused, scurrying around trying to maintain basic standards."?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman quotes from a letter that I have not seen. I have made it absolutely clear that I regard the training of doctors, nurses and all the professional staff in the health service a high priority. That is why I provided extra money in last year's pay settlement to ensure that the health service invests in its people, and then, having trained them, that it is a good employer and gives them fair terms.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Has my right hon. Friend been able to find out from Opposition Members, who consider that things are so bad—indeed, the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) obviously feels that if more money were spent, all of the tiredness would go—how much more money per annum the Labour party would put in to avoid these situations?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend raises an extremely important point. As she knows, it is a rhetorical question. The answer is no. They have made no commitment. They have not even matched the commitment that the Government give: that year by year there will be real-terms growth in the extra resources for the health service. Opposition Members are remaining very mum now. They have not been to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) to get that cleared, have they?

I shall give way to the hon. Member for Peckham if she will tell the health service how much extra money a Labour Government would promise.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: With all respect to the hon. Gentleman, I doubt whether he is in a position to speak with authority on this subject.

I shall happily give way to the hon. Lady if she is prepared to tell the House and the nation how much extra money a Labour Government would promise.

Her silence speaks volumes. She is not even prepared—

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Member for Workington may have ambitions, but I am afraid that I have to remove the delusion.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order: The Secretary of State is not giving way. The House must settle down.

Mr. Dorrell: I have talked about training and investment in the human skills of the health service. We

have done something else for the professionals who work in the health service: we have given every professional working in the health service the opportunity and the support that is necessary to deliver an improving quality of care.

Last week, we debated fundholding. That has given GPs throughout the country the opportunity to improve the care that is available to their patients. It has strengthened the voice of primary health care in the health service and has provided a broader range of provision to patients in the surgeries.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Will the Secretary of State give way on that point?

Mr. Dorrell: No, we spent a long time on fundholding last week.

We announced yesterday the best results seen on waiting times in the health service within living memory. We announced that just under 21,000 patients had been on a waiting list for more than a year. Throughout the 1980s—this is not a political point, as the figure was inherited from the 1970s as well—the number of people who were on a waiting list for more than a year was plus or minus 200,000 for more than a decade. That figure is now down to 21,000. That figure was referred to as sleight of hand. It is no such thing. We have cut the waiting time for patients on in-patient waiting lists, so that nobody waits for more than 18 months. A few years ago, 80,000 people had been waiting for more than two years. Now, nobody waits for more than 18 months. The number of patients waiting for more than 12 months is down to 21,000. The average waiting time on an NHS waiting list has been cut from nine months to four months. That is real progress, and patients who are on waiting lists, or feel that they may be on one for elective surgery in the health service, understand that very well. It represents a dramatic improvement in the quality of the elective surgery service that is provided by the NHS.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way on waiting lists, because I hope that he will tell us which one he is referring to. Is it the waiting list to get on the waiting list, or is it the proper waiting list? As far as patients are concerned, when they have been to see their GP, they are on a waiting list, but the Government, through their people in the health authorities, have created two waiting lists: first, they put the patient on a waiting list for an appointment to see a consultant—a list that they could be on for 12 months before they are even seen—and secondly, when they get to him, they are put on a waiting list for 18 months. That makes two and a half years, not 18 months.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman is simply wrong. Opposition Members claim to be supporters of the NHS, but when there is a clear improvement in the quality of service available to NHS patients, one might have hoped that Opposition Members would welcome it. It is simply untrue to say that patients on waiting lists do not wait a shorter time than a few years ago. In-patients are waiting a shorter time for admission, and *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Dorrell: If the hon. Member for Doncaster, North will contain himself in silence for a moment, I shall tell him the answer. He referred to outpatient waiting times for patients who are waiting, after referral by their GP, to be seen by a consultant in an outpatient appointment. The health service has never monitored that before. [HON. MEMBERS: "That is not true." I was a Health Minister between 1990-92. I regularly asked: how long do people wait between referral and their first outpatient appointment? I was told, "We do not know, because the information is not collected." It was the Conservative Government who recognised that that needed to be controlled and limited. It was the Conservative Government who introduced the patients charter standard that said that 90 per cent. of patients should be seen at their first outpatient appointment after referral within 13 weeks, and all of them within 26 weeks. The Government are delivering the progress that the hon. Gentleman asks for and does not recognise when he sees it.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is not just the success in waiting lists about which we should be proud but the fact that since 1991 more than 1 million people have been treated in the NHS—that is an extra 3,500 a day—and that it is not just the money that is invested in bricks and mortar that is important but the money that is invested in patient care? It is the patients whom we want to see served.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right. Waiting times are an important measure, but there are many others. My hon. Friend quoted one. Let me quote some others. We delivered the first breast screening programme in the European Union for the health service. I thought that the Opposition would have celebrated that. In Harefield hospital, just outside London, we have the world's largest centre for heart and lung transplants. Such transplants were unheard of 30 years ago. The world's first heart transplant took place in 1969. We all know that it is now routine business in hospitals throughout the health service. More transplants take place at Harefield hospital than at any other hospital on earth.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): They are carried out by NHS staff.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman is excited. I have been arguing throughout that it is the professional staff of the health service who deliver health care. Like the hon. Gentleman, I count myself a supporter of the NHS. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, however, I celebrate its successes.

Surely the NHS is something of which every citizen should be proud. Similarly, we should be proud that Harefield hospital is a great success story within the NHS. We should be proud also that the NHS is delivering improved patient care for people with strokes, asthma and diabetes, for example. Surely we should be proud that the NHS is improving the care that is available for cancer patients. We should take pride in the fact that it is now a routine operation in the health service to have joint replacement, to have keyhole surgery or to have modern lithotripsy.

The hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) is right when he asserts that it is not politicians or managers who deliver these services. The answer lies in the development of modern medicine. The hon. Gentleman

[Mr. Dorrell]

might serve his cause rather better, however, if he recognised that, throughout the health service, we are seeing the developments to which I have referred.

Patients are being given care that was undreamed of 20 years ago. Health care is improving. That is why the answer to the first oral question this afternoon was to the effect that the people of the United Kingdom are living longer. That is because we have the best NHS we have ever had. Of course it is not perfect. An organisation that employs 1 million people will, of course, occasionally make a mistake. The central fact, however, is that NHS patients living in this country receive care that is better than it has ever been, and it is improving year by year.

The attempts by the Opposition to paint the NHS as a system—*[Interruption.]* The British people believe me. It seems that it is only some Opposition Members who do not. When NHS patients are questioned, 90 per cent. of them recognise that we are delivering through the NHS a good health service. Hon. Members—[HON. MEMBERS: "They don't believe you."] Opposition Members are precisely wrong when they say that. National health service patients know very well that service is improving year by year. They do not believe the Opposition's claims that, if they were in government, they would somehow do better. They are right not to believe those claims. They know that they should not believe them.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Dorrell: No, I shall not give way again. I have nearly finished.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State has made it clear—

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Minister seems to be avoiding me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State is not giving way.

Mr. Dorrell: The NHS is a service with ambitions. The staff want to see it develop. They want to see the Government continue to support it. It is clear—

Mr. Campbell-Savours: What is wrong—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State made it clear—

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State has made it clear that he is not giving way. The hon. Member should remain in his place.

Mr. Dorrell: The people who work in the health service have learnt that the Labour party shows only a dilettanti interest in the NHS. They have seen through the hon. Member for Peckham. That is why the debate will fail in its central purpose, which is to motivate Labour Back-Bench Members. The hon. Lady has failed to do that. The only result of the debate is to lay bare once again—I welcome the chance to do it on a weekly basis, and we shall be doing it week after week, because we are looking forward to each debate—before the House and the country the emptiness or the vacuum that is at the heart of the modern Labour party.

Mrs. Mahon: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Secretary of State has promised us a debate every week on the national health service. Should the right hon. Gentleman declare an interest? I understand that he does not use the NHS, and has private medical insurance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair.

5.4 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): The Secretary of State talked about there being a debate on the health service week after week. This is the third occasion in the past couple of weeks when the gist of the debate has been that Opposition Members say that the public are not happy with the way in which the Government are managing the health service, but the Secretary of State, at some length, and supported by his right hon. and hon. Friends, says that the public are happy with the Government's management.

The Secretary of State is in the fortunate position of being able to resolve the problem, so that we do not have to continue to debate the subject week after week. He can suggest to the Prime Minister that, as soon as possible, we should have a general election so that the public can decide whether they are confident about the Government's running of the NHS.

I suspect that one of the many reasons why the Government would like a debate on the NHS week after week is that, as long as such debates take place, we do not have to throw the matter open for the public to decide. The Government know what the public will decide on what for the Government will be the grim day when they face the electorate. They know that many of the Conservative Members who have spoken this afternoon and in previous debates on the NHS will not be with us much longer.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): Did my hon. Friend note the small print that appeared last week in The *Daily Telegraph* opinion poll, which revealed that the Tories appear to have come within 30 percentage points of the Labour party? On reading the small print, it was apparent that as many as three out of four people were terrified of another Tory Government because of what another Tory Administration might do to the national health service.

Mr. Grocott: I do not normally turn to *The Daily Telegraph* for evidence to produce in arguments, but I am sure that my hon. Friend and I are in complete agreement.

The Government have an ideal opportunity to test public opinion—they can quickly move the writ for a by-election in the constituency of South-East Staffordshire. Perhaps the Secretary of State could persuade the Prime Minister to do that.

I shall be brief and refer only to a specific constituency issue that involves morale in the national health service. I am to meet the Secretary of State's ministerial colleague, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, Baroness Cumberlege, with the members of a delegation from my constituency and the surrounding area. I am grateful for the opportunity.

We are to meet the Minister tomorrow afternoon, following a vote of no confidence—49 general practitioners and 26 consultants in and around my constituency were involved—in the management of the health service by the Shropshire health authority. I think that Ministers will acknowledge that that is a serious matter. I shall spend three or four minutes explaining how the situation arose and a couple of minutes suggesting how the issue might be resolved.

The background to the vote of no confidence was the way in which the health authority has been making decisions. That decision-making process was highlighted during the consultative period last year when the health authority published a document entitled "Shaping Shropshire's Health". The background is straightforward: the growth of Telford new town, which I have the honour to represent. It can be acknowledged that the appearance of a new town will produce changes in an area's population structure.

The population of my constituency is growing rapidly. A hospital was built to serve the new town. Unfortunately, the balance of hospital services between the county town of Shrewsbury and the new town of Telford is out of kilter, given the way in which the population has changed. It is the resolution of that problem that goes to the heart of the vote of no confidence.

The focus of the debate is on a consultant maternity service. We in the Wrekin and surrounding areas believe strongly—this view is not confined to my constituency—that the case for our having our own consultant maternity unit is overwhelming. Last year, the health authority partly recognised that fact by publishing the "Maternity Care in Shropshire" document, which suggested three possible solutions. One was to retain the consultant maternity unit in Shrewsbury. The second was to close the Shrewsbury unit and open one at the Princess Royal hospital in Telford in my constituency.

The third, which I strongly favour, was to recognise the changing population balance and to split the consultant maternity unit between the two hospitals, both of which cover populations large enough to justify a unit of their own. Overwhelming arguments exist for doing that and they involve medical issues, which is one of the reasons why general practitioners and consultants signed the motion.

In brief, those arguments are that women in the east of the county, including my constituency, are more likely to be admitted for consultant hospital care than are women in the west. The east has a younger population, which means, obviously, that more babies will be born there—all the population trends show that. More than twice as many babies of low birth weight are born to Wrekin mothers as to mothers in any other part of the country. Strong medical support exists, therefore, for a two-unit consultancy service.

There is overwhelming public opinion in favour of two units. Last year, there were petitions signed by 27,000 people who wanted the health authority to provide them with a consultant maternity unit. Significantly, we were supported by the community health council which, as all hon. Members know, has responsibility for considering health service provision across the region.

The community health council's comments about the need for our own consultant unit included this evidence:

"Women booked to deliver at the Consultant unit"—

in Shrewsbury—

"have graphically described the problems they experience travelling there in labour, particularly if they have to rely on others for transport. They have referred to the physical discomfort, the stress and fear of being out of contact with a hospital and the acceleration or cessation of labour en route."

The council added:

"There was a strong desire for continuity of care and carer during pregnancy and childbirth and it was felt this was only likely to be achieved if Telford had its own unit."

The population argument is easy to describe, and it is compelling. I should be grateful if the Minister, in his winding-up speech, would refer to it. It has been said repeatedly that 2,500 births a year are more than enough to justify a consultant maternity unit. It is projected that, in the county of Shropshire, by 2011, there will be more than 5,000 births. In fact, the projected figure is 5,358—heaven knows how anyone can be as precise as that. The number is, however, more than enough to justify two consultant units.

On grounds of clinical matters, public opinion and population, there is an overwhelming case for our own consultant maternity unit, but—this is where the immediate problem arose—in its meeting on 16 November, the health authority basically said no to all those representations. Over the years, I have been involved in numerous campaigns. I have never known a campaign with as much public support as this one. I have been involved in many campaigns where people are opposed to something. We all know that is easier to mount a campaign in opposition to something than in support of something, but the campaign to have our own consultant maternity unit has had a level of public support like nothing I have seen.

When the health authority said no, and that there should be no change and no recognition of the changing population in the county, it was little surprise to me that doctors decided to publish, in the *Shropshire Star* on 2 January, the following resolution, again with all-party support—it was signed by leaders of the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democratic parties and by 49 GPs and 26 consultants.

"We the undersigned are seriously concerned by recent decisions regarding the strategy for hospital services in Shropshire and no longer have confidence in the ability of the Shropshire Health Authority to plan future health care for the people of East Shropshire."

I am sure that the Secretary of State will recognise that that is a serious state of affairs. When we meet the Under-Secretary of State tomorrow, I hope that she will respond to our modest request that, following the clinical evidence and public opinion in the region, she will ask the health authority to reconsider.

When the hospital was built in Telford, again as a result of all-party support and a campaign over many years, to meet the growing needs of a new town, it was never planned to be a static hospital. It is on a good site and there is room for expansion. It was always assumed that, as the population grew, services would grow to meet population need.

[Mr. Grocott]

The consultant maternity unit issue has focused public opinion in a way that hardly any other service could have done. I simply appeal to the Secretary of State to recognise that, in Shropshire, there is a morale problem, which is clearly spelt out in the resolution, and to take seriously the overwhelming representations that have been made to him.

5.15 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): It will not have escaped hon. Members' attention that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) could not put any figure on the amount of money that a future Labour Government might spend on the health service. I had had hopes that the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) who, I believe, is parliamentary private secretary to the Leader of the Opposition, might have been able to shed a bit more light on that subject, but those hopes were quickly dashed.

Perhaps I should not be too harsh on the Labour party. It makes a pleasant change for an Opposition-initiated debate about health matters not to be dominated by talk about money, as the health service is about much more than just that. It is indeed about a high level of morale. Before the hon. Member for Peckham leaves, I thank her for what she has done to boost morale among Conservative Members recently. The right decision that she took for her son was not the right decision for morale on the Labour Benches.

Most of the motion that we are being invited to endorse is simply fatuous nonsense, but we can agree on one thing: the high importance that we all attach to nursing staff in the national health service. We all agree that it is important that the House should affirm that

"the NHS staff are its most precious resource".

That unites all hon. Members.

We also agree—if I understood my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health correctly, he agrees, too—that the views of staff in the NHS should be heard clearly. As a constituency Member of Parliament, I sometimes find that a tricky exercise. Different branches of NHS staff do not always agree about the priorities for health delivery locally. Hospitals, doctors, general practitioners, nurses and ancillary workers often disagree about the priorities that should be attached to various issues in the local health service. They all make an invaluable contribution, but that does not necessarily mean that they should be expected to speak with one voice. Naturally, they have their own priorities.

The question that the motion begs is what makes for high morale in the NHS. Obviously pay is a factor—it would be wrong to deny that—but a host of other intangible and tangible issues affect morale. They include job satisfaction, good working conditions—by which I mean a hospital's physical environment—a sense of direction and purpose in the health service as a whole and in the trust for which staff work, and patients' manifest gratitude to staff for their help in making them fit and well again and able to go about their daily lives.

If there is one thing that destroys morale in the health service, it is the Labour party's constant denigration of what is being achieved. If there is one thing that I find especially shabby about the way in which the Opposition behave on this issue, it is their malicious attempt to weaken morale in the health service for narrow party advantage.

It is important to state clearly that the health service's achievements in recent years under this Government have been built firmly on extra money and on ensuring that that money is spent well. It must be repeated time and again that spending on the NHS in England is up sharply: by 70 per cent. in real terms since 1979. Moreover, health service spending represents a larger share of national income. When we took office in 1979, the Labour party was spending just 4.7 per cent. of gross domestic product on health; now, we are spending some 6 per cent. That is a sharply increased share of an increased national income.

It is obviously important to discuss pay, as it has a significant impact on morale. No active constituency Member of Parliament could fail to be aware of the public concern about nurses' pay; probably no group in society is more admired than nurses, and rightly so. That is precisely why their pay has risen by so much—by some 70 per cent. over and above inflation under the present Government. I am told that an experienced ward sister now earns about £22,000 per year.

I do not take kindly to lectures from the Labour party about nurses' pay. It was Labour that cut their pay, in real terms, when it last had any responsibility for health. It was the Conservatives' respect for nurses that led us to establish the Nurses and Midwives Pay Review Body in, I believe, 1983. It is essential for that body's findings always to be respected. Sometimes they will please the nurses and alarm the Treasury; on other occasions, they may please the Treasury and upset the nurses. That is the nature of independent bodies.

I issue not a warning but a judgment when I say that I do not think that nurses can seriously expect to retain an independent body to review their pay if they are prepared to accept the outcome only when it suits them. I hope that the Government will continue to accept the pay review body's recommendations in full, as they have in the past. We should also remember that—as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out—no nurse has yet received a pay award. Personally, I hope that the awards will be well above the 2 per cent. minimum established by the pay review body: I want nurses' pay to continue to grow in real terms. We should also remember that many individual nurses will in any event receive considerably more than 2 per cent., plus the locally agreed settlement, because many receive annual salary increments.

I should say, in fairness—I try to be a fair man—that there are signs of a few recruitment difficulties in certain specialties in my constituency, but I suspect that pay is not the root cause. I suspect that the problems are also caused by something of which my right hon. Friend has considerable personal experience—continuing concern about delay in the building of our new district general hospital.

The independence of the pay review body shines through every page of its report. It is important for people outside to understand that: the Government have accepted independent advice. The report states:

"Pay increases for nursing staff in 1995-96 have compared favourably with awards in the public sector and been broadly in line with those in the private sector, despite problems associated with the introduction of a measure of local pay determination . . . We further recommend that individual Trusts should engage in

negotiation with their staff representatives for local pay increases in 1996-97. We note that the Government is providing 3.9 per cent. additional resources to the HCHS"—

the hospital and community health services—

"in England in 1996-97. We have no reason to think that Scotland and Wales will be worse off. We believe that these resources should enable all Trusts to offer reasonable local pay increases to their staff, in addition to our recommended increase in national salary scales."

The body is at pains to point out some of the problems as well:

"The Review Body is not a negotiating partner and we have not sought to determine conditions of employment. However we would be remiss if we did not point out that in our view local pay arrangements can only contribute to increasing efficiency and job satisfaction if all aspects of work organisation are considered."

I hope that trusts will consider that recommendation carefully.

The review body says a great deal about its own independence. It says, for example:

"The Review Body has in our view always to work within the broad framework for the NHS established by Government policies: this would apply to any Government and any policy framework. This does not affect the Review Body's independence, which means that we come to our own judgement on the issues we are required to consider. We accepted in our last report that local pay determination was an inherent part of the Government's NHS reforms. In particular we felt that Trusts and staff representatives should be able to use local pay bargaining to achieve greater flexibility and efficiency in delivering health services, for example, by responding to the local labour market, or by improving the quality and quantity of patient care."

That is what drives the review body, and I think that it is absolutely right. What the body says gives the lie to the line peddled by the hon. Member for Peckham, that a national health service is all about national pay scales. It manifestly is not: a national health service is not a national employment service. Addressing local issues means achieving equality of care. That is the real need of the health service. The pay review body's report makes it clear that achieving that equality can be assisted by an element of local pay bargaining. For me, that is what a national health service is all about.

I said that morale in the health service was not just a question of pay. Working in a successful organisation matters to everyone, whatever field they are in. It is certainly true that the NHS has been a spectacular success: the Labour party tries to conceal that, but, I hope, consistently fails to do so.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Luff: No, I do not think I will. I observed the way in which the hon. Gentleman treated my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and I have no particular desire to give him any currency.

This year, hospitals will carry out 3 million more treatments than in 1979 and 1 million more than in 1991, when reforms were introduced. That is reflected in shorter waiting times. Over the past five years—my right hon. Friend made this point, but it bears repetition—the number of patients waiting for more than a year has fallen from more than 200,000 to about 31,600, the lowest figure since 1948. Over the past six years, the average wait for treatment has halved.

In Worcester, the success has been particularly spectacular, as my right hon. Friend saw for himself on Christmas eve when we toured Worcester Royal infirmary together. I hope that he agrees that what we saw suggested that nurse-patient relations at the infirmary were of the highest order, as they have always been. I also hope that he agrees that, during our walk around the wards, there was an atmosphere of professional dedication and high-quality patient care. That suggests to me that morale in my hospital trust is reasonably high. Perhaps in areas that we did not see it is not quite so high, but certainly it is generally good, as it has every reason to be.

Worcester Royal infirmary treated 2,851 more patients in 1994-95, and is on course to treat a surprisingly precise 3,444 in the current financial year. That represents increases in activity of 7.9 per cent. and 7 per cent. in two successive years. Further increases are planned for the coming year. Maximum waiting times have fallen sharply in my constituency. In 1993-94, the trust reduced them from two years to one; in 1994-95, they were reduced from 12 months to nine; this year, the trust is on target for a reduction from nine months to six. That is a phenomenal achievement by any standards, but it does not stop there. Worcester Royal infirmary is one of the 12 significantly improved hospitals in the national league tables. It was awarded a charter mark for its out-patient work, and it was the first hospital in England to win World Health Organisation status as a health-promoting hospital.

I know from what I see in my surgery, read in my post bag and hear from friends who have received treatment at the hospital, how grateful patients are for the quality of care that they are given there. I know that almost every patient receives an extremely favourable impression. There is a "but", however. My right hon. Friend probably knows what is coming.

Morale is also about good facilities. I am glad to say that facilities have been provided at a spectacular rate throughout the country: I believe that there has been a multi-million-pound project every week throughout the lifetime of the present Government. That is a real shot in the arm for the morale of those working with the new facilities. The massive increase in funds that the Government have made available to the NHS has made that possible.

Worcester's new hospital, however, is overdue. I am delighted to be able to tell my right hon. Friend that approval for the outline business case has now been won from the region, and the trust's ambition is to get contracts signed this year. Three private finance initiative syndicates have already pre-qualified, and the invitation to tender will go out early in the spring, with bids due in the summer. I look to my right hon. Friend to ensure that no obstacles or elephant traps are placed in the way of the new hospital by, for example, his friends in the Treasury.

I know what keeping to the predicted schedules for building that new hospital will do for the morale of the Worcester Royal infirmary trust staff. The new hospital, which will have a fine range of core services, will be one of which to be proud. I know that other hospitals in the region are facing severe difficulties because plans for them are inappropriate, but I am confident that the trust, the health authority, the region and the Department will not make those mistakes again.

I am delighted that the hospital is likely to be built using money from the private finance initiative. I am sure that that will produce some innovative solutions to the health needs of Worcester. Freeing up the supply of

[Mr. Luff]

capital should enable more such hospitals to be built in other parts of the country sooner than might otherwise have been possible.

Morale also relates to working in a well-managed organisation. Working in a badly managed organisation is incredibly poor for morale. Although I hope that nothing that the hon. Member for Peckham said suggested that management is intrinsically bad, that was the impression that I formed from her remarks. It is generally accepted that the NHS has been appallingly under-managed. Bureaucracy must be resisted and I welcome the 8 per cent. real-terms cut in administration costs across the health service that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State repeatedly reminds us has been made this year.

I welcome the reduction in the number of executive directors in my trust. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's plans to fight bureaucracy are impressive. The abolition of a whole tier of the health service, opposed by the Labour party, is welcome. The merging of three health authorities into one in my county is also welcome. What does that do for bureaucracy? It does a great deal; it helpfully releases resources for patient care.

Reducing bureaucracy locally is not always as uncontroversial as it might appear. The merger of two community health trusts in my county has been opposed—sadly—by one vote on my local community health council. Interestingly, the debate and the voting was swung by the intervention of my former Labour opponent at the last election. He persuaded the community health council to oppose a further reduction in local health service bureaucracy—so much for Labour's opposition to bureaucracy at a local level. Give Labour a chance and it supports unnecessary management costs and less money for patient care. It is yet another case of do as we say, not as we do.

I think that I am right in saying that the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) said a year ago:

"I do not think it's really in question any more that the NHS has been under-managed in the past."

Perhaps the hon. Member for Peckham, who now speaks on such matters from the Opposition Front Bench, needs to be reminded of that. The £34 billion or so that we spend each year on the health service must be properly managed—the House has a right to expect my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to ensure accountability and effectiveness in delivering a high level of patient care.

I do not think that many hon. Members know that I worked in the NHS for a few months in 1973, as a hospital porter. The huge scope to manage resources more effectively rapidly became clear to me. The Socialist Health Association gave some very wise advice to the Labour party last January, when it was quoted in *The Guardian* as saying:

"the NHS was traditionally under-managed and the Party"—

the Labour party—

"should avoid 'bureaucrat-bashing' . . . It is clear that in an organisation such as the NHS, good management is a prerequisite for good patient care".

I had hoped to hear something in this debate about the Labour party's plans for the health service. As far as I could tell, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State agreed with much of Labour's five-point plan and is already putting it in place himself.

The Labour party needs to bear in mind three things. First, it is still not promising any new money, yet constantly suggests that we are not spending enough. The silence when my right hon. Friend confronted the hon. Member for Peckham with that point spoke volumes. In fact, I noticed that she even avoided catching his eye while he put the point to her because she was so embarrassed by it.

Secondly, Labour's plans for the NHS, if it were ever to form a Government, involve substantial extra costs with no increased patient care. A national minimum wage would directly and indirectly increase costs through reclaimed differentials, and its plans to end competitive tendering would build costs back into the system and reduce funds for patient care.

Thirdly, even though the Labour party cannot quite work out what it does not like about our health service reforms, it plans more upheaval—even of reforms that are working well and that the medical profession has said it likes, such as GP fundholding. Those are three direct routes to lower morale. The system has experienced major change and the Labour party seems to want to impose more on it. That change is delivering the goods and should be allowed to settle down.

The fundamental test of the health service, which those who work in it should apply, is not the number of beds, the waiting list, or the management levels, but the results that it is delivering in improved health care. I have cited some of those results, as did my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Two facts that really matter about the health service that should encourage the highest possible morale among all those who work in it are: a child born today has a two-year longer life expectancy than he or she would have had in 1979—that is a result of the Government's policies—and, since 1979, the proportion of babies dying in the first year of their life has halved. Such results give the lie to the Labour party's arguments.

5.34 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I welcome the debate, although, like last week's, it has not added greatly so far to the sum of human knowledge. Although the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) was right to identify the lack of morale, I join others who have identified her huge flaw in not mentioning what the Labour party would do about the biggest issue connected with morale: pay. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) says that he will answer that in his winding-up speech, so I shall look—

Mr. McLeish *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hughes: He said that from a sedentary position a few moments ago. He will either deal with the issue and we will have an answer, or he will not do so and we will go without an answer. I was not expecting an answer—I do not think that the Labour party has one. I hope that all those who are interested will read the account of the debate and realise that, although it is very easy to say what is wrong with the health service, it is much more difficult to come up with the recipe to put it right.

The hon. Member for Peckham described five points. First, she said that health professionals should be given a say, with which the Minister and every hon. Member

agrees. Secondly, she said that there should be an end to employees being gagged. I did not hear the Secretary of State agree with that, but my hon. Friends and I certainly do. Thirdly, she said that there should be improved safety at work, which is a general proposition that others and I would support. Fourthly, she said that there should be fair pay, which is easy to enunciate without any elaboration. The fifth point got lost in the general exchange on what fair pay might be. We clearly have to wait for another day to find out what the Labour party will do in practical terms about the pay of NHS staff.

I expressly join the Secretary of State in congratulating and thanking the people who work for the health service—the largest employer in the country—for all they do and for their dedication. That is where we ought to start. I am all too willing to support many phrases in the Government amendment. There has been considerable improvement in many parts of the health service, such as nurse training, and many of the developments have produced better qualified people.

There is, however, some difficulty. I confirm that there is low morale in many parts of the health service, which the Secretary of State has not yet addressed. I hope that the Minister will address it. It is no secret to aficionados of health service debates that across the country Liberal Democrats are surveying morale, among many other issues. *[Interruption.]* I shall add factual evidence that confirms that morale is low. *[Interruption.]* Since hon. Members are always rightly sceptical of the veracity of such evidence, I shall even cite the number of forms sent out and the number of responses returned.

The leader of the Liberal Democrat party in the west midlands, John Hemming, and the deputy leader, Paul Keech, who are respectively our prospective candidates in Birmingham and in Hereford, carried out a survey among the majority of practices—that is a real test—in Birmingham and Hereford, in which 354 forms were returned. In answer to the question, "Are you seriously considering leaving medicine by early retirement?", 41 per cent. of GPs said that they were.

That survey was conducted at the end of last year. When Chris Fox, a colleague who is our prospective candidate in Windsor—the seat of the deputy chairman of the Conservative party—asked GPs in that constituency the same question, more than 50 per cent. said that they were considering early retirement. To ensure that the statistics are on the record, I should like to point out that 30 per cent. of GPs in that constituency replied, representing 70 per cent. of the practices. I shall give the House two further statistics, only to demonstrate that my proposition has many resources to back it up.

Steve Jarvis, our prospective parliamentary candidate for Hertfordshire, North-East, had a reply rate of 42 per cent. to his survey, and more than half the GPs in that constituency are seriously considering giving up medicine. The results of those surveys will be compiled in future—so that people do not have to wait for their exciting conclusion.

My colleague, Mark Oaten, who is our prospective candidate in Winchester—

Mr. Kevin Hughes: Outrageous.

Mr. Simon Hughes: It is not outrageous at all; it is fact.

Mark Oaten received replies from more than 80 per cent. of the practices in that constituency, and 47 per cent. of the GPs there were seriously considering leaving the profession by taking early retirement.

Mr. Luff: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: Of course I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, with whom I discover I share one thing in common—I, too, was once a hospital porter.

Mr. Luff: I wonder whether any of those surveys will be about anyone other than prospective Liberal parliamentary candidates. I ask just for my own amusement and information.

Mr. Hughes: If the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues want to join my colleagues in conducting the surveys, I should be entirely happy for that to happen and would equally attribute the results to them.

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): I should like to clarify a point, because the hon. Gentleman has mentioned my constituency. Is this the same survey that came from the Liberal Democrats' style book of campaigning tactics, which asked, in a general sense, what Nora Batty's view was of the local health service? I must know what we are talking about. That survey predicated its approach with the view that, of course, a vast majority of people would be demoralised. If it is the same one, I should certainly like to know.

Mr. Hughes: I do not know whether Nora Batty features in it. However, as it is the Minister's constituency, I shall happily send him a copy of the surveys. We could then debate the health service in Winchester, as my colleague in Winchester would be happy to do.

It seems me that there is abundant evidence for my proposition. The surveys were obviously a partisan collection, but they had responses from independent professionals. The surveys are borne out by all the other evidence. It ill behoves the Secretary of State—I hope that the Minister will not make the same mistake—to fail to acknowledge that there is a common dissatisfaction among professionals. One has only to ask the representative professional bodies to confirm that; whether one asks the BMA or the Royal College of Nursing, the evidence is the same. All the briefings that Members of Parliament receive from those bodies confirm those facts.

I shall not cite the evidence which we received in anticipation of today's debate, although I shall cite two other recent pieces of evidence. The first is a report, from last June, of the Department of Health's medical work force standing advisory committee. It contained clear evidence that there is a shortage of doctors in the hospital sector, as set out on page 18, and in general practice. A significant number of posts remained unfilled and without applicants. In response to the pay review body's recommendations and the Government's response to them, Michael Lowe, the BMA deputy secretary, said in a letter:

"The underlying failure of the Review Body to acknowledge an act upon the excessive and unsustainable workload facing doctors is further exacerbated by the Government's gratuitous insult of phasing the award."

[Mr. Hughes]

That is the most telling point; doctors have complained that the award, once recommended, will be phased in.

Nurses are entirely unhappy. The general secretary of the Royal College of Nursing has said on the radio and, during the weekend, in the newspapers that nurses find a fundamental award of 2 per cent., with a prospective local top-up, entirely unsatisfactory, and that they will campaign for a 6 per cent. basic award everywhere. Of course pay is not the only influence on morale. Other things impinge on morale, such as stress and work load; the number of people working in the ward, practice or hospital; how staff are treated by management; and how often they must go for locums or to an agency. Our job is to seek to alleviate those factors; that is our collective responsibility.

I should say one other thing to elaborate the point that I made in my intervention on the Secretary of State's speech. There are acute crises in various parts of the health service. The Secretary of State was right in saying that the review body did not say that the crises were occurring everywhere. However, that does not mean that the crises are not acute where they exist. One directorate at my local hospital, in the Guy's and St. Thomas's NHS trust, lost 13 staff nurses between November last year and January this year. That loss of people from one department cannot be sustained without a huge impact.

Whenever I have gone around to my local hospital, I have been able to testify to the truth of most patients' view—to which the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) alluded—that the staff there do an excellent job. However, the patients often also recognise how much stress and overwork the staff experience, and how that makes it difficult for staff to do the job that they would like to do.

I should like to give a few propositions on how we might proceed. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I stated our position on pay in an amendment on the Order Paper, which was in contradistinction to the Labour party's position. We believe that there should be a pay review. We ask the Government to re-think the pay increase that has been awarded to nurses and for the national pay increase to keep pace, at least, with inflation. It is extremely unfair that nurses—uniquely, out of all the people to have had a pay increase recommended—have had recommended a below-inflation pay increase. Of course I appreciate that the increase may be topped up by local awards, but the fundamental 2 per cent. award is clearly below inflation.

What shall we do? It is right to say that the elimination of short-term contracts would help considerably, because they undermine morale. One of the problems of the NHS structure, in which trusts themselves have short-term contracts, is that trusts employ people only on short-term contracts. That is a fundamental flaw in the system. There must also be increased flexibility in the types of contract that are offered. I am not saying that they should not be long-term, but people need to have sabbaticals, to share jobs and to have part-time contracts, particularly to encourage returners—the people who have left a profession, especially nursing, and want to return to it.

There must be—sadly, we heard not a word about it from the Secretary of State—effective forward planning. One of the dangers of a divided NHS, as it is under the current structure, is that there is no clear planning to meet the staff demand. When professional colleagues who advised our party in 1992 examined what would be the likely result of current policy, it was found that there would be a shortage of nurses, doctors, consultants and senior registrars in many places. Indeed, we are short of those people. We are not adequately planning ahead. We cannot leave such matters to the market. We have a national health service, and it must have people to meet patients' demands. I am grateful that the Minister agrees with that, and I hope that he will tell us how the Government propose to deal with that problem, so that we can plan for adequate staff and prevent shortages.

A small point—it does not apply everywhere in the country—is that there should be adequate staff accommodation, which is a factor in recruiting younger new staff in particular. There is now less staff accommodation, and trusts should sometimes subsidise it to enable staff to work in hospitals.

We believe that there should be one NHS pay review body, to deal with the disparity between management and other pay grades. The pay of everyone, from chief executives to cleaners, would be reviewed by the same body. That would prevent the situation in which the pay levels of some grades and professions are decided without taking into account the pay levels of others. The current position absolutely gets the goat of people who work in the mainstream of the health service.

I shall take the example of my local health service. If a nurse there is on £10,000, £15,000 or £20,000 and the chief executive is on £115,000 or thereabouts, nothing will persuade that nurse that the pay levels are equitable, however big a responsibility the chief executive has.

We believe that the pay review body's recommendations should be altered or varied only with the assent of the House of Commons. If the Government decide not to follow the recommendations, as they have done this year by delaying implementation, that should require parliamentary approval. That would give parliamentary protection against the actions of any Government who wanted to change what the independent body recommended.

We believe that there should be national criteria for local flexibility. There is a need for local flexibility, but there should be national criteria to govern how that is applied. For example, there should be flexibility to reorganise the staff structure in a trust, to deal with a local recruitment problem or to reward exemplary performances. However, local flexibility should be used within a pattern established for the country as a whole.

I shall mention two more issues. First, compulsory competitive tendering should be optional, and not compulsory. Secondly, the medical hierarchy should be reformed. I could elaborate on that, but I will not. However, the present structure is not compatible in many ways with the best use of resources. If we took less time to train our specialists, if we had specialists accredited earlier by the professional colleges and if we increased the number of consultant posts by bringing people into consultant grades earlier, we would start to fill the gaps in the system.

There are ways of dealing with morale in the health service. We have a duty to health service employees and, more important, to the patients to improve morale. The implication of today's debate is that all three parties,

and especially the Labour party, need to come clean with the employees in the health service on what they would do in practical terms to improve morale. Words on the Order Paper are not enough.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There are 39 minutes available before the winding-up speeches. Four hon. Members hope to catch my eye and, with co-operation, they should all be successful.

5.51 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): I had hoped to follow the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott). I have nothing against the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), but I sat on a Select Committee with the hon. Member for The Wrekin and he raised several important and interesting points about his constituency today. I felt that he did credit to the House by raising non-party political points, especially as he is the parliamentary private secretary to the Leader of the Opposition.

I also give considerable credit to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey. At least his party has the courage and honesty to table an amendment that gives its view about the nurses' pay review body. The hon. Gentleman did not say how he intended to fund any recommendations, if his party were ever in office, perhaps because he believes that his party will never be in office.

Mr. Simon Hughes: We have agreed to fund the commitment made in the amendment. I have cleared it with my Treasury colleagues and I can speak to and underwrite that commitment.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman's party is clearly prepared to put its cheque book where its mouth is. That is more than can be said for the Labour party.

I listened very carefully to the speech by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman)—I notice that she is not gracing us with her presence—and she did not say whether she supported the independent pay review body. Although she made several comments about the funding of nurses' pay, she made no commitment whatever—even when challenged by the Secretary of State—on how the funding might be achieved. It will be noted that she was not prepared to make any spending commitment on behalf of her party.

In the constant whinge from the hon. Member for Peckham, she came up with no new ideas for patient care. The Labour party appears to be bereft of new ideas, and all it wants to do is to destroy the one policy that has increased morale in the medical profession—the formation of GP fundholders.

I made the point, in an intervention in the speech by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, that it is not by chance that every GP in Lichfield will be a fundholder by April. I have spoken to many of them—for example, Barry Jones of the Minster practice. Unlike the hon. Member for Peckham, I am not frightened to mention the names of general practitioners who speak to me. Barry Jones has told me that he has become a fundholder because it helps him to be a better doctor and to give better care. That is what the national health service is all about. We have heard nothing from the Labour party except that it would destroy the system. We have not heard what new systems it might create.

We should never forget—I do not believe the point has been mentioned in the debate so far—that the national health service is the biggest employer by far in the United Kingdom. It is bigger than the armed forces. Surely the Labour party does not want to go back to the system that existed in 1948. That was a huge and unworkable bureaucracy. The hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) shakes his head, but the Labour party has spent most of its time today criticising bureaucracy. Whether one runs the national health service or a large corporation, one has to decentralise control and that is exactly what we are doing.

Different criteria affect morale, as my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) mentioned. One of those criteria is the facilities that are available. In Lichfield, we are blessed with modern facilities. The facilities in the constituencies of Mid-Staffordshire and of South-East Staffordshire mean that patients can be treated in modern hospitals. Stafford hospital was built no more than five years ago. The hospital in Cannock—I am surprised that the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) is not present, perhaps because he would be the first person to recognise the truth of my point—is brand new. Massive improvements are being made at the Victoria hospital in my patch of Lichfield, where I live.

Recent improvements at the Victoria hospital in Lichfield include a recent increase in out-patient capital spending by £200,000, and an increase in spending on day surgery by £400,000. The number of staff serving out-patients has increased and there has been a huge increase in activity. The number of out-patients has increased from around 11,000 in 1994 to 15,000 in 1995 and the number of day surgery cases from 231 to 670 over the same period. Those are examples of the changes that took place in the national health service partly under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who used to be a Minister of State in the Department of Health.

There has been a fundamental change and money now follows the patients, not the other way around. That is not just a slogan. Lichfield patients who previously had to go to Sutton Coldfield, Stafford or Burton are now treated in modern facilities in Lichfield. Consultants from Wolverhampton, Sutton Coldfield and Burton now send patients to Lichfield to be treated.

I smile wryly when I hear that morale in the British Medical Association is low. I suspect that it was no lower in 1948 when the Labour Government brought in the national health service. I hesitate to say it, but the BMA is rarely enthusiastic about any form of change. The consultants were not at all enthusiastic about moving from Wolverhampton and treating patients in Lichfield. They would, of course, much rather have patients shipped over to Wolverhampton, as that is convenient for them.

I had a sneaking sense of agreement with the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey when he said that we should reconsider the tiers and structures that exist in the national health service, particularly the way in which people become junior doctors, housemen and junior and senior consultants. It almost reminds me of the way that one became a pilot in British Airways in the old days: it was not due to ability, but was a matter of moving into dead mens'

[Mr. Fabricant]

shoes. We certainly do not want that system in today's health service, and the practice is changing because of the current reforms.

It is important to say that there are now new services at the Victoria hospital in Lichfield due not only to the national changes that have taken place because of Department of Health initiatives but to the Premier Health national health service trust. I pay tribute to Margaret Whalley, the chairman of Premier Health, and Mike Marchment, who lives in Lichfield and who is the chief executive of Premier Health. It is thanks to them and to the facilities that have been made available by the Government that new services have been installed at the Victoria hospital over the past 18 months.

Those services include rehabilitation medicine, direct access surgery, an evening radiology service, an evening physiotherapy service and additional orthopaedic, dermatology and gynaecology out-patient services. Day case income is currently £50,000 above target. There has been a massive rebuild of in-patient facilities.

Given the huge number of advertisements that we heard from the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey, perhaps I might be allowed to say that I was recently invited to open a new wing at the Victoria hospital for out-patient care and minor surgery. There is an additional 20-place day unit, and the rehabilitation facilities have been extended. There are also more day surgery facilities.

In an intervention, I mentioned the statement made by a ward sister at the Victoria hospital in Lichfield when she was asked about changes that continue to take place in the Lichfield area. When she was asked whether she was demoralised, she said that she was not because she could now use her training for the first time, whereas previously she had been more concerned with the narrow area of nursing care, which had meant that she was unable to provide the service that she wanted to give to her patients.

The liaison that now exists between general practitioners—all of whom will be fundholders come this April—and the local hospital is almost returning to the sort of Tannochbrae system that used to exist before the formation of the NHS. There is a true community spirit and good patient care in Lichfield without the invidious systems that existed in the days of Tannochbrae, when people had to pay for patient care. That should never be forgotten.

One constantly hears from the Labour party about two-tier systems that cannot be substantiated. There is no two-tier system—there certainly could not be in Lichfield, as all the GPs are fundholders. Patient care in Lichfield is free at the point of service. For the first time, some consultants are having to get off their bottoms and come to Lichfield to treat patients, rather than the poor patients having to visit the consultants. That is one of the most important aspects of the changes that have taken place. We have heard absolutely nothing from the Labour party, merely criticisms and talk about dismantling the GP fundholding service. We have heard no answer to the question, how would the Labour party pay for some of the changes about which it talks?

There will never be enough money paid to nurses, but let us not forget that it was this Government who introduced an independent pay review body. This Government are keeping to their commitment of paying what the independent pay review body recommends. We should not forget that the average earnings of a nurse in 1979 were £67.80. We should not forget—perhaps you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, were in the House at the time—that before 1979, under a Labour Government, nurses suffered a pay cut. It was not merely a cut in real terms, but an actual pay cut. Such a cut was unheard of.

The ward sister in Lichfield told me that not only did she suffer a pay cut when she was a nurse, but she had to worry about where she would get the sheets laundered. She said that the health service was in such a dreadful state under the so-called Labour Government that not even the most basic things could be organised. The Labour Government always claimed that they cared—perhaps they cared, but they could not deliver.

In 1979, the average earnings of a nurse were £67.80; they are now £310.90. If a nurse's average earnings had kept pace with the retail prices index—with inflation—since we inherited the 1979 wage level, nurses would now be earning only £186. A nurse now earns £310—£125 more than inflation, while the Labour party dares to teach us about how we should steward the health service.

It ill behoves the Labour party to preach lessons to us. The hon. Member for Peckham sits on the Opposition Front Bench saying nothing and avoiding the eye of the Secretary of State for Health when he asks her how she would pay for Labour's policies and what sort of funding commitment she is prepared to make on behalf of her party. Anything that now follows can only be empty rhetoric.

6.7 pm

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): After the rant from the Secretary of State, it is obvious that the Government did not want today's debate on health. We all know that there is no good time for the Government to have a health debate, but after a week when they announced a mere 2 per cent. increase for nurses and when the Prime Minister stood at the Dispatch Box and refused to condemn the massive golden handshake given to Cedric Brown of British Gas, we can certainly see why the Government do not want health issues on the agenda.

The hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant), in his closing remarks, mentioned an average nurse receiving £310 per week. I suspect that, at his advice surgery this weekend, there will be a queue of average nurses wanting to know where their share is. I do not believe that an average nurse receives £310. The hon. Gentleman may be able to ratchet the figure up by lumping together the money of consultants and chief executives, but he will not be able to arrive at that figure on the basis of the figures for nursing staff.

Mr. Fabricant: The figures come from the earnings-related database and the standard payroll system. The information applies to nurses—it does not include any other bodies.

Mr. Hughes: I certainly cannot accept that the average nurse receives £310 per week, and I do not think that the average nurse would agree with the hon. Gentleman.

The Royal College of Nursing described the nurses' pay award as

"derisory and out of touch",

and it will not tackle the increasingly evident shortages and low morale in the service.

I pay tribute to the work of national health service staff in Doncaster and throughout the country who, despite the Government's policies, manage to provide an excellent service and much comfort and advice to patients. I am sure that, in initiating the debate, my Front-Bench colleagues wanted to recognise that service and to take the Government to task for what they have done to the morale of those dedicated staff over the years.

The Government surely cannot fail to perceive that morale in the NHS is low and falling, that increased work loads are causing stress and that low pay awards and the strain of increased bureaucracy are producing outrage. The Government must realise that doctors are leaving the NHS due to poor working conditions and that, worryingly, nursing shortages are increasing.

That is happening against the background of encroaching privatisation of the national health service. Beds are being shut and we hear daily horror stories of patients being shunted around the country in search of a bed. The latest, published in today's *Standard*, is entitled:

"Meningitis scare boy faced 100-mile trip for hospital bed".

His parents took him to the Frimley Park hospital in Camberley, but were told to take him to Poole in Dorset. That is what the national health service has been reduced to under the present Government. Patients are being shunted from hospital to hospital and from county to county.

Artificial waiting lists are being created. Accident and emergency admissions have increased by 16 per cent. in the past five years. Do the Government not realise that doctors and nurses feel let down by a Government whose policies have made them unable to get on with the work to which NHS staff are dedicated—that of caring for patients?

There is much anecdotal evidence about staff morale in the NHS. People are very anxious about the lack of resources and about short-term thinking. There are reports from the RCN that, in my constituency, the Doncaster Royal infirmary has a shortage of theatre nurses and there are not enough specialist nurses to cover the operating theatre; yet 32 senior nursing posts have been threatened in the Trent region alone as part of the Government's proposals for management cuts. Those are nursing cuts, not management cuts.

Mr. O'Hara: My hon. Friend will not be surprised to hear about the position in a hospital in my area.

Faced with the task of making a 5 per cent. cut in a £4 million management budget—£200,000—the management found that they had to invest an extra £200,000 to finance the internal market. They had to meet the costs of corresponding with general practitioners in connection with meeting contractual standards and enhancing their record keeping to meet the continued data requirements of the regional office. They had to spend £70,000 on correspondence, £80,000 on medical reports and £50,000 to meet the data requirements of regional office.

Does it therefore surprise my hon. Friend to know that, when it came to the crunch, most of the cuts were in nursing staff and pharmaceutical staff and not in management?

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to that position. No, I am not surprised. His words reinforce my arguments.

Today, we hear of six nursing sisters working in accident and emergency at Leicester Royal infirmary facing redundancy while at the same hospital parts of the accident and emergency department have recently had to be closed on occasions due to staff shortages. There are worrying reports that the use of bank and agency staff is increasing, which obviously denies patients all-important continuity of care.

Nurse managers complain that non-clinical duties take up too much time and that they are not on the wards as much as they would like. They are consumed by paperwork. Those issues, in my constituency and others, reflect the position locally and nationally, which gives cause for concern.

Unison officials in the Trent area have reported that nursing shortages are becoming worse and that increasing numbers of staff do double shifts to keep the service running. Between 1989 and 1994, the number of nurses in the Trent region was cut by 9 per cent. while the number of managers escalated by 470 per cent. A survey undertaken by the Institute for Employment Studies for the Royal College of Nursing shows that nearly 40 per cent. of nurses in the Trent region said that they would leave nursing if they could.

The national statistics speak for themselves: 90 per cent. of nurses felt that

"local pay will result in unfair deals"

for some nurses, and 87 per cent. felt that local pay would increase uncertainty about future pay. Moreover, an increasing proportion of nurses regarded nursing as an insecure job. As nurses leave the profession, student places have nevertheless decreased dramatically—by two thirds since 1983.

More and more hard evidence is emerging of increasing stress and low morale among doctors. As recently as yesterday, we heard of a survey carried out by Middlesex university among London GPs. It was a small survey, but the results were revealing: 98 per cent. of the doctors questioned complained that their paperwork had increased, and nine out of 10 said that they did not have enough time to keep up with medical developments. Two thirds of the GPs said that they had less time to spend with each patient since the NHS changes.

The British Medical Association recognises that many doctors are leaving the medical profession. The reasons that it cites for that haemorrhage of staff are increasing work load, inflexible training, the internal market and the long hours worked by junior doctors. In a study of 229 doctors, it was found that half had thought of leaving the profession. A recruitment survey by the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts noted a significant fall in the number of trainee doctors wanting to become GPs. It attributes that fall to the low morale and increased work loads in general practice.

We may also consider more specific cases. Christopher Adams resigned as head consultant in February 1995 from the department of neurosurgery at Radcliffe infirmary, Oxford, after being asked to create waiting lists artificially. In an article in the *British Medical Journal*, Mr. Adams said that his department, which has the lowest average cost per case in England, at one point became

"unsafe . . . hyperefficient . . . with exhausted and demoralised staff"—

his words, not mine.

[Mr. Hughes]

The Government must answer some serious questions, not only for Opposition Members, but for nurses, doctors and patients. The Secretary of State must admit that NHS staff morale is at an all-time low, and he must admit the reasons for that and tell us what action he plans to take. Will the Secretary of State tackle the NHS staffing crisis and ensure that there are not shortages of senior nurses, especially in operating theatres and accident and emergency departments? Shortages of nurses and lack of planning for nursing needs are placing patient care at risk and contribute to low morale among nurses in the NHS. Exhausted and demoralised staff are putting patient care at risk. Medical experts express those anxieties. The Government must listen to the opinions of those professionals—the doctors and nurses who are struggling to keep the national health service running as well as it does.

The Government do not seem to realise what they are doing. They cannot continue with low pay awards for nurses and longer working hours in the name of efficiency. They cannot continually cut nursing student places in the light of increasing shortages and they cannot continue to run down the morale of NHS staff still further. The Government tell us that the NHS is safe in their hands, but the doctors and nurses do not believe it; Opposition Members certainly do not believe it—and we know that the public do not believe it either.

6.19 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I shall be brief, as the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) also wishes to speak in the 10 minutes before the Front-Bench winding up speeches begin. I could employ the old Scottish trick of speaking extremely quickly and putting all of my comments on the record. However, I shall try to condense my points, which I want to make quite forcefully.

The debate is about the morale of national health service staff. No hon. Member from any political party can be unaware of the fact that the morale of NHS staff at all levels has been severely affected over a considerable period—not just by one change, but by a series of changes which have created uncertainty. The British Medical Association produced documentation in November 1995 which pointed to a decline in morale among general practitioners, a steady decrease in the number of doctors entering training for general practice and so on.

The Royal College of Nursing has produced its own statistics. It referred me, as a member of the parliamentary panel, to an independent survey on the recruiting, retraining and rewarding of nurses undertaken by the Institute for Employment Studies in 1995. It drew attention to the fact that 60 per cent. of nurses said that they could earn more for less effort if they left the profession and almost 40 per cent. of nurses said that they would leave nursing if they could. Those findings are indicative of the many references that have been provided to those hon. Members who are interested in the subject.

I shall give the House just one example. A consultant in Glasgow picked up a copy of the *British Medical Journal* and found his post advertised in that publication. He had not been consulted and he did not know of any plan to replace him: he simply saw his job advertised in the *British Medical Journal*. Incidents of that kind do a great deal to undermine morale in the NHS.

All hon. Members are aware of the individual and joint views of those who work in our health service locally, including those of the Royal College of Nursing, Unison and the various local representatives of the General Medical Council. I am proud of the national health service developments that have taken place in Moray—I refer particularly to developments at Dr. Gray's hospital. However, we are far from complacent about the delivery of services as some areas continue to cause concern, and with the best will in the world, many of the issues that we have to address in Moray are related to funding.

The argument about local versus national pay bargaining can be viewed in that context. Last year the Government cunningly—if I may put it like that—announced that nurses would receive a 3 per cent. pay increase. However, the Government said that they would fund only 1 per cent. and that the other 2 per cent. must be found at trust level. It was the first time that such an arrangement had been attempted. The Government argued that the trusts would be able to find the money and that there would be no differentials in pay, irrespective of where in the United Kingdom a nurse worked. Many trusts were expected to bring forward efficiency savings to fund the 2 per cent. pay increase.

I was lucky, as my trust area managed to provide a staff pay increase of 3 per cent. across the board with no strings attached. However, that trust can make no further efficiency savings that will not impact directly on patient care. It is important to argue consistently against the idea that there should be competitiveness of that sort within the health service, but that is what is occurring with local pay bargaining.

In the present round of pay bargaining, there appears to be a deliberate attitude of divide and rule within the medical profession. The philosophy of the NHS is to ensure that there is a direct relationship between the patient and whoever delivers the service—be it consultants, GPs, nurses or ancillary workers who often play a fundamental role in patient care. In the current pay round, we are witnessing the fracturing of that relationship—which is critical to the well-being of the national health service—and a rupturing of the partnership concept.

I shall now address those problems, as I believe that every politician has a responsibility to offer constructive suggestions. We must look at the system and define what is good and what is bad; we must determine what can be retained and what must be changed. For example, do we need to spend so much money on media training for health boards? Must six people be involved in making referrals—rather than one, as was previously the case—as a result of the workings of the internal market? Should £30 million of taxpayers' money be squandered on Health Care International in Clydebank? HCI had the temerity to advertise in last Saturday's edition of *The Scotsman* and last Sunday's edition of the *Scotland on Sunday* inviting women to attend the medical centre for breast cancer screening. That undermines the idea of a national breast screening campaign, and I pay tribute to the hon. Member, for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) who has been at the forefront of the campaign in Scotland.

Most importantly, all political parties have a responsibility to put their money where their mouth is. This morning, I met representatives of the British Medical Association and I put before them the Scottish National party's budget proposals, which are open to public

scrutiny. We have said where we would spend money in the national health service. I believe that all political parties have the same responsibility, and I hope that they will follow our lead.

6.25 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute briefly to the debate and I thank the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) for abbreviating her remarks to accommodate me. I was attending a Committee of the House from a quarter to four until I entered the Chamber, which is why I was unable to hear the earlier speeches in the debate.

I wish to participate in the debate because of my long-standing interest in health issues, which is due to many factors—not least the fact that my family and I have had no private medical insurance since the time that I entered this place, and I therefore rely to a considerable extent on the national health service.

I obviously cannot comment on the earlier speeches in the debate, although I noted that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) referred to the absence of beef in Labour contributions. He questioned what the Labour party would do to improve the alleged low morale among staff in the national health service. The question of NHS staff morale is a very important one, but I do not recognise the motion's claim about growing demoralisation. No one would pretend that every detail of the NHS is perfect, but many staff are proud to work in the service: they are optimistic about its future and they relish the opportunities that the changes of the past few years offer.

I shall make two points in the short time available. The first is a historic one. I recall the state of morale in the national health service in early 1979. In January of that year, my father was in hospital and nearing the end of his life. As he was nearly 90, that was no great surprise and not particularly tragic, as it was the end of a happy and successful life—much of it spent working in the national health service. When it was clear that the NHS hospital where he was being treated could do no more for him, my mother and I decided that he should be moved to a nursing home closer to her house to spend the last three or four days of his life.

However, my father's last illness coincided with a period of industrial disruption in the national health service. I do not think that a strike is evidence of very high morale among NHS staff, but that is what occurred in the last few months of the last Labour Government. That strike may have had the consent—possibly even the active encouragement—of the trade unions which later merged to form Unison, whose support Labour Members are happy to accept.

As a consequence of that industrial action, I had to smuggle my father out of the hospital just three days before his death and transport him in a privately hired ambulance across a picket line in the middle of the night. Many of the excellent staff who had treated him were embarrassed, distressed and ashamed at what was happening. Labour party policy on the national health service had reduced their morale to a level as low as could possibly be imagined. That was the state of play in 1979.

My second point relates to this year's pay deal for NHS staff—particularly nurses. I shall not retread the ground that has been well covered by my hon. Friends, who dealt with how badly nurses' pay suffered under Labour. I do not know how much nurses will get this year, although it is clear that they have every reason to be optimistic and confident about the outcome. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out at Question Time this afternoon, nurses have done extraordinarily well and much better under the Conservative Government.

The system of local pay and negotiation is a key advantage. Anyone who has been involved in the management of any organisation, particularly one that operates at a large number of different locations, will know that staff are happiest and their morale is highest when decisions are taken at the lowest possible level and the decision making process is devolved as far down the line as possible. Nothing is worse for staff morale than the sense that their interests are being neglected at the sharp end, that they have no input in the decision making process and that key policies are being set centrally.

The most important and influential policy decisions that affect morale inevitably concern pay, so local pay negotiations can make a huge contribution to achieving and maintaining high morale in the national health service. Those who oppose or criticise the system of local pay negotiation are actively undermining the morale of NHS staff. I particularly regret the fact that some people, both within and outside the House, have tried to distort the position by claiming that nurses have received a 2 per cent. pay offer. That is not the case. I am sure that, when my hon. Friend the Minister of State replies to the debate, he will confirm that last year's local pay decisions did more than protect nurses' interests—they produced a satisfactory outcome. This year, many local employers will add significantly to the 2 per cent. national pay increase.

As local pay negotiations become the norm over the next few years, nurses will identify even more with the national health service in their communities and employers will recognise local conditions. As someone who is extremely concerned about the morale of national health service staff, I strongly commend the system of local pay and commend the Government amendment to the Opposition motion.

6.31 pm

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): I am pleased to reply to the debate. Let me begin with a point on which the whole House will unite. National health service staff do an excellent job year in, year out and over Christmas—a particularly difficult time—they did more than their pay levels would suggest. That reinforces the concern that has been expressed about the recent pay review, particularly by nurses. We should also praise the work of the London hospitals on Friday evening after the terrible outrage in the east end. Members will agree that the staff represent one of the most precious assets of the NHS.

As usual, we have had an interesting debate. According to Conservative Members, there are no problems. They seem to say, "Read my lips: there are no problems with the national health service."

Mr. Malone: No.

Mr. McLeish: The Minister says, "No." He will have a chance to tell us about those problems when he replies to the debate. The Government intend to make no concessions to patients, the public or the Opposition.

Mr. Malone: As far as I can recollect, the hon. Gentleman was listening to the speech by my right

[Mr. Malone]

hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who specifically acknowledged that there were problems in the NHS and spelled them out in detail. It is quite wrong of the hon. Gentleman to suggest that he did not, and I am sure that he would like to put that right.

Mr. McLeish: I listened to Secretary of State, and I did not hear him enumerate the problems, but I await with interest the Minister's reply to the debate.

The Secretary of State was highly selective about pay review quotes. The essence of the debate is morale and motivation in the national health service, but the Secretary of State forgot to mention that, tucked away in the review body report published last week, was the following paragraph:

"As we commented last year, changes in the wider business and labour market environment have affected the morale of employees in a number of sectors. However, the pace of change in the NHS: heavy workloads; significant and sustained pressure on resources; fears about job security; and, we suspect, the course of this year's pay dispute, will all have exacerbated staff anxieties."

The Secretary of State joins us at a time when the pay review body has conceded that there are major problems of morale and motivation. Not only did he refuse to acknowledge them, but, by logical definition, he will do nothing about them.

It is important that we put firmly on record what has happened to our national health service. It is indisputable that there are major problems that are recognised by all parties, but not by the Government. Why have we lost 60,000 beds and 50,000 nurses in five years? Ministers may quibble, but those are the Government's own figures.

Ministers should not attack their own Department of Health and their own civil servants. We have 19,000 fewer nurses in training. The Government like to talk about customers, and there are now 20,000 more managers in the national health service. It is ridiculous for the Secretary of State to champion the nurses against the bureaucrats. In the past five years, we have seen front-line care disappear, and a management explosion in the national health service.

This morning, my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) produced an excellent report highlighting the fact that an additional £1.1 billion has been spent on bureaucracy in the past five years. That represents £6 for every second in the past five years. It is hard to find the right word to describe that, but "scandal" is the first word that comes to my lips. All those factors make it easy to deduce why morale and motivation are major problems in the national health service.

We no longer talk about bed availability; we shall soon be tabling questions about trolley availability. We shall talk not about ward closures, but about corridor closures, and, as I have said, Ministers no longer talk about patients; on a number of occasions, they have described them as "customers". Does that not underline what we have been saying over the past few years—that the Government see the national health service as a business and an internal market, but at the end of the day they do not wish to talk about the patients?

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): An example of that occurred in my constituency recently, when a gentlemen who had undergone an operation woke up in an ambulance, having been driven more than 30 miles to another hospital because his bed had been reallocated while he was in the operating theatre. Neither he nor his family had been informed before the operation.

Mr. McLeish: My hon. Friend strengthens our attack on the Government. We are living in the real world, and the NHS is populated by real patients, with real anxieties and concerns. Why do they never seem to interface with Ministers or Conservative Back Benchers, although they recount their recent visits to hospitals? They do not want to acknowledge that, despite relentlessly pursuing five years of internal reforms, they simply have not got it right. Now, they are squandering the most precious resource of the NHS—the staff, their commitment and their skills.

The debate is about morale, so we have to ask why it is at such a low ebb. The Government believe that everything in the garden is rosy, so why should we have a debate on morale in the national health service?

Mr. Malone: It is habit-forming.

Mr. McLeish: The Minister says from a sedentary position that it is habit-forming. We would love to have a debate on the health service every week in Government time. *[Interruption.]* I hope that the Minister passes that note to the Leader of the House and to the Conservative Chief Whip.

Finally, I shall spell out our case against the Government. The first point that affects morale is that the Secretary of State is keen to tell interviewers that he believes that he should have private health care as a safety net. What does that do for the morale of doctors and nurses? It is not good enough. In recent interviews, he said, "We should try to make it as good as possible, but I still have private health care insurance." His predecessor, now the Secretary of State for National Heritage, may not have many qualities, but she does not have private health care. [HON. MEMBERS: "That is cheap."] It may be cheap, but it is accurate.

In the *Observer* on 11 February, an advertisement for Norwich Union Health Care Ltd. took advantage of the hypocrisy of the Secretary of State and others, using a quote from the Minister of State and two quotes from the *British Medical Journal*, all about delays. But of course, the advertisement states:

"The hospital says you can have a bed straight away."

It adds:

"When it comes to healthcare, we talk sense."

One disgraceful aspect of Government policy is that it is driving people into the private sector.

Mr. Malone *rose—*

Mr. McLeish: I have little enough time left, and I have given way before to the Minister.

The Secretary of State's lead on the private health care issue is only adding to the problem.

As to the pay award, press comments read: "Anger over 2 per cent.", "Outrage at mean awards", "Nurses accuse Tories of contempt for the NHS", "Nurses to fight for rise of 5.6 per cent.", "Fury over NHS pay insult". One would have thought that the Government, faced with a battery

of problems, would have shown some contrition—just a bit of humility and recognition that nurses do a good job and should be rewarded. Not a bit of it. The award and the Government's response was not only insulting but provocative. Perhaps the Government want to provoke, rather than to ease the burden.

The third issue on which our case is based is the health service's future direction. The Government will try to convince everyone that their agenda is not one of privatisation or commercialisation. No one believes them. There are in place the building blocks of further fragmentation, commercialisation and contractualisation over the next year. Ultimately, through the private finance initiative, market testing and other methods, there will be privatisation. That is the challenge for the Government. That is why the public do not believe that the health service is safe in Conservative hands.

Mr. Dorrell *indicated dissent.*

Mr. McLeish: The Secretary of State continues to interrupt, and I am happy that he should—but he must answer a question that he ignored earlier. What is the reason for the money-go-round of the internal market, with its bureaucrats in place? The Government lecture us on waste and fiscal prudence. It is time that official organisations within the House started to examine what the internal market is doing and its consequences.

My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) rightly highlighted the problem of recruiting nurses and doctors. The Government simply walk away. For them, the problem does not exist. If a Government are to take the NHS seriously, recruitment is the only strategy to deploy when faced with the criticisms that we are making.

Health service morale is being destroyed by the daily diet of regional and national newspaper reports of tragic incidents of hospitals posting "Full up" signs and patients having to travel across the Pennines. That issue should unite the House, as it threatens to undermine the fabric of a one-nation health service. The Government know the problems, but do not wish to do anything about them.

The Government's first line of defence is, "It has nothing to do with us. We do not collect the information. That information is not centrally held." Only after a recent parliamentary question by one of my hon. Friends are we building up the picture in respect of paediatric intensive care beds. The Government did not have relevant information. The Secretary of State said, "That is nothing to do with me. We only pass the budgets. It is over to the NHS." Thankfully but belatedly, the Government now accept that they have a role to play. The Government's defence is, "Don't ask us"—a hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil, attitude.

The Government's second line of defence is, "Blame it on the trusts. Blame it on the managers." God forbid, there are a lot of managers around. Can the Government really pass the buck? They cannot. They set the policy. They have relentlessly pursued internal reforms for five years. The trusts are only implementing Government policy, so it seems astonishing that the Government are still blaming trusts. Their answer to every issue raised in the House and elsewhere is, "It must be due to inefficient management." Sixty thousand beds have been lost, but, according to the Government, that is still a management problem.

The Government's third defence is, "We spend more on the NHS year on year." If we accept that claim at face value and put aside inflation, technology and increasing costs, are we to believe that more money is being spent? If it is, the logical question is, "Where is it being spent?" There has been extra spending on bureaucracy of £1.1 billion over the past five years, and £500 million is being spent on non-NHS provision. Under the PFI, deals are done secretly. What is the risk? What is the return? How much of the taxpayers' money is feather-bedding deals? The Government will not publish details, so Ministers should not argue and laugh.

I want to clear up any confusion that lurks in the mind of the Secretary of State on these occasions. I think that something lurks there. The Government are wedded to three words—private finance initiative. As with many other issues, the Government see no alternative way forward other than their setpieces, and no reason for dialogue.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman ought to be better informed about what his hon. Friends are up to, because, according to *The Times* today, the shadow Treasury Minister, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling)

"is currently meeting City lawyers and seems to be whispering reassuring words"

about the private finance initiative. The conclusion drawn by the people in receipt of those whispers is:

"There may be a certain amount of rebadging, but the essentials would remain the same."

Mr. McLeish: The Secretary of State raises an important issue, and must deal with it. He ought to deal with the Stonehaven issue. The right hon. Gentleman goes about England saying, "No clinical services: read my lips." In Scotland, the Secretary of State has sold off virtually everything in that state hospital to the private sector. Will policy in England be contrary to that in Scotland, or is Scotland being tested in respect of the NHS as it was with the poll tax?

The Government do not like our attack on waste. There are also £100 million of GP fundholder surpluses lying unused. A recent article in the *Observer* suggested that NHS suppliers may be taking £400 million from the health service. It is vital that the Public Accounts Committee takes on board the workings of the internal market in the NHS. There is no accountability or no cost-benefit analysis by the Department of Health. The cost to the taxpayer and benefits to patients must be high up on such an appraisal.

I urge the Minister for Health, when he winds up, to embrace and endorse that idea, to get to the bottom of whether the internal market is working, and—more importantly—in whose interest it is working. We need to know what is happening and where the money is going. It is a Government issue of massive waste in the NHS. The Government lecture us about where cash will be found for this or that. If one considers the £1.1 billion spent on bureaucracy, one sees that there is a significant difference between ourselves and Government Members. We believe in front-line care and in doctors and nurses. We do not believe in adding further to bureaucracy.

When the Minister winds up, I would like him to answer this simple question: are the Government happy for £1.1 billion cash to be used merely to police the internal market?

Mr. Dorrell: One question, after 17 minutes.

Mr. McLeish: The Secretary of State says that, but the fact remains that we provided time for the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), who had not been in the Chamber for most of the debate, but who informed the Chair of his wish to speak.

The Government do not like to be confronted with the waste argument. The Government's case is flimsy. Their arguments, "It is nothing to do with us" or "Blame it on the trusts", will not stand up. They are spending more and more money, but creating more and more waste.

The Government pretend that bed closures are all about care in the community and continuing care. The Government simply cannot match bed closures with what is happening in care in the community. That defence will not wash with the public.

The Labour party would like the Secretary of State to face the real issues. Today, he said nothing about the crisis affecting morale in the national health service. There is a crisis at the heart of the Government's policies, which reveals the unacceptable face of their policies for the NHS. We would like to see a reprioritisation of what is happening, and a refocusing on the important issues. The public, patients, taxpayers, doctors, all the staff of the national health service and the Opposition parties cannot be wrong. The Government must listen, because if they do not, we will.

6.49 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): I will not exactly follow the stream of consciousness of the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) with respect to the health service, but I will deal with a number of the foundation stones with which the Opposition thought they would underpin their argument today—and there were precious few of those.

I do not know why the Opposition called this debate. If it was to underpin morale on their Back Benches, they clearly have not succeeded, because no one bothered to turn up to listen.

We have heard another debate predicated on a false assertion supported by an exaggeration that the health service is in a state of collapse. The Government admit that the health service is under tension, that it is delivering more health care than ever before, that its staff are working extremely hard, and that problems must be addressed. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State quite clearly said in his speech that the problems need to be addressed. However, we do not accept the grotesque image of the national health service, of those who work in it and of the way they feel about it that has been painted by Labour Members.

Labour Members relied on a number of arguments, which I shall deal with individually. They referred to recruitment. They said that the NHS was now denuded of front-line staff, and that there simply are not enough people to provide a service. I shall cite some figures for the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) that might change her mind, although she is not interested in evidence; she prefers assertion. I shall refer to some medical manpower numbers.

Between 1984 and 1994, the number of general medical practitioners increased from 23,640 to 26,567—a 12.38 per cent. increase. The hon. Lady would no doubt argue, on the basis of assertion, that they have a far harder task. Those figures are accompanied by a decrease in the average list size from 2,089 to 1,900.

When the Opposition refer to nursing figures, they always ignore—this is perhaps one of the most unforgivable ways in which they try to bend the figures—all the changes and transfers between nursing staff, the context in which they used to work and how they work now. One reason why fewer nurses work in hospitals is that 60 per cent. of the activity is to be found in day case surgery, where fewer of them are needed. There has been a great transfer across the service and the way in which nurses work. I refer to the number of GP practice staff.

Ms Harman: From the private sector.

Mr. Malone: The hon. Lady says, "From the private sector." I do not want to talk about the private sector; I want to talk about the NHS.

In 1984, there were 25,994 GP practice staff, and now there are 51,833—an increase of 99.4 per cent. The number of nurses included in GP practice staff has increased from 1,924 to 9,099—an increase of 372.92 per cent.

These staff increases have occurred in a service that the Labour party says is being denuded of people at the front line. Where is there more of a front line than in primary care? Whose policies have ensured that these talents are now being devoted to primary care, which was not the case in the past? Since 1979, the number of nurses has increased by some 55,000. Labour Members choose to ignore—

Mr. McLeish *rose—*

Mr. Malone: I may give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment, but I do not have much time in which to speak, because he squeezed me out. I shall anticipate what the hon. Gentleman was going to say.

Usually, Labour Members selectively quote figures and ignore what has happened in agency nursing and bank contracts. I was delighted that today, for the first time, they acknowledged the existence of such agency and bank nurses. Their failure to take those figures into account has resulted in the lower figures to which they have referred.

The Labour party has also said that there are not enough nurses in training. This year, there are 14,920 in training, and next year there will be 17,080—they are all decided by training commissions across the country—an increase of 14.4 per cent.

Mr. McLeish: In 1989, there were 62,100 training nurses in the health service, and in 1994, including the learners and Project 2000, there were 32,000—a decrease of 19,000. Will the Minister accept those figures as correct?

Mr. Malone: My right hon. Friend explained why that was so: the wastage rate has decreased by 50 per cent. Of course there will be fewer people in training if more are staying in the service. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome the fact that retention rates were up, and that more people were finishing their training and working in the NHS rather than leaving it.

The other point of strength that Labour Members always think they have is what is happening to senior house officers, and we heard that argument again in the debate today. I advise hon. Members that SHO strength is extremely good. My right hon. Friend and I were both concerned about what happened in accident and emergency departments on 1 February last year, and we undertook to monitor the situation.

I am pleased to tell the House—although the Labour party will not welcome it—that SHO strength in the regions monitored to date now totals 945, and there are now 59 vacancies—only 6.3 per cent. Most trusts, when consulted, find that because of an agreement the Government have reached with the profession they are able to fill those posts with staff grade doctors. That has destroyed yet another myth that the Labour party has peddled.

Labour Members claimed that there is low morale in the NHS. I am astonished that they ignored—in fact, they considered it a matter of ridicule—what we have done about junior doctors' hours. I remember when that was the test of whether the Government would be successful in raising the morale of those who work in the hospital sector. The targets that the Government have reached are remarkable, as is acknowledged by junior doctors.

There is 99 per cent. compliance with the target to eliminate hard-pressed, on-call posts contracted for more than 72 hours a week. I inform hon. Members that 93 per cent. of the 27,994 junior doctors complied with the end of 1996 targets. That is a tremendous achievement, for which we have fought hard and in which we have invested a tremendous amount of money. It goes hand in hand with the creation of the specialist registrar grade which came into effect on 1 January, enabling junior doctors, when they get to the more senior posts, to spend more time in training than in providing service commitment.

Labour Members' solution was a five-point plan. Conservative Members agreed with four of the points—they were all apple pie and motherhood. *[Interruption.]* We agree with the concept of fair pay. We established the independent review body that delivers fair pay on an annual basis, unlike the Labour party, which chose to cut it. Unfortunately, the fifth point appears to have been lost—doubtless we will learn about that in due course.

The hon. Member for Peckham would not be drawn on the most important question. If she were serious about introducing a policy to improve the NHS if she were ever in government, she would say how much money would be provided. I ask her that question again—perhaps, during the debate, she has been able to have a word with the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) to find out the position of the Labour party in this regard.

Will she now give the House a commitment that she would at least imitate what this Government has done since 1979 with respect to increasing expenditure on the health service? Well, as the whole House can see, the hon. Lady sits firmly in her place—unable, as the health spokesman of her party, to give such a commitment. And this is a debate in which she has claimed that morale in the health service is at an all-time low.

The Opposition have been found out; the arguments they have put to the House this afternoon about the health service have amounted to no more than the usual innuendo and denigration of a service that provides excellent care for the whole population. The hon. Lady's argument has been demolished. The country will recognise that, and the House will recognise it, too.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 272, Noes 302.

Division No. 52] **[18.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric

Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
McFall, John
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'lton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W. *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Dennis Turner and
Mr. Malcolm Chisholm.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*

Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'derry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Derek Conway.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments) and agreed to.*

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House pays tribute to the dedication and commitment of the NHS's staff; welcomes the investment in professional development for all NHS staff made by the Government since 1979, in particular the investment in high quality nurse training represented by Project 2000, the development of new nursing specialities, for example, in general practice and paediatric intensive care nursing, the increase in the number of doctors, nurses, midwives and consultants, the reduction in on-call hours for junior hospital doctors, the establishment of an independent Pay Review Body for nurses, the increase of nearly 70 per cent. in nurses' earnings, the establishment of the principle of local pay for nurses which has delivered fair and flexible settlements and the development of high quality NHS general management; commends the recent announcement by the Secretary of State for Health of an 8 per cent. real terms cut in administration budgets for health authorities and trusts next year, together with an efficiency scrutiny which will identify and eradicate unnecessary paperwork; and looks forward to the further development of the National Health Service.

Private Security Industry

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Before I call the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) to move the motion on the private security industry, I must inform the House that Madam Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.15 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I beg to move,

That this House requires Her Majesty's Government to implement the recommendations of the Home Affairs Committee contained in its First Report of Session 1994–95 (House of Commons Paper No. 17) on the private security industry.

More people now work in the private security industry than in the police. The phenomenal growth in the industry is a direct result of one world record that the Government could fairly claim: the doubling of recorded crime in England and Wales since 1979.

As crime and the fear of crime have increased, so there has been a huge expansion in the number of firms and employees in the private security sector and, more critically, a major change in the character of the work that the industry undertakes. Once, the industry was principally concerned with the relatively passive guarding of property, where in practice there was little contact with law-abiding members of the public. Today, the work of the industry brings it into far greater and more active contact with the public. In shopping centres, housing estates and parks, the public are more likely to see a private security guard than they are to see a police officer on the beat. Increasingly, private security guards are used where police officers would previously have been deployed. Today, security guards are used in sensitive public order situations, for example, to help to police protests against the building of major road schemes. Indeed, such is the extension in the role of the industry that in Her Majesty's criminal courts private security guards are now replacing police officers.

In consequence, as the Home Affairs Committee indicated in its report, the dividing line between the activities undertaken by the private security industry and by the police is shifting and becoming "increasingly blurred".

While the police are subject to the most detailed statutory regulation and accountability, the private security industry is subject to none. When a police officer is dishonest, uses unreasonable force or is just uncivil, he or she will run the gauntlet of a tough disciplinary process. But if a security guard is employed by a firm that is not a member of one of the national associations, he or she may be dishonest, violent and uncivil, but there need be no sanction whatever against the employing firm, and only the sanction of the criminal law against the individual. We are left with the extraordinary irony that an industry that exists to enforce certain minimum standards of behaviour of the public has no enforceable standards set for itself, that an industry that is there to catch thieves employs thieves, that an industry that is there to prevent drug dealing, employs drug dealers, and that an industry that is there to reduce the threat of violence to the public may use such violence in an unlawful way.

In its evidence to the Select Committee, the Association of Chief Police Officers said that it believed that the case for the continued self-regulation of the industry is untenable, and called for the regulation of the industry by statute.

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the vast majority of people employed in the security industry are respectable, law-abiding, upstanding members of the community? Will he accept that perhaps his words on drug abusers and criminals in the security industry might be taken as an insult by the vast majority who are honourable members of society?

Mr. Straw: I agree with the first part of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. It is those responsible, decent people in the industry, and their decent, respectable firms, who are the first to call for effective external statutory regulation of the industry.

The evidence of the Association of Chief Police Officers about the current unregulated state of the industry was damning. The association presented nine case studies. As the Select Committee commented, the studies need only to be recited

"to indicate how serious the issue is."

I shall take only three of ACPO's studies. The first is headed "Escapee Murder". It reads:

"A manned guarding system was subject to a routine police enquiry. During the course of this enquiry it became apparent that one of the employees used a false name. When his correct identity became known, it transpired that not only was the man an escapee from HM Prison, but that the offence for which he had been sentenced to his term of imprisonment was one of murder."

Case study 8 is headed "Application for Shotgun Certificate". It reads:

"An employee of a security company recently applied for a shotgun certificate. This application was endorsed by his managing director, who said of the applicant: 'I have known X for one year . . . He has worked for X (private security company) this length of time. X has a sociable nature and a good even temperament. I recommend him as an honest and a very reliable person who can be trusted.' The police enquiries into X revealed"—

this was to the contrary—

"that he had at least fifteen previous convictions for dishonesty and violence. One of these was for a burglary of a non-dwelling involving the use of explosives, even more disturbingly, the employee had a conviction for the manslaughter of his wife."

I move on to case study 9, which is headed "Prevalence of Criminality". ACPO reported:

"During a police investigation conducted into a theft believed to involve an employee of a security company, a full check of every employee was conducted. This company is involved in the manned guarding of sites and buildings. Of the 26 employees in the company, eleven had previous convictions. The . . . offences committed by the employees and their scope . . . include a total of 74 offences ranging from convictions for rape, threats to kill and firearms offences, to burglary . . . assault, vehicle theft and damage. The directors of the firm are not aware of their employees' previous convictions."

ACPO's evidence was the most powerful of that calling for proper statutory regulation. The association was joined, however, by almost every group or individual that or who gave evidence, including all the trade associations.

As I said in response to an intervention, there are many firms and individuals in the private security sector that set good standards for themselves and seek to meet them.

They have been in the forefront of calls for effective regulation because they are the first to recognise that in an unregulated market the strongest forces are those that pull operators down to the level of the lowest common denominator—in other words, to the cheapest, to those firms that are most ready to cut corners.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the three examples that he quoted involved employees who had previous convictions? Does he accept that the way to deal with that problem is not necessarily regulation but to give employers a much easier right to obtain details about the possible criminal history of would-be employees?

Mr. Straw: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. The Select Committee examined that issue carefully. There is a need for employers to have more access indirectly to the criminal records of employees. The Committee reported powerfully, however, that if only that is done there will be a perversely dangerous situation, because there will be no check on employers. In other words, there is no check on crooked employers who are pretending that their employees are honest. It is then implied by partial regulation that private security firms have been regulated and have proper probity when in fact they have not and do not.

The Select Committee commented that support for regulation grew as its inquiry progressed, including support from the British Retail Consortium, which changed its position following a survey of its members. By the end of its evidence taking, the Committee reported that backing

"for the introduction of compulsory regulation of the manned guarding sector . . . was almost universal. The trade associations . . . individual companies (large and small), customer and user groups all called for statutory regulation".

The Select Committee spent six months studying the industry and considering whether it needed external regulation. I believe that its report is one of the best examples of a Select Committee report—it is short, well argued and unanimous. Moreover, members of the Committee were obviously at pains to put aside partisan issues on which they were unlikely to agree, and concentrate instead on making recommendations where they believed that there was a clear consensus for doing so.

The Committee's conclusions were categorical. It stated that the growth of the industry, and the expansion of its work into areas previously the domain of the police, gave rise to increasing concerns about the industry's relationship with the public, and about standards within the industry. It stated also that external intervention in the industry would be justified in the public interest if it could be demonstrated that other mechanisms were unable to deliver an acceptable level of performance. It concluded that

"current standards . . . in much of the . . . industry are unsatisfactory and below the level the public need and have a right to expect."

The Committee agreed its report last May and published it in early June. The Chairman, the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), complained during an Adjournment debate that he initiated that

"normally, we could have expected the Government to reply in about two months. Four months later, they have not yet replied, and I am not over-optimistic that we will have a response today."—[*Official Report*, 1 November 1995; Vol. 265, c. 215.]

The hon. and learned Gentleman's pessimism was not misplaced. Three months later, there is still no proper, considered response. We have had only a two-page letter from the Home Secretary, which was forced from him last night in anticipation of the debate. It takes the issue scarcely an inch further forward, save in respect of only one of the Committee's 24 recommendations, concerning guidance on best practice on the employment of "door supervisors", who are better known as bouncers.

On the key recommendation of the Select Committee, however, the Home Secretary's letter is vintage Whitehall waffle. I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to savour an especially bizarre passage. The letter reads:

"I know that the industry and police see a need for additional regulatory measures, but I can speak less confidently about the general public, who in my experience rarely buy or complain about guarding services."

First, because the sector is unregulated, no one knows or can know about the level of public complaint. I can tell the Secretary of State and his ministerial colleagues, however, that in my constituency I have received many complaints about a private security firm, Pendle Clamping, that operates what it describes as a wheel-clamping service. Some of my constituents think that it is more akin to an extortion racket. There is nowhere, however, that I can send my constituents' complaints with any chance of action.

The Secretary of State wrote that in his experience members of the public "rarely buy . . . guarding services." I do not think that any member of the general public has had any experience of buying in guarding services. The idea is risible. The public may be directly affected by the service provided but they have no say over the terms on which it is provided, which blows apart the claim that standards can be set and maintained in the public interest by market forces alone.

By definition the private sector industry operates within a market where firms compete for business on the basis of price, quality and suitability. Therefore, the inclusion of the industry within a market is not in issue. What is at issue is whether market forces, left to their own devices, can ensure that the public's interest in the good operation of the industry is safeguarded. The evidence gathered by the Select Committee points overwhelmingly to the conclusion that market forces alone cannot do the job.

It is often asserted that the fundamental divide is between self-regulation and statutory regulation. In my view, it is not. The key divide is surely between self-regulation and external regulation. The question whether external regulation should be statutory or non-statutory is important but subsidiary.

There are examples of where market forces external to a particular industry may provide sufficient regulation. The Select Committee report identifies some of those. For example, the systems installation sector, which puts in burglar alarms and the like, is the subject of external regulation imposed by insurance companies, which have an obvious interest in ensuring efficiency and the maintenance of proper standards, and which appear for the moment to have market clout to achieve that.

The Committee came to a provisional conclusion that the regulation of "door supervisors" might be achieved by external but non-statutory means. I hope that its optimism about that is justified. It was plain to the Committee that the external market forces that operate in the manned guarding sector are wholly inadequate to secure effective, non-statutory regulation of the sector.

[Mr. Straw]

Voluntary self-regulation has palpably not worked because, as the Committee made clear,

"companies operating at low standards have chosen not to join the system."

Moreover, those companies then drag down others with them. The absence of any enforceable standards across the industry means that companies that provide no training and bother least about the personal capabilities, not to say the criminal records, of their employees can offer the lowest price. Wage rates in the industry are notoriously low, with one third of firms paying between £2.31 and £2.60 per hour. Those depressed wage levels lead to inordinate working hours and, in some cases, as the Committee heard, to systematic fraud of the Department of Social Security, in which employers take the lead.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): The other day, I received a letter from a security guard who said he had been

"turned down for a security job, during the interview."

The manager told him that it was not because he was not suited to the job, but because he

"would not be able to live on the wage he was paying."

The manager told him that if he had had a family, he would be able to claim family credit and would therefore be worth employing.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is right. That is a perfect example of where the state and public are subsidising the worst firms with the lowest standards and lowest wages.

For all those reasons, the Select Committee recommended that there should be a statutory regulation system for both companies and their employees in the contract guarding sector. It accepted, as do we, that there would have to be transitional arrangements, with a phasing-in of the regulatory requirements. The Committee made it clear—I know that this was disappointing to some hon. Members—that, initially, the statutory scheme should be limited to the contract guarding sector alone, but that the statutory framework should be sufficiently adaptable to allow other sectors of the industry to be included at a later date should that become desirable.

Anyone who reads the Select Committee's report will be struck by the fact that its recommendations are sensible, based on the evidence and proportionate to the problem. So the question before the House is why, given the agreement on all sides to the recommendations, the Government continue to drag their feet and to stand back while unregulated cowboy firms run by criminals, employing criminals and using unacceptable methods, put the public at risk. Why are Ministers acting as those villains' friends?

We received our answer this morning. There are six Home Office Ministers. I am glad to see four of them on the Front Bench. None of them is exactly shy and retiring when it comes to seeking publicity—I say that as a compliment—but, astonishingly, no Home Office Minister was put up by the Government this morning to answer the case for the regulation of the private security industry. Instead, and most revealingly, it was left to a former Minister and failed Member of Parliament, Mr. Francis Maude, now special adviser on deregulation to the Deputy Prime Minister. Mr. Maude confirmed what we have long suspected—that policy in this sector is led no longer by Home Office Ministers on the basis of public safety, but by that man, who is obsessed with deregulation to the point where he is ready to put the public's safety at risk, and I say that advisedly.

When Mr. Maude was Minister with responsibility for consumer affairs before the 1992 general election, he resisted for as long as he could all calls for effective regulation against unsafe inflammable foam mattresses. I do not know how many people were burnt to death or badly injured while he resisted what was plain common sense. I do know that it was only after a number of fatal fires and mounting adverse publicity that Mr. Maude was forced to perform a complete U-turn and to introduce better regulation.

This morning—Conservative Select Committee members may wish to bear this in mind—on the radio Mr. Maude derided all the people who sought proper regulation of the private security industry as having a "knee jerk" reaction to the issue. He implied that the only part of the industry that was a problem involved door supervisors, when manifestly it is not. He suggested that much of the anxiety about the industry would be solved if there were better access to individuals' criminal records, when, as the Committee makes clear, doing that could create as many problems as it would solve.

There are hundreds of decent firms and thousands of decent employees in the private security industry. They want it to be regulated by statute, as do the police, the British Retail Consortium, local authorities and every Select Committee member. Against that weight of opinion and weight of evidence, the Government's failure to act to regulate the industry and their willingness to allow some villainous firms to continue their criminal ways is nothing short of irresponsible.

The Government talk tough on law and order, but act soft on crime. They say one thing and do another and are putting their dogma about deregulation above the safety of the public. The Select Committee report is sensible and comprehensive. If the Government will not act promptly on it, the House should require them to do so.

7.36 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'recognises the valuable work done by the Home Affairs Committee in its First Report, Session 1994–95, on the private security industry (House of Commons Paper No. 17), welcomes the Government's plans to introduce the White Paper which will allow greater access to criminal records; and congratulates the Government on its firm and positive commitment to ensuring that standards throughout the industry are raised to the level of the best.'.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department explained to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) that he was addressing a major conference today.

I had hoped that, in the hon. Gentleman's speech, we would receive an answer to the question that has been intriguing colleagues, especially Labour Members, since last Thursday: why on earth has he selected this subject for debate? We know that Oppositions value their Opposition days and that they normally use them to discuss the burning issues of the day. Law and order is of

course a key issue but, when I checked with the Library, I discovered that, of more than 50 subjects tabled for debate by the Opposition in the past two years, never once have they asked to debate law and order issues. This is the first Opposition day debate on law and order that they have requested and what have they selected—the private security industry. No wonder Opposition Members have been asking me: what on earth is going on and what is our Front-Bench team up to?

I have been defending the hon. Gentleman and have asked his colleagues to appreciate his predicament. *[Interruption.]* I would not dream of naming friends of mine in the Glasgow Labour party. I know that he really wanted to debate the issues that are at the forefront of our constituents' minds, but picture the scene with the hon. Gentleman and his advisers. They tell him that he must go on the attack against the Tories to recover his position. "Good idea," he says. "We will attack them on the police." "Oh, better keep off that," they say. "The Tories will remind people that, when Labour left office, we were 7,500 police short. With record funding for the police, that is not a strong issue."

Mr. Straw: The Minister is not discussing the subject of the debate.

Mr. Maclean: I shall come to that.

"Right," says the hon. Gentleman, "what about drugs? That is better surely." "Oh, keep off drugs too," say the advisers. *[Interruption.]* I have much to say, but it is interesting that the hon. Gentleman had little to say in the time he took. This subject is obviously the most important to Her Majesty's loyal Opposition in the law and order arena. By selecting it, they show their sense of priorities. The hon. Gentleman has not taken the chance to debate the subjects that are of concern to our constituents.

What about crime? The Opposition have not picked crime as the subject of the debate. We know why: crime has fallen by a record amount in the past two years—the biggest drop for 40 years. I understand that the hon. Gentleman is to make a big splash tomorrow about sentencing, and that he hopes to debate the subject with me on Radio Cumbria. I am intrigued by the publicity avenues that he chooses. Of course, Opposition Members do not want to discuss such topics on the Floor of the House because they are aware that they voted against all our major law and order measures.

The hon. Gentleman is clearly becoming desperate for a subject on which to attack the Government. His advisers point out that the Home Office is still thinking about the Select Committee report on the private security industry—"so you can talk tough on that one." I suspect that that is the reason for today's debate. As the *Daily Mail* put it so sadly last week,

"few spectacles are more inherently improbable than that of the Shadow Home Secretary periodically pumping himself up to talk tough on crime".

It said that the hon. Gentleman's words were

"ludicrously out of sync with both his own political nature and the instincts of his party."

The editorial went on to list all the measures against which the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends had voted, and the crucial issues on which they had refused to give an opinion. It ended by saying that, "without impugning his motives", the newspaper "remained unconvinced that" the hon. Gentleman

"or new Labour really believes that prison works and that more of the vicious criminals who plague society should spend longer behind bars. This Home Secretary is implementing the toughest anti-crime agenda in modern times. And his Shadow is—well, just shadow-boxing."

That is what we have seen today.

We are grateful to the Home Affairs Committee for its report. The Committee wanted more access to criminal records, and an exception from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 for a widely defined private security industry. It was particularly concerned about certain parts of the industry, and proposed a number of solutions. We replied yesterday to many of the report's points, and a copy of that reply is in the Library.

Today, the hon. Gentleman called for more regulation, more controls and more bureaucracy—I suspect that we shall hear a good deal more about that in the next two hours—but we have yet to hear a detailed and workable blueprint that identifies the benefits that would flow, at what cost and to whom. I do not want some vast bureaucracy to stifle a burgeoning industry, driving the smaller companies out of the market, and I question the need for it; but that is not to say that the Government have ruled out additional measures to tackle the alleged problems in the contract manned guarding sector.

We have heard proposals from the Select Committee, as well as ideas from the police and the British Security Industry Association. Only this morning, the right hon. Francis Maude mentioned a solution that he favours. I happen to disagree with his suggestion, however, and I would point out that Francis Maude does not make Government policy. The deregulation unit makes suggestions and advises, but it is for the Government to make decisions on policy.

As far as I know, no one in my office was asked by the media to speak this morning. I was ready to speak on Radio 4, along with the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), about the Security Service Bill, which we shall discuss tomorrow. I should have been delighted to speak on the subject if the media had contacted my office. The hon. Member for Blackburn himself complained that Home Office Ministers were always speaking on the wireless.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): I have been asked to speak to the media about almost every other subject that has been raised this week. The private security industry is the one issue on which I have not been asked to represent the view of the Government or anyone else.

Mr. Maclean: My hon. and learned Friend makes a valid point. I have run a check, and to my knowledge—I shall apologise to the House if I am wrong—no media outlet asked a Home Office Minister to talk about the security industry on the wireless this morning. I should have been delighted to do so, but no bid was received by any Home Office Minister.

Mr. Straw: Of course I accept what the hon. Gentleman says, but does he not think it improper for a special adviser in the position of a temporary civil servant to put himself in the position of a Minister and speak for the Government, as Mr. Francis Maude did this morning?

Mr. Maclean: Not the way I heard it. The deregulation unit has a point of view; so has the Select Committee;

[Mr. Maclean]

so has the BSIA; so have the police. In that sense, they are all legitimate pressure groups with a legitimate point of view. There is no question of Francis Maude's having pretended that he spoke for the Government. The Government will make their views clear in due course. *[Interruption.]* Of course Mr. Maude does not speak for the Government.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): Who does he speak for, then?

Mr. Maclean: He speaks for the deregulation unit, and for his point of view. We shall listen to his suggestions, as we shall listen to all other suggestions.

Mr. Straw: The Minister has come out with a very bizarre comment. He said that Mr. Maude spoke for the deregulation unit. Is the deregulation unit part of the Government?

Mr. Maclean *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before we continue, let me point out that this is a relatively short debate. It would be interesting for the Chair if hon. Members debated the subject in hand.

Mr. Maclean: I have made it clear that various organisations have views about what should be done about the private security industry, or the manned guarding sector. I have also made it clear that the Government will reveal their view in due course. Let me explain what we propose to do.

The private security industry is a large, diverse industry encompassing a wide range of activities. In most of it, there is not the slightest suggestion of a problem. For example, the alarms sector, accounting for a large part of the market turnover and employing some 33,000 people, has no problems. The big sectors comprising locksmiths, safe manufacturers and cash in transit have no problems either, and the in-house sector—estimated to outnumber the contract sector by more than two to one—is sound. We are left with the contract manned guarding sector, comprising some 24 per cent. of the industry's employees, as the only part of the industry that may merit special attention. None of those employees has the powers that a police constable has, and none can carry out what we have identified as core policing functions.

Calling for a bit of regulation and a bit of control, as the hon. Gentleman has just done, is very easy, but we must consider the machinery that is required for regulation. The Select Committee identified problems of standards, training and criminality within the contract manned guarding sector which it considered to require Government intervention. It proposed an agency to run new arrangements both for licensing individuals and for ensuring that companies fulfilled certain minimum criteria.

Licensing would involve the checking of criminal record information, and the exercise—presumably by an independent body—of an element of discretion to ensure that there was no unfairness. For companies, common minimum standards would have to be laid down, minimum levels of training specified and arrangements made for its provision. There would then have to be regular inspections to check compliance, and recourse to the criminal justice system in the event of non-compliance. All that could have a considerable impact on smaller companies. As paragraph 86 of the report acknowledged,

"the pattern of the impact within the industry must also be considered if regulation is successfully to target weak companies rather than small companies."

What is the justification for all that change? First, it is claimed that standards are low; but low in comparison to what? Is there some objective standard? The majority of buyers of private security guarding services are other companies, and it is for them as customers to weigh the relative cost and quality of services offered.

Secondly, the commonest argument in favour of regulation is that many of those employed have criminal records. Figures submitted to the Committee following a study by the Association of Chief Police Officers seemed to indicate a high rate of offending among security guards. Further examination of those figures showed that 57 per cent. of the offenders were bouncers, accounting for 68 per cent. of the offences. Night club bouncers are a distinct category, and it is a distortion to include them in the manned guarding sector.

We recognised some time ago that certain parts of the country had experienced problems with bouncers, and discussed with the police and other interested parties how we could work together to combat the problems. Local schemes set up by the police and local authorities were monitored and found to be successful in reducing the number of incidents; we have therefore drawn up and issued best practice guidelines to assist others in setting up schemes. As recommended in the report, we shall—with the help of the police—monitor the effectiveness of existing and new schemes.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): I was a member of the Home Office working party that investigated the industry. I thank the Minister for allowing Opposition Members to be part of that body, which sat for almost four years. Does he realise that the Select Committee report was issued before the working party had considered it? At its final drafting meeting, the working party concluded that the report's recommendations were inadequate to meet the needs of the industry. The private security industry, its associations, chief constables and representatives of the licensing trade and the brewing industry unanimously agreed that the Government's proposals were inadequate. As a result, the working party was not reconstituted. The report has been published without the working party's authority.

Mr. Maclean: The point is that the guidelines are working, they have been welcomed throughout the country and they are dealing with problems associated with night club bouncers. There is little evidence of criminality across the board.

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): The right hon. Gentleman may not be aware of the great interest that my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) and I take in the matter. Since the town of Wigan, which is in both our constituencies, has more local authority-licensed night clubs than Blackpool, we have had personal experience of

the bouncer industry over the past 15 years. I regret that the Minister thinks that the matter is frivolous, since our constituents have been subjected to gratuitous violence by bouncers. The only way to stop such violence is to adopt a scheme such as that introduced by my local authority, under which it is mandatory for bouncers to be registered and licensed. That does not present any problem to decent firms that provide door supervision. The cowboys are the problem. If they are not licensed, they move to St. Helens where such a scheme has not been introduced. That is why we are keen to get the regulation on the statute book.

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman makes the point that the system is working perfectly because of a voluntary scheme in his area. Rather than wanting to duplicate that scheme around the country, he wants compulsory regulation to force it on others. We have developed guidelines to deal with bouncers, and they are working very well. There is no reason why such schemes cannot be spread through the country voluntarily, with the help of police, magistrates and local councillors. If the hon. Gentleman's scheme is so good—I have heard that it is good—it should be a model for others to follow voluntarily. We have issued guidelines and I understand that they are working.

If bouncers are excluded from the manned guarding sector—bearing in mind that we have issued guidelines to deal with them—the number of ex-offenders employed in the industry is considerably lower than is claimed. Nevertheless, the industry is growing and private security guards are increasingly present in areas where they have frequent and close contact with the public. It is vital that public confidence in them should not be misplaced. It is therefore important to ensure that the bad reputations of a few unsuitable individuals or poor companies should not tarnish the reputation of the industry as a whole.

Those calling for action to root out criminals have in mind the removal from the industry of those with past convictions for all or certain offences. To do that, they are seeking access to information about criminal records. Employers and customers in many occupations might envisage benefits for themselves and the public arising from greater access to criminal records. Such checks are, however, not the only way in which to establish the suitability of applicants for jobs. Security companies, like all employers filling positions of trust, should ensure that they check carefully applicants' employment records and references.

At the moment, there is no legitimate method of obtaining information from criminal records other than by putting pressure on individuals to exercise their rights under the Data Protection Act 1988 for access to the information on convictions that is held on police computer systems. The problem is that that circumvents the safeguards available to individuals under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, which aims to strike a balance between giving offenders a chance to re-integrate themselves into society and the need to protect society from those who might offend again. It allows convictions which have become spent through the passage of time and the individual's subsequent good behaviour to remain unknown to prospective employers.

Some groups are exceptions to the Act, but they do not include any part of the private security industry. I know that parts of the industry would like that to be changed. That was also one of the Select Committee report's recommendations.

In deciding whether it is right to accept that recommendation, we need to consider very carefully the safeguards that the Act provides to individuals who, by subsequent good behaviour, have lived down their past errors, against the need of employers to ensure that their employees are fit and proper persons. Designation of jobs in part or all of the industry as exceptions to the Act would mean that those who apply for such jobs could be asked to reveal convictions that were spent under the Act.

A conviction becomes spent only when the rehabilitation period laid down in the Act has passed. That means, for example, that a conviction of more than six months would remain unspent for 10 years, and convictions incurring prison sentences of more than 30 months would never become spent. Few if any serious offenders are therefore likely to slip through the net even without an exception to the Act. The Government believe that a case cannot be made for accepting the recommendation for the vast majority of the industry, and in any event it needs to be put in the context of the more general matter of pre-employment vetting.

The whole subject of pre-employment checks of criminal records has concerned the Government for some time. At present, criminal record checks are carried out by the police only for certain groups of employees. Most checks take place to protect vulnerable people such as children, while others are necessary for the purposes of national security or for probity in the administration of the law. The number of checks has grown over the years. Now, more than 1 million checks take place each year and significantly more than 600,000 are made on people seeking to work with children under the age of 18. That work places a considerable demand on the police, diverting resources from other tasks.

The Government have therefore been reviewing very carefully the current arrangements for vetting. Towards the end of 1993, we issued a Green Paper "The Disclosure of Criminal Records for Employment Vetting Purposes", which posed 12 questions that had arisen from the Home Affairs Committee's deliberations on vetting. For example, what should be the broad criteria for authorising criminal record checks and what level of checks would be appropriate in each case? Who should handle the checks? Is there a role for a central agency and, if so, what should its functions be? What are the implications of the checks for the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act?

More than 180 responses were received. They confirmed that there was a wide demand for checks not only from the private security industry but from financial organisations and those who work with vulnerable people other than children, such as elderly and disabled adults. The Government have therefore been considering a new approach to vetting. In doing so, we have taken into account the Home Affairs Committee's report on the private security industry.

We intend to publish a White Paper on the subject very shortly and I cannot go into detail about its contents now. However, I can say that a more accessible and open system of pre-employment checks of criminal records, which will meet the needs of employers and other

[Mr. Maclean]

organisations who need to employ people in positions of trust, is needed. We will discuss ways in which to enable a much wider range of employers to obtain relevant information about criminal records. The system should therefore meet the Home Affairs Committee's main recommendations for greater access to national criminal record checks.

As I said when giving evidence to the Home Affairs Committee in December last year, one way in which to implement such a system would be to introduce an easily obtainable criminal conviction certificate. Such developments will largely be possible because of improvements in technology, particularly the development of a comprehensive criminal record database on the police national computer, which will provide access to a much wider range of information than was once available.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The Minister used the phrase "employees who are in a position of trust" as if that were a good guide. Surely most employees are placed by their employers in a position of trust. Would it not be better to rely on his earlier expression, when he said that the provisions related to people who were vulnerable, such as children? Many of the public are vulnerable when the security industry, where power, and to some extent coercion, is exercised, where trust is placed in a uniformed official and where security staff have access to premises on such a basis that the lives and safety of people could easily be threatened by criminal intent.

Mr. Maclean: I shall certainly reflect on the right hon. Gentleman's point. Whatever definition he uses, he will find that organisations will claim that they meet that definition and therefore want access to criminal records. There is no clearly logical place to draw a line between those who we think should have access and those who we think should not, but I shall reflect carefully on what the right hon. Gentleman has said.

I believe that our proposals on vetting will go a considerable way towards meeting the concerns of the police, the private security industry and others. I listened carefully to the case studies produced by the hon. Member for Blackburn in his opening remarks, and I think that, in every case that he quoted, those firms would be caught by our plans on vetting. However, it is also fair to point out that criminal record checks on their own will not be enough. They are not, in themselves, a substitute for employers taking other steps, such as taking up references to ensure the exclusion of people whose previous conduct would make them unsuitable for employment.

I should like to endorse the Select Committee's recommendation that each case should be considered on its merits, and that there should not be a blanket ban on employing people with criminal convictions irrespective of how long ago and irrelevant the convictions may have been. Not everyone with a criminal record is necessarily unsuited to all jobs, and not all of those who are unsuitable for employment in the private security industry will necessarily have a criminal record.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): Since 1 November, the Minister has had plenty of time to answer the question: what about the criminal employers?

Mr. Maclean: I shall address that point in my concluding remarks.

We have heard many calls for regulation, but, as I said earlier, the proponents of regulation have been rather less keen to produce detailed plans for how it should be done. Now that our plans to give the security industry greater access to criminal records will do so much, we are considering whether anything else must be done.

Mr. Mullin: I hope that the Minister will at least make the point that we are not dealing only with criminal records. There are other factors to consider, such as minimum standards of training, the quality of service offered to the public by the companies, and—although I know that Minister will not be very keen on it—the way in which companies treat their employees.

Mr. Maclean: I am delighted that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman. He has revealed that, while the hon. Member for Blackburn is, in some ways, calling for less regulation, the hon. Member for Sunderland, South is willing to get into training regimes. I know that he is keen on a minimum wage. The hon. Gentleman would like to see the largest, most bureaucratic, all-singing, all-dancing regulatory regime possible. While one certainly does not want to go down the route proposed by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South—

Mr. Mullin: Why not?

Mr. Maclean: Because, in the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Sunderland, South was obsessed with trying to get a minimum wage for security operatives. I read all of his questions and all of the evidence to the Committee.

Mr. Mullin: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Maclean: No. The hon. Gentleman will have a chance to speak later. I have given way to him once already, and I want to push on. He has already stated that he is a believer in the minimum wage and, if he is consistent, he would want it for the security industry as well.

Security industry regulation is a complex area, and we want to get it right. We have to weigh the views, problems and usefulness of various possible arrangements as accurately as we can to arrive at the simplest and most effective solution. That is why we are giving such detailed consideration to the central issue. The security industry has expanded enormously in the past 25 years. It has had 25 years of success and achievement, which has been brought about because Governments did not interfere with it.

The Select Committee report is receiving careful attention and, while I hope to make a decision fairly soon on its proposals for regulation, I reject the accusation that we should have rushed a decision—[Hon. Members: "Rushed?"] Yes. In the 25-year history of the private security industry, we would have been rushing a decision if we came to conclusions in the past few months. If we want another 25 years of success, a few months more to get the right answers is entirely justified.

The Home Affairs Committee recommended that we should issue guidance on door supervisors. We have done that. It recommended that we should provide access to criminal records, and we shall publish soon a White Paper

that sets out our proposals on that subject. Collectively, all of our actions will ensure that the minority of crooks and con men who currently inveigle their way into the security industry will not be able to do so in future.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is clear that many hon. Members wish to speak. I ask, therefore, that hon. Members who are called make their speeches as concise as possible.

8.4 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Madam Deputy Speaker, my contribution will be brief and to the point. I was surprised at the complacency which the Minister expressed in his contribution. I developed an interest in this subject when I spoke for the Opposition on the Committee that considered the Criminal Justice Bill, before the 1992 election. We spent a great deal of time considering these very matters, and we consistently argued with the private security industry, many chief constables and other people who knew about the dangers that were presented by the burgeoning private security industry. We argued about regulation with the Government—a Government who had had many years to consider the matter, not just the few months since the production of this most recent Home Affairs Select Committee report.

The debate on the private security industry goes back a long way, and it has figured significantly for more than 10 years. I know that some of my hon. Friends and some Liberal Members have had a great interest in the topic. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), in particular, took his devotion to the subject so far that he joined a private security firm to prove how easy it was to do so. He regaled us in Committee with that experience, which gave us food for thought and much amusement when he described it in graphic detail.

The debates in the previous Session were characterised on all sides by clarion calls for proper and effective regulation of the private security industry. That was considered to be in the interest of the public, the police and the responsible companies which understood the damage that was being done—in the words of the Chairman of the Home Affairs Select Committee—by cowboys, villains and rip-off merchants. More sanguinely, I would say that disreputable elements were doing harm to the industry's reputation.

Today, the tremendous growth of the industry means that private security firms and their personnel touch the lives of most of our citizens during most days. In my book, that is enough justification for the important debate which the Opposition has initiated. Every hon. Member has had complaints about private security firms. To take one recent glaring example, a security guard, who had an Alsatian dog, not only arrested but handcuffed to the railings an innocent citizen who happened to be pounced on at the local bus depot. What kind of society allows small companies, without controls, to do that to the individual citizen?

A cursory examination of any *Yellow Pages* will illustrate the extent and influence of the private security industry in a myriad of spheres. We are not speaking merely of bouncers, of a tiny part of the industry or of the vetting question, and the Minister does this debate no good by refusing to examine the issue in its entirety. The private security industry advertises the following wares in the *Yellow Pages*: property protection, store detection, insurance investigation, surveillance services, alarm systems, bodyguarding, security marking, bomb threat advice, escorting cash and valuables, key holding, dog handling, spy catching, anti-vandal patrols—the list of its activities is almost endless.

The industry has grown like wildfire. It is regularly estimated to be at least the size of the entire police force of this country, and many experts and chief constables believe that it is twice the size the regular police force. That gives Labour Members some cause for concern. Eight thousand private security companies are operating in the United Kingdom, and only 280 are represented by the British Security Industry Association. There are other members of professional associations, but a minimum of 1,000 belong to no regulatory, or even voluntary, regime. The codes that the industry has introduced are sometimes used as an excuse by the Government for not introducing a regulatory regime.

I pay tribute to the work that has been done by professional organisations, and congratulate them on their attempt to ensure high standards among their members. Even so, much still needs to be done in terms of vetting, training, managing and controlling staff. As in so many spheres, voluntary codes are no substitute for a proper regulatory framework from which reputable and responsible companies have nothing to fear and which provides the public with the protection from rogues in the industry which they deserve.

Regulation is not about inhibiting just a few rogues; it is about securing peace of mind for the individual. Sadly, I am sure that many hon. Members will have had the same experience as my hon. Friends the Members for Wigan (Mr. Stott) and for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) and I of the way in which some small—and some large—companies act irresponsibly.

Calls for a proper regulatory regime do not necessarily have to lead to a vast bureaucracy. That is simply one of the excuses that the Government give. They say that there is not enough evidence of criminals in the industry, but, at the same time, they say that regulation would be a restraint on the industry and would create bureaucracy.

I have spoken to many people in the industry and they do not believe that there needs to be a massive bureaucracy. They believe that regulation can be imposed with a light touch and a small administration. Indeed, if the newspapers are to be believed, the Home Secretary himself believed that that was the way ahead, until he came into contact with the President of the Board of Trade and lost the argument. In his innermost thoughts, the Home Secretary understands the need for a regulatory framework but cannot get past the more ideological members of the deregulation group within the Cabinet. They are the reasons the Government have failed to act.

Often, the Government's pat response is that there is little evidence of criminality in the industry. We have already heard good examples this evening of the extent of criminality in the industry, but that could be a red herring. The Government prefer to ignore the evidence and the informed opinion of the industry in favour of their own narrow, ideological preoccupation with the free market.

[Mr. Barry Sheerman]

For them, registration always equals regulation, and regulation is bad because it damages business—never mind the fact that regulation is the obvious way to improve standards in the industry and eliminate the numerous abuses of the system which, at the end of the day, harm the industry itself.

Intelligent voices within this burgeoning industry will tell the Minister that if regulation is not introduced soon, the industry will get a bad name. As the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath)—a former Prime Minister—said in the House last week, the Government have an unhealthy obsession with privatisation. Surely it is impossible to ignore those voices which the Minister knows exist, especially in view of the Government's experience of sections of the private security industry which fail to uphold the standards of conduct that we expect from organisations that are increasingly taking on the peculiarly sensitive roles that were once the preserve of our police forces.

Another matter of great concern to me and many other Opposition Members is the nature of the society that we are creating, a society in which people no longer feel secure in their own homes, on their neighbourhood streets or in their own communities but feel obliged to resort to private security firms for peace of mind and protection. Is it not a fact that the private security industry has grown so fast under this Government because law and order have not been upheld? The two are equal and apposite. I am afraid that it is symptomatic of the state of our nation that, after 17 years of Conservative rule, crime and the fear of crime preoccupy millions of our citizens and small businesses.

The Minister did nothing but attempt to score points and present statistics in a ridiculous way. I heard him repeat yet again the nonsense that this country has just experienced the biggest fall in crime for 40 years. How many experts do we have to hear denounce that statistic as nonsense? The Minister knows that it is nonsense—it must have been minted at Conservative central office. If they really want to reduce the levels of crime that plague our towns, cities and villages, the Government must act on the root causes of the problem, causes which have been identified countless times and which lie in poverty, deprivation and unemployment.

There may be a role for the private security industry, but there are serious questions to be answered about the worrying growth of private police forces. The Government have singularly failed to deal with the fundamental concerns about the legitimacy of commercial companies and policies that affect private citizens and impinge on them to an ever greater extent. They are impinging on the traditional rights of English people and their liberties. That is the real worry about the tenor of the Government's remarks.

The Government always look to the short term; they are always picking up the superficial. The fact is that we have not had a debate about the real concerns expressed by Opposition, and some Conservative, Members about private police forces which are now, according to some estimates, twice the size of the regular police force. They can increasingly control and affect the lives of individuals without any input from the state or the approval of the House.

Those of us who are interested in the subject have been disappointed by the Minister's remarks this evening. Our concerns have been brushed aside. Indeed, they have been swept under the carpet, because the market rather than any higher concern is always the first priority of this sad Administration.

8.16 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I shall be brief. Between 1990 and 1993, I was a director of the security firm, Group 4. I am no longer a director of that firm. However, as the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) will recall, my interest in the subject of this debate goes back much further.

In July 1973, I introduced the Security Industry Licensing Bill—a ten-minute Bill—which, although not opposed, did not reach the statute book. When introducing the Bill, I cited the case of

"a company run by a man who admitted that he had twice been convicted of grievous bodily harm and who employed four or five staff with criminal records".—[*Official Report*, 4 July 1973; Vol. 859, c. 538.]

It would be comforting to believe that, in the intervening 22 years, action had been taken to prevent anything of that kind from happening again. It would be comforting but, sadly, inaccurate, because men with criminal records are still employed by some security companies.

I mention 1973 for two reasons. In spite of the slightly self-righteous speech made by the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), it has to be pointed out that the problem of private security firms is not a new one that has emerged suddenly. The same problem existed in the 1970s, and the Labour party certainly had the opportunity to legislate to deal with it between 1974 and 1979. I am bound to say that I was underwhelmed by what the Opposition spokesman had to say, including on wage control, a matter that has nothing to do with security licensing but on which the House should concentrate.

Mr. Mullin: My hon. Friend did not mention it.

Sir Norman Fowler: The hon. Gentleman cannot have been listening; if he consults *Hansard*, he will find that the hon. Member for Blackburn did mention it.

Why has action not been taken? What are the reasons for what I shall, with the greatest respect, call the slow bicycle race between hon. Members on the two Front Benches? I suggest that both parties have tended to approach the issue of licensing the security industry from preconceived positions. The Labour party has traditionally been opposed to the private security industry and the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) has given a flavour of that underlying opposition. The Labour party has opposed new roles for the security industry and it has feared in the past that licensing would give an unjustified degree of respectability to the security industry.

The Conservative party's reluctance to act is a reluctance to impose new regulation. I understand that and I understand also—although I do not agree with it—the party's faith in self-regulation. As it happens, I believe that both parties' arguments are wrong.

Mr. Michael: For the sake of accuracy and although I understand the right hon. Gentleman's description

of ancient history, I should like to say that the Labour party has found that companies in the private security industry understand our position and support our plea for regulation. Firms in the private security industry want regulation as much as we do.

Sir Norman Fowler: I hear that point, but my description of the hon. Gentleman's party was entirely right, as hon. Members who know the subject better than he does will confirm. I have heard the hon. Gentleman's attacks on the private security industry over the past two or three years, so he should not make too much of an issue of my point.

The aim of public policy should be not simply to curb the private security industry—as the hon. Member for Huddersfield implied—but to recognise that the industry has a legitimate role in the public interest. The aim should be to ensure high standards and, above all, to protect the public. Public policy should recognise that the private security industry is here for good and the only sensible question is how it can be best regulated. If the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) wishes to endorse those words in his winding-up speech, I shall be very glad to hear him.

The police must work to priorities when they face the challenge of crime and, of course, they have done so for as long as I can remember. The hon. Members for Huddersfield and for Blackburn tried to pretend that the problem of crime had suddenly emerged in the past five or 10 years, but that is simply crass. If that were the case, we would not have had similar debates 25 years ago. My point is that crimes of violence, such as armed robbery, will inevitably come higher in the list of priorities than, say, burglary. However, that is not to say that burglary is unimportant, because obviously it is extremely important to the individual.

The implication for the public is that there will never be, under any Government in any circumstances, enough regular police to investigate every burglary and house break-in that takes place in our great cities, such as London or Birmingham. That has not happened in the past and there is no reason to believe that it will happen in the future. We may regret that, but we should learn a lesson from it. The public, business and industry must take the best possible care of their property. We must all learn to take crime prevention seriously; if we do that, good private security firms have a vital part to play. We should recognise that part, and good firms—there are some very good firms employing dedicated people—should be encouraged.

I was encouraged to note what the Police Federation said in evidence to the Select Committee on Home Affairs. Significantly, the Police Federation's view has changed drastically over the years, and it said:

> "It needs to be said that the vast majority of established firms conform to excellent standards of commercial probity and make an important contribution to the prevention of crime."

Regulation should deal with the cowboy firms, not the firms that the Police Federation mentioned.

Too often in the past 20 years, policy makers have not recognised what the private security industry can and should do in a modern society. It can help the citizen and the company to prevent crime by guarding premises, by supplying alarms and by handling cash in transit. But the private security industry's role goes beyond that and it is equally sensible to consider the duties carried out by the police and prison officers and ask whether those roles can be performed by the private security industry. We do not necessarily have to conclude that the duties should be transferred, but we should ask the question. For example, the Government were right to extend the work of the private security industry to escort duties and taking prisoners from prison to court. If the police are taken away from that job, they can concentrate on the more important crime fighting for which they are trained. It is also sensible to have an alternative provider to the Prison Service, because we can then discover other ways in which prisons can be organised.

I speak as a great supporter of the extension of the private security industry's work, but if that is to happen, the public should be protected by some guarantee that the firms meet certain standards and, especially, that the people who work for them do not have criminal records. That is the case that other hon. Members and I have been making over the years.

I see the attraction of self-regulation, but I am more persuaded by the argument of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) in the Select Committee's consideration of self-regulation. I have some personal experience of self-regulation because I am chairman of the National House Building Council. That organisation grew out of concern about jerry-building in the 1930s. It has been working for 60 years and the problem has been tackled and largely eradicated.

Self-regulation in the building industry is one thing, but self-regulation in the security industry is quite another. Different issues are involved. The access to criminal records involved puts the security industry in a class alone. Other issues which dominate relations between the police and the public include the inevitable conflicts that can arise between the demands of security and the demands of personal freedom. It is difficult to see how those issues can be dealt with entirely by a system of self-regulation.

The Home Affairs Select Committee's proposals were helpful. I do not think that the security industry and others, who have been advocating some kind of licensing system for years, have been doing it to drive small security firms out of business or to prevent them from coming into the business. With great respect to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, I think that it is more accurate to say that those people are dedicated to the security industry and want the highest possible standards to be maintained.

The private security industry is not the police, but it helps the police by helping the citizen to guard his property. However, some of the issues that the security industry faces are the same. No one needs to be persuaded how difficult it is to reconcile the issues of police and public relations.

I hope that the end of this long debate—I mean not today's debate but the debate that has been going on for the past 20 years—is not caused by a scandal somewhere in the industry, with the result that legislation is rapidly produced as an emergency measure. Dare I say that we have seen one or two examples of that practice under Governments of both parties.

I therefore hope that the White Paper that we are promised is the prelude to effective and well-thought-out action that will encourage, promote and ensure high

[Sir Norman Fowler]

standards in the security industry. When my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary sets out that White Paper, I hope that he will take the widest possible advice from colleagues on both sides of the House of Commons.

8.29 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) made a persuasive speech. He demonstrated that this is an important issue and that successive Governments have had plenty of time to think about it, as the right hon. Gentleman brought the matter before the House before I was even elected to it—albeit only a matter of months before I was elected, but nevertheless 23 years ago. So the issue has been with us for a considerable time.

One has only to consider relatively recent times to find that in 1990 the Select Committee on Defence examined the service that the Ministry of Defence was receiving from commercial security firms and recommended that no new sites be guarded by private security firms

"until such time as there is legislation regulating commercial security firms and laying down minimum standards—which we would welcome."

The report of the Select Committee on Home Affairs set out the issues well and clearly. The Liberal Democrats party conference passed a resolution in favour of a system of licensing in September 1994. There was a further debate in November that year. So there has been plenty of time to reach some conclusions on the subject.

Part of the background to the concern involves the growing prevalence of the private security industry in all its forms. People are much more aware of it as we have had to become more security conscious. Uniformed security officers are to be seen in various places, from the test match to the social security office, and there is a concern that in some areas such firms may be taking over responsibilities and duties which should be left to the police.

The job of maintaining law and order should be a job for accountable, trained and disciplined police officers. There have been instances when communities have felt compelled to use private security, not for its proper role, but to provide services that they believe that the police cannot currently supply due to problems with resources. I do not want us to pursue such practices. There is plenty of work for the security industry to do without becoming involved in areas which require the accountability, discipline and skills that characterise the police service.

The industry has a large role to play and a wide range of work to do, and it involves many responsible firms and people. The leaders of the industry, most of its major firms and many of the smaller firms want a regulatory system. It is too easy for criminals to be employed—or, indeed, to be employers—in the industry. It is absurd that there is nothing to stop someone walking out of gaol, hiring or even stealing a van, buying a dog and setting up a private security firm. We cannot persist with a system which makes that possible. It poses a threat to the reputation and credibility of responsible firms in the industry. The evidence that the Home Affairs Select Committee gathered—much of it was quoted in the body of the report—showed how damaging that can be. The report of the Association of Chief Police Officers, in which the chief constable of Northumbria took the lead, cited many incidents of criminal infiltration. Thousands of crimes are committed by employees of security firms, and many employees and proprietors of such firms have criminal offences on their records.

In addition, parts of the industry have appallingly low rates of pay. This is not an argument about the merits or otherwise of a national minimum wage, but an illustration of a problem. Rates of pay are so appallingly low in some parts of the industry that they cannot be associated with high standards of recruitment or with a responsible attitude of employer to employee. In an unregulated industry in such a sphere, the cowboys undercut the reputable operators. In parts of the industry there is too little training and many people in the industry have no training at all.

The public are being deluded into thinking that because someone is in a smart uniform, he is therefore part of a trained, disciplined and accountable service, but that is not necessarily the case. The industry has worked hard to build up its various systems of self-regulation, but in the guarding sector of the industry it has been repeatedly proved that self-regulation does not extend far enough and does not give reputable firms the protection to which they are entitled.

I remain concerned that the Home Office itself employs companies which do not belong to a self-regulating system. I am not satisfied with the excuse that it would be unreasonable to impose such a condition because it would require membership of a trade organisation. Given that there is more than one such body, the Home Office can surely require that any security firm that it employs should subscribe to one of the recognised self-regulating organisations until something better is produced.

There was recently an outcry at the misuse and sale of closed circuit television tapes. Much of the monitoring of CCTV is carried out by private security firms, some of them at the doubtful end of the industry. CCTV is a valuable tool in fighting crime, but there is no control over what happens to video tapes produced by it. The video that was produced for sale before Christmas was one example of the way in which CCTV can be abused. I participated in a radio debate with the man who was hoping to make a lot of money out of sales of footage over Christmas, and I am glad to say that the video was ultimately withdrawn, but the incident provided a vivid illustration of what can happen.

New schemes supported by the Home Office for CCTV have to be subject to guidelines—to a code of practice—but that limitation does not cover existing schemes that the Home Office supports, let alone those which, although they exist in public places, are not funded by the Home Office. There is no adequate system of sanctions. I would expect any system for the regulation of security companies to cover their conduct in that sphere. It is also necessary to have specific limitations on the misuse of CCTV tapes. If that is not done, sooner or later people will start switching off the systems because they are being abused and public co-operation will be undermined. CCTV is a valuable tool to fight crime, but if it is used as a source of intrusive, salacious or violent videos, the exercise in crime prevention will be fatally damaged. We should not allow that to happen.

On the wider issue of the regulation of the industry, particularly the manned guarding sector, the Government's response has been inadequate. It is not satisfactory that we should have to wait even longer for a full Government response to the report of the Select Committee on Home Affairs. The Government should get on with it. Issues remain to be resolved, but we need an agency to carry out the licensing system. There must be provision for access to criminal records, there must be some provision for exemption from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and there must be action to monitor CCTV.

The private security industry needs regulation to carry out its job properly, and the public need the assurance that when they see a uniformed security guard they are seeing someone who has been subjected to a proper system of regulation and control. It was therefore right for the motion to be cast in terms that require the Government to get on and do the job. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I will support the motion and I invite other right hon. and hon. Members to do the same.

8.37 pm

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): This is a short debate and other hon. Members wish to speak, so I shall not repeat the speech that I made on 1 November last year when I introduced to the House the report of the Select Committee on Home Affairs on the private security industry. I intend today to speak as briefly as possible of the Government's reactions so far.

The Government have been a little slow in coming forward. The Select Committee reported in May 1995, we had our press conference in June—the Government usually reply to Select Committees within two months, although in this case we were approaching the long vacation—but I have only just received a letter from my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, dated yesterday, with responses which are not yet the full and final Government reaction, although it is now nine months since the Select Committee reported.

I should be reluctant to blame the Government because the question of whether—and, if so, how—we regulate the private security industry, is complicated and involved. Although we tried to narrow its scope considerably by excluding many areas that we thought might eventually have to be addressed, we were unable to give the Government any help with the draft Bill or very much detail. I believe that we all appreciated that, and we did not expect the Government to make a speedy and detailed response to the report. But I do not completely excuse the Government for the delay because I suspect that part, if not much, of the reason was a conflict within the Government as to whether to regulate, which may not have been resolved. Perhaps the Minister of State, Home Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), will be able to throw some light on that.

I join other hon. Members in paying tribute to the many good firms in the industry which behave reputably and go out of their way to try to ensure that everything is carried out properly in their part of the industry. Nevertheless, despite all the good voluntary regulation carried out by responsible and reputable companies and institutions recently, there is an urgent need for statutory regulation.

We conducted our inquiry precisely because evidence was growing that there were too many cowboy companies in what was a fast-growing industry. Too many firms were outside the scope of voluntary controls. Too many disreputable people worked in the industry. Too many offered a low standard of service. Too many were a danger to the public, and to themselves, as working conditions, quality of training and pay were unacceptably low.

Some people consider that the industry should therefore be regulated, but a conflict exists because others say, "We are a deregulating Government; we are trying to get the Government off the backs of industry and business. Our deregulation drive not only distinguishes us from paternalistic Governments in other countries, but has been a principal reason for the success of British industry as we emerge foremost among our competitors from the last world economic recession".

I agree with that, but I believe that that conflict within the Government machine has slowed down the decision-making process and that there may be a danger of its stopping altogether. That would be too bad for those suffering from the inadequacies of the 80 per cent. of the industry which does not subject itself to voluntary regulation and controls. A great many people in Britain are at the mercy of cowboys, crooks, incompetence and low standards.

I, too, listened to Francis Maude—a former distinguished and able parliamentary colleague—who chairs the Government's deregulation task force, stating his reasons why statutory regulation was not necessary in a discussion on "Today" this morning in which I had not been invited to participate. Impressed as I usually am by my former right hon. Friend's wisdom and judgment, I was not overly impressed this morning, although I certainly do not share the personal strictures that were passed on him by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw).

Francis Maude said, if I heard him aright, that only "one bit" of the private security industry needed attention—the manned guarding sector, as the Select Committee recommended. That "bit"—on the assumption that the private security industry would soon be, if it was not yet, double the size of the police force in this country, at 300,000—must be approaching the size of the entire police force. Some bit!

According to Francis Maude, most of the trouble comes from bouncers, but I do not believe that that is the case. There must be more security guards guarding businesses, industries, factories, stores, private estates and building sites and patrolling the streets than there are bouncers in the entire country.

I believe that Francis Maude said that it was unnecessary to make it a criminal offence for an unregulated company to offer guarding services without a licence or for companies to employ people who did not have a licence; all that was needed was for the individual to be prevented from offering himself for employment if he had certain convictions. That will not stop the cowboys or the crooks; still less will it stop those who employ cowboys and crooks in the knowledge that they are employing cowboys and crooks. That is why the police so strongly support statutory regulation.

Francis Maude said that our proposals would mean more bureaucracy and more pressure on small business and would give false comfort to the public. He said that the police always want licensing systems and that they do not care about spending more of the public's money.

[Sir Ivan Lawrence]

Frankly, I believe that Francis Maude has elevated deregulation to an exaggerated level. I am as deregulating a Conservative as anyone can be, but there is regulation and regulation: some regulation is necessary and some is not.

In the opinion of the all-party Select Committee, this type of regulation is necessary. Some regulation is not wanted by industry and some regulation is—and this regulation is wanted by the private security industry. Some regulation is unnecessarily costly to the Government and to the people, and some regulation is not. The proposed regulation would be paid for by the industry: that alone makes it different. The industry is not complaining about regulation, licensing or statutory controls: it wants all those things so much that it is actually prepared to pay for them.

I make the following plea to the Government. Let them consider more realistically the fact that the private security industry is growing fast and is reaching into areas which have hitherto been the province of police forces in Britain—the prisons, private escort services and street patrols. Let them consider the fact that public anxiety is growing, which is why the police are anxious for a more regulated—not less regulated—industry. Let them consider the fact that, uncharacteristically, the industry wants statutory regulation because it cannot cope itself.

This morning, the Select Committee received a letter from the British Security Industry Association—one of the most responsible organisations in the industry. It says:

"The issue has gained momentum in recent months"—since our report—

"with the growth in companies offering residential street patrol services and the imminent review of police core activities, which is likely to have a major impact on the industry".

The association concludes, as a representation to us:

"BSIA will continue to work to persuade Government to introduce statutory regulation of the manned guarding industry".

I ask the Government to consider that something positive must be done to stop crooks, or even people with previous relevant convictions who might be placed in positions of temptation and become crooks again, from taking up those positions. I ask them to consider, please, the deplorable level of training, of pay, of social security abuse, which exist in the industry and which cannot improve without statutory regulation. I ask them to consider that we are one of the few countries in western Europe in which the private security industry is not regulated, and to consider the commercial disadvantage to which our industry might be subjected if we do not statutorily regulate.

I ask my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Minister of State to consider how greatly public confidence in the Government's approach to law and order and crime reduction would be increased if we controlled what is wrong in the industry in a clearly regulated way.

Having said all that, if there is a Division today I shall not go into the Lobby with the Labour party, for obvious reasons. Unfortunately, the debate was made party political by the hon. Member for Blackburn, with strictures against the Government far wider than the single issue that we are debating requires. The tabling of the motion in prime time is itself a party political matter. I was not elected to vote against the Government on law and order, of all issues, and my constituents would rightly be astonished and unhappy if I did.

I deplore the political nature of what is, fortunately, only part of the debate, because I believe that more would have been achieved if we had not been party political.

Mr. Michael: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman note that we stood back and allowed the opportunity for a non-partisan debate as long ago as 1 November 1995, when the hon. and learned Gentleman first drew attention to the issue, and that it might have been a non-partisan debate if Ministers had chosen to make it so?

Sir Ivan Lawrence: That is not how it worked out today, when the hon. Member for Blackburn and his team made it a party political debate. The debate on 1 November was very good, but unfortunately it was too short and I am pleased that we are taking the matter up again today. However, I deplore the fact that, for a number of reasons, it has acquired a party political aspect—even though an all-party Committee released the report that we are discussing.

If the Government were ignoring our report, I should be constrained—even in the face of my constituents' expectations—to vote with the Opposition in their Lobby. However, from my close association with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and with the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and the Border (Mr. Maclean), I know that they are treating the subject very seriously and I believe that the door supervisor guidelines are a very sensible and strong indication of that fact.

We have raised complicated matters and I agree with my right hon. Friend the Minister of State that we cannot expect the Bill to contain detailed provisions about the licensing authority, its size, functions, powers and scope, about licensing individuals, rights of appeal, disclosure of criminal records, the relevance of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and much else—even after a few months.

My right hon. Friend has convincingly addressed the problems of vetting, which the Government are examining, and the work being done to produce a White Paper on such matters. I accept that the Government intend to ensure that the White Paper meets our concerns about the employment of dishonest and violent people in the private security industry.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary says in his letter, it is extremely important to get the solutions right. As I see it, the Government are endorsing the principal recommendations of the Home Affairs Select Committee in important areas. I accept also that our report is receiving careful consideration. I regret that the letter does not go as far as I would like, but I believe that it is constructive—as were the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State today. So long as the Government are not diverted by those who believe that statutory regulation is out of place in this area—where the public are increasingly closely, and sometimes frighteningly, affected—I shall certainly give the Government the benefit of any doubts that I may have about their determination to adopt the Committee's recommendations.

Interestingly, the Home Affairs Select Committee report concludes:

"We have . . . been impressed by the fact that the Government—once resolutely opposed to regulation in this sector, and even now going through a process of comprehensive deregulation—has an open mind about regulation in this field".

That is what my right hon. Friend the Minister of State told us when he gave evidence before the Select Committee. I hope that we can rely utterly upon that statement and that my colleagues on the Home Affairs Select Committee were not too easily or wrongly impressed by my right hon. Friend's reassurance.

8.52 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): The private security industry cannot and should not be the subject of partisan debate. People's safety and security should be more important than the Minister conveyed to the House this evening. His barnstorming speech failed to convince the Liberal party; the Opposition; the former chairman of the Conservative party, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler); and the Chairman of the Home Affairs Select Committee, the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), who is a recidivist right winger. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield received the Adam Smith award for services to economics and politics.

Apart from the Home Office and, dare I suggest, some of the criminal classes, no one—including the right and the centre moderate wings of the Conservative party, almost all of the security industry, the Police Federation and the Association of Chief Police Officers—is unanimously in favour of the Government's response. I have also been approached by those in the criminal classes whose houses were burgled while they were supposedly being guarded by security firms, so not even all the crooks favour the Government's response.

The Minister said that those who argue the case for regulation have not put forward alternative detailed proposals. I have introduced five Bills in the House of Commons and the last of them—which I introduced only a year ago—ran to 29 clauses. With that challenge in mind, I shall shortly introduce my next Bill which will make the Scott report look like a pamphlet. It will contain enormous detail about what I believe regulation should involve. My latest Bill was supported by six Conservative Members, all of whom were members of the Defence Select Committee. That clearly shows that the subject cuts across party political boundaries.

I fear that the Minister's speech was misconceived. He criticised the Opposition for daring to raise an issue that was not "one of the burning issues of the day". I shall ask him afterwards why those remarks were, unwittingly, probably the sickest that have been uttered for some time. If the Minister watches the 9 o'clock news this evening, he will see the funeral of a young lady who it is alleged was burned as a result of a security guard's actions. The matter is yet to be decided by the courts.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I must remind the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) that the whole of the case is sub judice.

Mr. George: I will not pursue the matter further and I said that it is yet to be proved in the courts. I know of three cases—I know that there are many more—involving pyromaniac security guards who set fire to the factories that they were employed to guard and caused enormous damage. I have details of those cases and, if pressed, I shall present them to the House.

I very much welcome the debate, which, unfortunately, is about 15 years too late. My interest in the industry dates back only to 1977—that of the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield goes back almost a quarter of a century. No one who has taken an interest in the industry is remotely satisfied with the way in which it has been conducted. When I talk to senior figures in the private security industry abroad, they are bemused to learn that there is no regulatory system of the industry in Britain. Some 42 states of the United States, Hong Kong and Singapore—those bastions of socialism—are regulated. All the states of Australia, the provinces of Canada, New Zealand, Japan, the Philippines, Turkey, Israel, Argentina, Chile, South Africa and even Trinidad and Tobago have regulated security industries.

Is there something about our approach to industry that reflects a British genius that allows us to do things without regulation which less competent mortals and political systems must do with regulation? The club of countries with no regulation is diminishing as a number are working to produce regulatory regimes, and we shall soon be isolated. The Confederation of European Security Services—an employers' organisation—compiled a league table of European security industries based upon average working hours, wage levels, the number of hours' training that a guard received, industrial relations and the regulatory system. The United Kingdom came joint 13th with Ireland in the table for Europe alone. There is little of which to be proud. The Government's response to regulation has been total indifference. They are wedded to the philosophy of deregulation and letting the free market reign. Apparently, they oppose setting up a quango, although they have contributed significantly to the increase in the number of quangos.

In 1991, a Home Office report on the security industry stated:

"Inevitably, users of the industry get what they pay for. The Government considers that issues such as training and wages are fundamentally matters for the industry and its customers.

It is ultimately for users to ensure that the company they choose is competent and reliable and to include strict requirement for employee vetting, training, supervision and performance in their contracts.".

The private security industry must not be perceived in the same way as the purchase of a washing machine or a visit to the hairdresser. It is far too important to be left to market forces, which drive down wages and performance in the industry. The Government must do what almost every other Government does—they must not take over the security industry, but merely set the parameters within which it operates.

Most purchasers of security, including the Government, buy the cheapest. One gentleman who gave evidence to the Defence Select Committee said that he would not put in a bid for a contract from the Ministry of Defence because the MOD would not like his prices. He could not run a competent security operation on the money that the Government were prepared to pay. I have here details of a job in security offered by the security department of the British Library paying a basic salary of less than £9,000, rising to about £11,000. Can we protect the nation's heritage for some £10,000 a year?

Many purchasers of security—regrettably, even the Government—fail to set minimum standards. In Newbury, 700 security guards were chasing their tails pursuing people who were infinitely more competent than

[Mr. George]

themselves. They received minimal or no training. There were 700 guards, yet they could not provide the service for which their employers were paying.

Poor security can have serious implications. The Deputy Prime Minister, the arch-deregulator, helped to create an amusing piece of history, although it is a serious matter. It concerned one of the first people to be gaoled after the ceasefire with the IRA. It was reported that

"the younger of the pair, had worked as a security guard in London, his postings taking him to both Capital Radio and the Independent Television Commission where one of his tasks had been to escort Michael Heseltine, the Trade and Industry Secretary around the premises.".

Should the right hon. Gentleman read that, perhaps he would review his opinion on regulation and licensing.

The industry has appallingly low standards, low pay and long hours. One job that was advertised offered no pay but free access to a mobile phone. A survey by the Low Pay Unit in the west midlands identified salaries of £2.69 per hour for a 67-hour week. There are poor wages and low levels of training. The Government amendment wishes the House to congratulate the Government on raising standards. The Blue Ribbon security company offered only two days of formal training. What industry requires only two days' training? Some 555 guards in England and Wales and only 15 in Scotland have passed the NVQ level 2 in security guarding. Only about one in 10 guards has passed the professional guard part 1 qualification, which does not require the brains of a rocket scientist. Quality in the guarding industry is low and the Government are prepared to tolerate it.

There is evidence of poor standards of performance throughout the guarding industry. There is a notable lack of accountability and self-regulation has been a dismal failure. Companies that do not wish to participate in the self-regulatory system do not put forward their names, so only a fraction of the companies in the private security industry are subject to what is often weak self-regulation. I could provide more details. The regulators themselves are not independent. The British Security Industry Association has a regulatory regime, but it is a trade association and it remains rather too closely connected with the inspectorate that it set up.

In conclusion, the Government took nine months to reply to a report. The Select Committee on Defence, of which I am a member, would not accept a reply more than three months after the publication of the report. That demonstrates the Government's confusion. What the Minister said was appalling. It is a travesty that employers are denied access to criminal records. Many right hon. and hon. Members travel by air. How many of them are aware that the employers of UK airport security personnel do not have access to criminal records? That should be a salutary reminder to those of us who fly. Employers are refused the benefit of such access because the Government have not seen fit to bestow it upon them. Wide-ranging regulations should cover the industry progressively over time, and they should include background checks and beyond. There should also be minimum training standards and insurance, and the industry's regulation should be independent.

I want the security industry to be respected. At the moment, it is seen as a bad joke. In a recent television programme, one character asked another, who was a policeman, "Does he have form?" The reply was, "Of course he does—he is a security guard." How long can that situation be tolerated? I want a private security industry that is healthy and profitable, provides excellent services, and is efficient, accountable and honest. I want the people who work in the industry to be proud of doing so. Regulation is not a panacea—it must be the proper type of regulation.

When the House has passed regulation of that sort—and clearly that will not be done by the present Government—the security industry can develop. It has not done so other than in numbers because the Government have not been prepared to lay down minimum standards. Self-regulation has exhausted itself. Even security firms that operate in a self-regulatory environment are pleading for statutory control. Regrettably, the present Government will not deliver that control, but perhaps another Government will.

9.6 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): The interesting contributions to this debate and to that of last November, which I had the pleasure of attending, do not in any sense convey an impression of unanimity, because different views and shades of opinion exist in the House. The fine balance of arguments is illustrated by the excellent Select Committee report.

The House has often rightly been condemned for rushing too quickly into legislation without proper thought—and if we acted on the speech of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), we would be doing that. Although the hon. Gentleman hid behind the Select Committee report, he failed to make a convincing argument for regulation. He rightly referred to statistics indicating problems in the industry, which are not denied. Nor do I deny the need to address those problems. However, the hon. Member for Blackburn failed to make a strong case for tackling them solely by regulation. He was extremely thin on detail, failing to address any of the anomalies among the possibilities for regulation.

There are two distinct parts to the argument for dealing with the problems that exist in the private security industry. One part relies on non-statutory methods to improve standards; the other relies on some degree of statutory or state regulation. I have no difficulty with the former. There is a way of considerably improving standards, by enhancing the ability of employers to consult national criminal records. It is entirely right that the law should be amended so that employers in the security industry can check on employees and prospective employees, to vet them far more thoroughly and ensure that persons with unsatisfactory criminal records are not employed.

I was pleased to hear the Minister hint that there may be some hope of extending the law in this regard after the White Paper is published. The Government closely studied this issue following the Green Paper, and it would fit in very nicely with some of the recommendations in the Select Committee's report. All the examples that the hon. Member for Blackburn quoted referred to employees who have criminal records, and that issue could be dealt with via this mechanism. It would also deal with the majority of examples in the Select Committee's report.

If employers are given access to Phoenix when it is fully on stream and to national records it would, to a large extent, deal with the problem of people with criminal

records being employed. I should like to find a way to deal with employers who have criminal records—an issue that the hon. Member for Blackburn was correct to raise.

I wonder whether a mechanism could be found to allow those who sign contracts with manned guard companies either to examine the records of the employer or directors of the company or to find an alternative means to assure themselves that not only those who represent the contract company but those who run it have clean records.

I support the extension of the exemptions under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 to this area of employment. The correct extension of exemptions in other forms of sensitive employment would rightly rest with an extension to this area as well.

Another area of non-statutory regulation is self-regulation. The hon. Member for Blackburn was far too ready to dismiss self-regulation as a useful tool. He made a distinction between self-regulation and external regulation, but there is a role for both, as both have good track records in many other industries. For example, I refer to the advertising industry and to the security alarm sector of the security industry. The National Approved Council for Security Systems, the trade organisation involved, has worked to regulate that sector.

I encourage further steps to achieve higher training standards and other standards within the industry. However, it must be borne in mind that this industry is diverse. For example, the following activities are quite different: guarding gold bullion; guarding a shop—a small newsagent, for example—against shoplifting, normally via presence; and guarding materials on a small building site.

It would be virtually impossible to define in statute standards that should apply in all those cases. The simple solution would be to allow the industry, in its various forms, to promote high standards and internal regulation. That can be an effective way of dealing with potential problems.

I am not against statutory regulation as such—it has a role in many industries—but I am simply lukewarm about it for this industry. There are always arguments in favour of it—although those arguments can be applied to almost every industry. One could make a very good case for statutory regulation of window cleaners as they enter private premises and have unparalleled opportunities to commit crime if they so wish. Other issues have been used as an argument for regulation, such as low wages. However, that does not mean that as a matter of course regulation is a good thing.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Can my hon. Friend think of any other industry that wants more regulation and is prepared to pay for it?

Mr. Merchant: The House should not make a decision purely on the basis of what an industry wants or argues for. Of course, it is not the whole industry that wants statutory regulation; for that matter, there is no consensus on where the borderline should be drawn. As my hon. and learned Friend will know, one of the major trade organisations—it is mentioned in the Select Committee report—has criticised the recommendation in the report and has said that licensing should be put into effect right across the manned guarding sector, not just the contract part of the industry. In other words, it should apply to direct employment as well. There is thus no clear consensus on the exact form that regulation should take.

It is possible to argue in favour of regulation in an industry, but the arguments do not end there. We have to decide exactly what we intend to regulate, how to regulate it and where to draw the line. There is no consensus on that, either. No clear argument to explain where the line should be drawn has been advanced.

The fact is that this is a very large industry. To be sure, it should behave properly and it should have high standards, but I am not convinced that introducing statutory regulations would achieve them. Would regulation automatically improve the industry? Would it avoid the possibility of criminals subverting parts of the industry? Would it stop crime altogether? I think not.

Unfortunately, regulation is no guarantee that an employee will not use his position to commit a crime. After all, the police are heavily regulated. They are part of the state system, yet there are, unfortunately, quite a number of policemen and women who commit crimes. Regulation is therefore by no means a panacea.

I am not at all clear where the manned guarding contract sector begins and ends. Should we, for instance, include commissionaires? They are employed to guard and are often part of a contract arrangement. Quite often, however, their sole duty is to sit at the entrance of a building and issue people with permits to enter or leave. Should we include caretakers? A major part of the role of some caretakers is to guard buildings. When other staff leave, they are responsible for ensuring security. All these problems must be dealt with.

It is no use people like the hon. Member for Blackburn saying that the problem can be easily solved by producing regulations and by stipulating who can be employed. We must also define exactly which activities we are talking about. I fear that new Labour sees regulation not as a way of dealing with abuse in an industry but as a way of controlling it. It sees regulation as a way of reintroducing the state to an industry. Once Labour had opened the door to regulation of this sector, it would wish to use the opportunity to push the door completely open and control every aspect of the industry. The industry is certainly not calling for that, yet a number of speeches today seemed to show that that is what the Opposition want.

Of course we want high standards in the industry. The question is: how to achieve them? The Minister is quite right to be cautious. He should take some time before grasping some of the superficially attractive solutions that might in the end do little to alleviate the problem. Instead, he should look in depth at every aspect of the industry before reaching a final decision on whether regulation is appropriate—and, if it is, on what form of regulation to introduce.

9.19 pm

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): Only the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) has argued in favour of continued self-regulation of the private security industry. I am sure that he would want, in normal circumstances, to place proper emphasis on the views of the Police Federation and the Association of Chief Police Officers when forming his views, so I respectfully ask him to look once again at the evidence that the Select Committee took on self-regulation. The evidence against it is convincing.

The Police Federation, for example, told the Committee that the whole system had broken down. There is little support across the industry for continued reliance on

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self-regulation, which would not restore or maintain public confidence in the industry. Nor would it address some of the wider concerns that were argued before the Committee.

The hon. Gentleman also made a rather unfortunate mistake in suggesting that the Committee's report was a Trojan horse that was engineered by Labour Members of Parliament, and that it was designed somehow to re-regulate whole sectors of the industry. I remind him that the Committee has a majority of Conservative Members and that its report was unanimous. The report was compelling because the arguments in favour of statutory regulation are overwhelming. Everyone who gave evidence supported the arguments in favour of regulation. To summarise for the hon. Gentleman's benefit, they included the police, the industry itself and all the main consumers of security services.

When the Minister of State gave evidence to the Committee in December 1994, he told us that he was coming to the Committee with an open mind. He used that expression again tonight. I was rather disappointed with his speech tonight because I did not see any evidence of an open mind on statutory regulation—far from it; he tried to parody the arguments in the Committee's report and present them as some back-door red tape and bureaucracy that would stifle an important industry. All the members of the Committee were conscious of that argument. We do not want to adopt a system that would in any way act as a brake on the industry or bury it in red tape. We have had enough red tape from the Government in many other sectors—the health service and elsewhere—to know the problems. We do not want those problems to recur in the private security industry.

That was not the model that we presented in our report, and the Minister did the Committee a disservice—and gave the game away to a large extent—by trying to pretend that it was. We are conscious of those arguments. We do not want to repeat the mistakes. We want an effective system of statutory regulation, as called for by the industry and the police, which will address some of the concerns that we heard about the operation of the industry.

There are three specific arguments in favour of regulation of the industry. First, we want to deal with standards. Secondly, we want to deal with the chronic abuses in the industry: low pay, appalling working practices and conditions, and poor training. It is an abusive industry in many respects. Many of the small employers—the cowboy employers—abuse their staff and require them to work long hours. There is no holiday provision. It is a disgrace. That is not an argument for old-style regulation. The Committee examined the matter and felt that the evidence of abuse and of low standards was sufficiently compelling to warrant consideration by the agency that we propose to regulate the industry.

Thirdly, we are extremely concerned about criminality in the industry. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and others some pretty grim examples. I do not want to repeat the arguments—anyone who wants to see the catalogue of miserable events should simply read the evidence that we published at the same time as our report. It is important to deal with some of the arguments raised by the hon. Member for Beckenham, and by the Minister of State, who suggested that the issue of criminality in the industry could be dealt with solely by improving access to criminal records. I do not believe that to be the case, and nor, I believe, do my colleagues on the Committee, because there are well-documented examples of one-person businesses being set up by people with serious convictions for offences that make them unsuitable to provide private security services. We would not deal with the issue by disclosing or requiring greater access to criminal records.

The evidence of criminality that was presented to the Select Committee came in part from the Lancashire constabulary, which undertook some research of its own. It revealed that criminality in the private security industry was 21 times higher than we would expect in the police service. That is the important comparison that we should be making. It is false to compare levels of criminality in the private security industry with those in the general population. The private security industry is moving into territory that has hitherto been the sole responsibility of the police, which have their own legal, ethical and moral code, backed by statutory force.

I know that there are some methodological difficulties with the research undertaken by the Lancashire constabulary, but the results give us a pretty good background against which we can measure the performance of the private security industry. There is plenty of evidence that should give rise to real concern. Unlike the hon. Member for Beckenham, I do not believe that we can rely on self-regulation to deal with the problems.

Perhaps there is a wider issue of public confidence that we should consider. The Association of Chief Police Officers, for example, was extremely articulate in presenting evidence to the Select Committee. It drew attention to the fact that there has been a shift in some of the roles and relationships between the private industry and the police.

One example is the prison escort service. We see the private industry involved in the prison service. Such responsibilities have always rested in the public sector, but no longer. In any main shopping centre anywhere in the country we see uniformed patrols of staff employed in the private security industry. They are on the streets, they are visible and all our constituents come into contact with them. The need philosophically and jurisprudentially for a proper statutory context in which the private industry can function is overwhelming and compelling.

I am sad to say that the Library told me today that the average time taken by all Government Departments to deal with Select Committee reports is 3.4 months. The Home Office takes an average of seven months to reply to such reports. That is not good enough. I know that the issues raised in this instance are extremely complicated—

Sir Ivan Lawrence: And there are many of them.

Mr. Hutton: My hon. and learned Friend says—well, I do not want to embarrass him. The distinguished Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), mentions that the Committee made many recommendations. In fact, that is not so. It is not the case either that our reports are so uniquely complex that the Home Office needs twice as long to respond to them as other Departments need to respond to other Select Committee reports. The problem

is that it is inefficient and involved in a battle with the Department of Trade and Industry, which is apparent to anyone who has been involved in the debate about the private security industry.

The Home Office cannot make up its mind. It is torn between the need to do something to deal with a problem that it recognises and its ideological obsession to deregulate at every opportunity. It is increasingly the Government's trademark to pursue ideology at the expense of common sense. Before us is a classic example of the need for less ideology and more common sense, plus a commitment to do something sensible to tackle problems.

If the Government continue to delay and to obfuscate the argument, they will damage the industry. Maintaining the status quo and tampering with or accepting, perhaps, some of the more marginal recommendations is not the best way in which to proceed. The Government should accept the main thrust of the Committee's recommendations. Only if they do that will they convince the House—that certainly applies to my right hon. and hon. Friends—that they have the best interests of the private security industry at heart.

9.28 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): We have heard little so far about the victims—those who have been let down by an industry that has been infiltrated in certain key sectors by the criminal classes. I have in mind companies that have been set up as front organisations for organised crime. They sell their wares to unsuspecting licensees of public houses or the managers of hotel catering establishments. During the 1980s, such infiltration increased enormously, with the result that there was a huge increase in criminal activities. Such organisations realised from the outset that, if they controlled the door security industry, they would control access to clubs and leisure areas, the selling and distribution of drugs there, prostitution, and other key intimidation and protection rackets. As a consequence, they use violence against the companies who own the clubs and pubs and their customers.

I could not believe it when the Minister of State made light of the issue and claimed that it was not one of law and order or of crime prevention, but of some obscure issue of regulation. In the past eight years, I have provided the Home Office with a dossier of violence, murder, grievous bodily harm and intimidation, leading to people having to give up their licence because of their refusal to allow these companies into their premises. There have been arson attacks, physical violence against people and their families and racketeering leading to companies' losing control of their premises.

The dossier includes examples of constituents of mine who have been visited at home because they were witnesses in court cases against bouncer companies that had been violent. On two occasions, for example, they have been told that, if they proceeded as witnesses, their child would end up in a coffin with them. The dossier also includes examples of constituents who have been beaten up with baseball bats in mistaken revenge attacks against an enemy of a company and of rice flails being used against licensees who objected simply to the use of violence in their premises by the companies.

During the campaign, we have had the support of the security and leisure industries and the police. There is a strongly held view that, unless we register and regulate the industry, the expansion of criminal activities will continue.

I say without exaggeration that the companies and criminals are ruthless. They will stop at nothing. They threaten the people who stand against them. For example, I gave evidence to the Home Office about personal threats to kill me and my family. My children were threatened and a wreath was nailed to my door by a company. My wife has received condolence cards about my death and I have received such cards about my wife's death. We have had telephone calls threatening that, if we continue the campaign in the local community, violence will be inflicted on me or any individual who associated with us in that campaign. Despite that, the Home Office has taken no action. It must do so not because of the threats against me—I am only one individual—but because thousands of people are experiencing daily attacks by these companies.

I shall conclude soon because some of my hon. Friends want to speak. The Home Secretary has a full dossier of evidence about the extent of infiltration of this sector of the industry by organised crime. I raise one issue contained in the dossier that he has not yet revealed and refused to reveal in the debate. In Merseyside, a detailed report was supplied revealing widespread criminality, including drug dealing, organised violence and extortion, among door supervisors. A survey of 476 door supervisors found that three had convictions for murder and manslaughter, that another two were on bail charged with murder, that 25 had weapon convictions, that seven had firearm convictions, that 18 had drug convictions, that 101 had assault convictions and that 97 were claiming unemployment benefit while working as regular door supervisors. Those figures do not include the people who employ the door supervisors. A survey of the employers found that they had a similar record. The companies were just front organisations for organised crime.

The Home Secretary should take action urgently. During Home Department questions, I asked the Minister of State if he would

> "bring forward proposals for statutory regulation of the security industry."

He said that the Government had no plans to do so. In response, I said:

> "Was it not extraordinary that just before Christmas Conservative central office, through its security company, recruited one Bob King who had just served 15 years for armed robbery to work as a security guard at central office? Does that not prove that infiltration of the industry has gone right to the top, including the Government?"—[*Official Report*, 12 January 1995; Vol. 252, c. 263-64.]

Having listened to the Minister and the complacency of his speech today, I believe that that just about got it right.

9.34 pm

Ms Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen): What has been most striking about the Government's utterances about the need to regulate the private security industry, and their inadequate and long-delayed response to the Select Committee's report—forced on them by this Opposition day debate—is the sheer complacency of Ministers. Despite statistics that occasionally suggest otherwise, the growth of fear of crime is now a disturbing social phenomenon. Since the Government came to office,

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recorded crime has more than doubled. What the Government fail to recognise is that the expansion of private security is a direct reflection of that trend, and society's response to it.

There is considerable public unease about the intrusion of the private security industry into areas that were previously the domain of the police. As a report in the *Independent on Sunday* in June last year pointed out,

"Already, security firms have fingers in a staggering number of pies."

Once it was exclusively the task of the police to keep the unruly at bay, marshal parades and check shop doors after dark. On rare occasions, special constables were sworn in to subdue riots. That is no longer true. Privateers escort prisoners to gaol, run prisons and guard installations; they repel anti-road protesters, and defend construction sites. They kept mourners in line at, for example, Ronnie Kray's gangster funeral. There are now at least as many people employed by private security firms as there are uniformed police. According to one estimate, the former—162,000—outnumber the latter by 4,000. According to another, there are as many as 250,000 privateers.

Last year's Police Federation conference was warned by David French, chairman of the constables' central committee:

"The growth in private security services means that those who can afford it are looking to hired hands to protect them. There is no plan behind it, no legislation. They're leaving it to market forces."

The chief constable of Northumbria told police staff college recruits:

"The private security industry has begun to enter areas of public life which, until recently, have been seen as the sole preserve of statutory regulated bodies such as the police and prison services."

As the *Independent on Sunday* report also pointed out,

"A glance in the Yellow Pages shows the extent to which unregulated private security firms have invaded aspects of our daily lives."

The list of those aspects is almost endless. It ranges from property protection to surveillance services, from bodyguarding to dog handling, from investigations of theft, from fraud and product piracy to airport, bank and embassy security. Security firms' advertisements reveal men in police-like uniforms with German shepherd dogs, or on horseback, or at control desks. They wear shields and crests with lions rampant.

Nearly 8,000 private security companies now operate in Britain, making the British industry the second largest in Europe, behind Germany's. It is a £3 billion industry, accountable to no one but itself. Counting the firms—never mind regulating them—is a problem. As BSIA spokesman Andrew Mackay has said,

"There could be hundreds if not thousands of firms in London. Anyone can set up a security company using a mobile phone."

In the face of all that evidence of the need to regulate the industry properly, the complacency of the Minister—who, as we know, has direct experience of the industry through Securicor—and, indeed, that of the Home Secretary is staggering. The Home Office has been presiding incompetently over an industry that is 30 years old. Every witness interviewed by the Select Committee called for statutory regulation at least of the manned guarding sector, making it plain that such a system could be self-financing, at no cost to the public purse. The Committee unanimously

"agreed with the overwhelming majority of the evidence we received that the advantages of regulation of the manned guarding sector . . . in terms of quality of service and protection of the public, of the industry's customers, and of its workforce, outweigh the loss of commercial freedoms which would be involved."

Finally, let me tell the House which Conservative Members signed that unanimous Select Committee report. They are the hon. Members for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Ashby), for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler), for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight), for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney), and of course the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), the Chairman. We shall see tonight whether those Conservative Members are willing to vote with their principles and support the Opposition motion or whether, yet again, we shall witness them saying one thing and doing another.

9.39 pm

Mr. Don Touhig (Islwyn): I should like to declare an interest. Since the beginning of this month, I have been a parliamentary adviser to the Police Federation, although I do not intend to refer to it in this debate.

Over the past decade, the private security industry has expanded rapidly. Private security guards have become part of everyday life across Britain in shopping centres, business districts, hospitals and entertainment complexes. Indeed, as the Home Affairs Select Committee report noted, increasingly the private security industry is expanding into areas that were previously in the domain of the police. Although it is important to ask whether that development is to be welcomed, that is for another debate.

The private security industry is becoming more and more involved in protecting people and property, patrolling and guarding and, because of that expansion, we must be concerned about the industry's relationship with the public. Security guards are protecting people's lives and guarding people's property. That task should be undertaken by people who have been properly vetted, trained and paid. Some security companies address those issues thoroughly and act responsibly; however, many private security firms do not, and that must concern us all.

Self-regulation has not worked. The industry is dogged by cowboy firms that continue to damage the reputation of responsible companies. There is no legal requirement to comply with minimum standards or join professional associations. The lack of vetting procedures, which lead to the kind of incidents that hon. Members have cited, must cause considerable concern.

Until the Government are prepared to legislate on regulation in the security industry, I commend to the House the Public Interest Disclosure Bill, which I shall introduce on 1 March. It will go some way towards protecting those who discover malpractice, especially in the private security industry, from being penalised.

9.42 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): We have heard it all tonight. The Home Secretary is not willing to listen. He is not willing to listen to decent employers, chief constables, the Opposition or the Home Affairs Select Committee, and he is not willing to act to protect the public.

Last night, we received a pathetic so-called interim response addressed to the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence). The Opposition have not chosen

to divide the House; the Home Secretary's reply has caused that to happen. It is an insult to the Home Affairs Select Committee and the House.

It is almost two years since I commented that, sadly, it was difficult to find opponents of statutory regulation apart from Home Office Ministers and criminals who might be deprived of their jobs. Yet, since then, more examples of private security have arisen in different parts of the country. People have been approached by individuals who say that they operate a security system and look after homes in the area for a weekly payment. Such an approach is sometimes close to operating a protection racket and it is wholly unacceptable.

There have been examples of people developing a security system on an estate, telling the police of their plans, then telling local people that they have the approval of the police when that was not the case. One group's circular offered patrols by staff free of criminal convictions, yet bore the name of a director who had several convictions for dishonesty and violence. Another firm was run by two men—one had a record for violence and the other for embezzlement. Perhaps in Conservative Britain that is regarded as a good partnership.

A senior police officer told me:

"I personally find it monstrous that people with convictions for burglary in dwelling houses are being allowed to run businesses and work for such companies whilst having strings of convictions for the offence for which they are purporting to protect the public".

We have heard such comments from police officers in various parts of the country, and the Home Affairs Select Committee received specific evidence from the Association of Chief Police Officers which made exactly the same point.

It is outrageous that no action has been taken and that the Government have failed to respond to the Select Committee's report. Indeed, the Chairman of the Select Committee has tried to persuade and cajole Ministers to act, but they have refused to do so, thus insulting him. He is handling that insult with great restraint, but members of all parties who worked to produce a coherent report calling for action by the House have the right to ask better from Ministers.

The public have every right to ask why Ministers are not answering questions. To whom does a dissatisfied customer complain if there is no statutory body to monitor and regulate private security firms? What criteria are used to decide whether people are suitable for employment if there is no enforcement in the industry? How can we ensure that all employees are trained to an acceptable level if there is no power of oversight?

The Minister always forgets that there is no point in allowing employers access to criminal records if the employers themselves are criminals. Such employers may be in the minority in the private security industry, but it is decent employers who are supporting us whole-heartedly in calling for sensible regulation. My hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) was right to say that decent companies in the industry would be seriously damaged if the Government failed to join the search for proper regulation.

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) referred to staff with criminal records employed by someone with a criminal record for grievous bodily harm. He was right to say that this is not a new problem and that the only question to be asked is, how do we achieve sensible regulation? I happily agree with his comments, but who is missing from the search for proper regulation? Only Ministers at the Home Office.

The answer to the question how to find proper regulation was given in the unanimous cross-party report of the Home Affairs Select Committee. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield was right to say that the private security industry is totally different from, for example, the housebuilding industry, where self-regulatory systems can work and be comprehensive. That is not so in the private security industry, which is why the Home Affairs Select Committee was so persuasive and why we have sought the sensible minimum in the debate—that we should unite behind the Select Committee's report.

The unanimous report proposed proper regulation of the private security industry, but that regulation is obstructed by dogma and the obsession for deregulation displayed by Francis Maude and his like, even though it is obvious to the police, the public, the British Retail Consortium and decent companies in the industry that regulation on a statutory footing is urgent and essential.

The Minister chose to ramble on about crime, the police, law and order and a series of issues on which the Conservatives are floundering and inept. He did so to avoid debating the issue before the House. He told us that he wanted to get any regulation of the private security industry right. He said that he had not rushed to make a decision, but, in truth, his contribution was pathetic. I know that the Home Secretary had a prior engagement but, by gosh, he must have been delighted and relieved to have missed such an embarrassing effort.

The Minister tried to ridicule the serious commitment shown by my hon. Friends the Members for Wigan (Mr. Stott) and for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), but he must take seriously the experience of those who have taken action in the interests of their constituents, as my hon. Friends have done at a local level. Tonight, the Government have struggled to appear serious.

Why did a Home Office Minister respond to the debate when it is dogmatic Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry who are blocking regulation that is in the public interest? Why is dogma standing in the way of protecting the public interest? That question was answered on the "Today" programme by a failed Conservative candidate who has been given a job by Ministers.

More than a quarter of a century ago, Philip Sorenson, who was then the chairman of Group 4, said:

"It is the responsibility of the security industry to work towards statutory backing for a system of control.

That system should allay any fears about the role of private security companies in our society."

Twenty-five years later, the Government offer only prevarication and delay.

There are decent employers and decent employees in the private security industry. Their friends are on the Labour Benches. We are their friends, as we are the friends of the police and the public. There are also crooked employers and crooks employed in the private security industry. By Conservative Ministers' pathetic response to this debate, they have shown themselves to be the villains' friends.

9.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Tom Sackville): I wish to make it clear that the Government have great respect for the

[Mr. Tom Sackville]

private security industry, which employs some 160,000 people and conducts the vast majority of its business without any problems. For example, the alarms sector, locksmiths, and cash-in-transit companies all operate well. The in-house part of the guarding sector is generally recognised to be sound. The one group that raises real concerns is the contract guarding sector.

Legitimate concerns arise about the contract guarding sector, but no one should exaggerate the degree of criminality or security industry-related crime. A number of Opposition Members were guilty of that. Among other things, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) accused Mr. Francis Maude of speaking for the Government. Although Mr. Maude probably will speak for the Government again, he is what one might call a resting Minister, to borrow a phrase from another profession. He spoke as an independent business man on a panel that advises the Government. This morning, I was waiting by my telephone to be asked to appear on the "Today" programme, as were all my colleagues and the chairman of the Home Affairs Select Committee. It was entirely the BBC's decision to ask Mr. Maude to speak and I hope that that is not a habit to which they will become accustomed.

The hon. Members for Wigan (Mr. Stott) and for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) mentioned the problems of bouncers in their area.

Ms Janet Anderson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Sackville: I will not give way because I have very little time.

I think that the hon. Members for Wigan and for Makerfield exaggerated somewhat. I do not think that thousands of people are threatened by bouncers.

Mr. Ian McCartney: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Sackville: I will not give way. The hon. Gentleman himself mentioned that there is an excellent voluntary scheme in Wigan, which makes my case that deregulation can work.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) demonstrated his long interest in this subject. He lamented the lack of regulation during the Labour Government and his interest goes back before the last Labour Government. I am sorry that my right hon. Friend did not manage, in one of the many seats that he occupied in the Cabinet in the past 15 years, to bring forward the regulatory measures that he suggested. Ireassure him that the Government are considering the Home Affairs Select Committee report carefully and we shall shortly produce proposals on vetting that may address his concerns. I certainly echo my right hon. Friend's call to avoid rushed legislation. He always showed remarkable prudence in introducing legislation in the many posts that he occupied in the Government.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) produced the old chestnut about the danger that closed circuit television video might be abused for commercial purposes. We had an isolated case, but that did not happen. That case demonstrates that it is possible for the CCTV industry, which makes a huge contribution to crime prevention, to regulate itself. We should be careful about restricting CCTV unnecessarily.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) made a characteristically wise speech. He chided us for being slow in replying to the report, but he conceded that he did not expect a speedy response given that the issue is complex and that any action we take has many ramifications. I can reassure my hon. and learned Friend that his report has been carefully studied. We need to do further work on a number of issues, but we shall introduce proposals soon. I noted the point that he made so vividly: the industry is growing and public concern is growing. Those matters need to be addressed.

The hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) also showed a long-held interest and expertise in the subject, which we greatly respect. He warned us about the position of airline employees, the probity that is needed and the respect for the security industry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) made an interesting point when he said that we cannot be too prescriptive about training, because there are many different sorts of jobs in the security industry. *[Interruption.]*

The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) warned us against red tape. His was a timely warning. We may need to ensure that there is access to records for employers, but without unnecessary burdens— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House should listen to the winding-up speech and I should be grateful if hon. Ladies who want to have a giggle would have it outside the Chamber.

Mr. Sackville: I shall not enter into that discussion, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The hon. Member for Makerfield mentioned violence. He made an interesting point, but we must be careful to keep it in context.

The report of the Select Committee on Home Affairs covered the ground expertly and the Committee has done some excellent work in identifying the problems. However, we need to do more detailed work on tackling the problem, which is why we are considering some aspects of the report. As my right hon. Friend the Minister has said, we shall shortly be publishing our proposals on vetting, which should go a long way towards resolving the difficulties.

The net effect of the contract guarding sector—even though there may be problems—is to deter crime. It reassures the public in many different ways. It has grown partly because of the lack of intrusive legislation. The vast majority of firms do a good job and add to the community's safety. They give businesses peace of mind and allow people to leave their premises at night; they do much to reassure vulnerable people in the high street.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) accused us of complacency. The Labour party's new-found interest in crime is hardly convincing. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister made some remarks the other day about Labour and criminals. Some of us were disappointed by his remarks, as we felt

they were far too restrained. The gulf between what Labour says about crime and what it does about crime is striking.

When we raised the maximum penalty for dealing in hard drugs to life, what did the Labour party do? It voted against it.

Mr. Michael: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Sackville: No, I will not give way.

When we raised the maximum penalty for taking guns to a crime, the Labour party voted against that measure. We gave the Attorney-General the power to appeal against lenient sentences; the Labour party voted against that. We gave the courts the power to make the parents of 16 and 17-year-olds pay their children's fines; the Labour party voted against that. We reformed the right of silence; the Labour party voted against that. We gave the police powers to take DNA samples; the Labour party voted against that. Where were Labour Members? Perhaps most significantly, every year that we renewed the prevention of terrorism Act, the Labour party voted against it. Labour Members voted to weaken our controls against terrorism and against the bombers.

The debate is not about security; it is a piece of Labour party opportunism. Labour Members are trying to combine their new-found display of interest in crime with an attack on the thing that they hate most—an unregulated private sector industry.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 263, Noes 294.

Division No. 53] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Laurence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
McFall, John
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert

Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Clarke and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Neil
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David

Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Simon Burns and
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House recognises the valuable work done by the Home Affairs Committee in its First Report, Session 1994–95, on the private security industry (House of Commons Paper No. 17), welcomes the Government's plans to introduce the White Paper which will allow greater access to criminal records; and congratulates the Government on its firm and positive commitment to ensuring that standards throughout the industry are raised to the level of the best.

PETITION

Retirement Pensions

10.14 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): I beg to present a humble petition addressed to the honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, from the residents of Coventry. The petition reads:

The recent reports of plans for changes to retirement pensions has filled the people of Coventry and in particular its British pensioners and the Trades Unions Action Association of the Coventry Branch with deep concern because the threat to the universal basic retirement pensions will in the long term be to their detriment and cause great hardship to the least well off of the pensioners of Coventry and the Nation. Two thousand and six hundred and twenty four people of Coventry have expressed their concern by signing the petition because if these proposed changes are implemented, they would be neither economically nor socially justified.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House will approve no action that will be to the detriment of pensioners' entitlement and rights, instead commend the enhancement of pensions to at least one third of average earnings. And your pensioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray."

To lie upon the Table.

Coastguard Service

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Streeter.]*

10.16 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am delighted to have the opportunity to raise the subject of the coastguard service this evening, and I am particularly delighted with the choice of Minister to reply—the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris). That allows me to pay tribute to the Minister's erudition, wit and courtesy—which we will sadly miss when the hon. Gentleman leaves the House—and to say how much I anticipate with joy the description of the coastline of the Minister's constituency that he will no doubt give when he replies.

The coastguard service is a serious subject, but it has not received much attention in the House in recent years. This is the first debate on the service in many years—in particular, the first since the publication of the Transport Select Committee's report on the future of the coastguard service that was published on 7 December 1994. I know that other hon. Members with coastal constituencies and those who are fellow officers of the all-party coastal group feel that this important issue should have been given Government time, but we welcome this opportunity. I am pleased that a number of my hon. Friends are present, as well as hon. Members of other parties.

The Select Committee's report concluded with this important analysis:

"The evidence we have received suggests that the operational personnel and equipment of the Coastguard are thinly stretched at present. The agency is dealing with many more incidents than in 1986, with fewer staff, and may recently have relied too much on the use of overtime and auxiliary coastguards to maintain service levels. We therefore welcome the fact that the Government has rejected the option of requiring the agency to produce efficiency savings of 20 per cent. Given the financial pressures under which the agency is presently operating, we are concerned that its present target of achieving a 6.4 per cent. saving in the next 18 months might adversely affect the provision of coastguard services. In view of the haste with which the agency was obliged to agree to the target, it may not in fact be possible for its management to find sufficient economies in non-operational elements of the budget to achieve such savings without compromising the effectiveness of the service."

We are reaching the end of the period to which that conclusion relates, so this is a fitting moment to take stock.

I pay tribute to the dedication, professionalism and sheer guts of those who serve in the Coastguard Agency throughout the country. There are nearly 500 full-timers and 3,700 auxiliaries. They have been, and still are, demoralised by five years of non-stop reorganisation. In 210 BC, the Roman General Petronius said:

"I was to learn in later life that we tend to meet any new situation by re-organising, and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralisation".

That is precisely the impact that these continual reorganising proposals have had on this dedicated team of men and women.

The current review is not the first in recent memory. The so-called Laver review, which was completed in 1978, recommended an increase in staff to more than 700. In 1987, cuts were imposed, resulting in the closure of more rescue sub-centres. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the number of centres was reduced from 28 to 21. Recently, the following centres have closed: Wick, Peterhead, Tees, Shoreham, Ramsey in the Isle of Man, Land's End and Hartland Point on my constituency border.

On 3 December 1991, the then Minister announced the latest comprehensive reorganisation, following a year-long review. There were elaborate plans to redesignate the auxiliary stations—some would be initial response teams, and some would be back-up teams. This caused confusion and consternation. The name games have played a major part in the confusion of recent years, including the curious suggestion that watch monitors be appointed—that seems more relevant to the classroom than to the serious occupation of watching the coast. This has contributed to the feeling that the service is unloved and misunderstood.

On 9 May 1994, the then Secretary of State announced that he had set the service a 20 per cent. economy target, to be achieved over a two-year period by 1 April 1996. The chief executive anticipated the closure of seven rescue centres, and the loss of one third of the full-time jobs. As part of the Transport Select Committee exercise to which I have referred, Ministers subsequently back-tracked. The abrupt U-turn meant that the full implications were not, and are still not, apparent—they have not come out into the open, which is one of the reasons for continuing concern.

Savings of some £1.4 million or £1.5 million by the end of next month are still being sought, but their manpower implications have not been fully explained to those most concerned. I know that my colleagues from Scotland, in particular my hon. Friends the Members for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie), will confirm that morale is low.

One officer has written the following to me:

"After almost 30 years as a regular officer and 5 years as an auxiliary, I more than most can see just how the service if falling apart . . . recent decisions in the Coastguard service leave staff astounded, disenchanted and with morale at an all-time low".

Hon. Members may recall that the timing of this debate was announced only last Thursday. The fact that all this information has reached me so speedily suggests that many people share our concerns.

Another officer has written:

"Rumours were flying around that discussion had taken place, or even agreements reached, about a range of issues . . . it appears that these rumours may have emanated from some senior managers".

That is no way to conduct an effective, constructive negotiation or to improve confidence in the service.

As in any organisation, there is room for savings, and there may be waste in particular areas. If so, it should be identified and eradicated. For example, there seems to be widespread criticism of the vehicle policy of the service in relation to initial costs, replacement and running expenses. The rationale should surely be the improvement of the efficiency of the service, not a dogmatic and arbitrary cost-cutting exercise to a predetermined monetary target.

Between 1986 and 1994, the total number of incidents dealt with by the coastguard service almost doubled, from 5,300 to 10,470; the number of persons assisted increased from 8,960 to 17,400; and, thankfully, the number of fatalities decreased from 286 to 272. That in itself is

a tribute to the quality of the service. With much less manpower and a reduced budget in real terms, it is already achieving a great deal more.

The gales of the past few days around the west country coasts, and especially in my constituency, are a salutary reminder of what we owe to those who dedicate their lives to safety at sea. The current collapse in morale, following months of secret cost-cutting schemes, is surely too high a price to pay if it results in reduced standards and obstacles to high quality recruitment.

We are already hearing reports of distress signals being missed. I have a dossier referring to reports from regular coastguards of information that they have passed on to their superiors about missed mayday calls and missed urgent transmissions on the new 2182 medium frequency. There are renewed fears of inadequate manual watch—the cover in known danger spots around west country cliffs and secluded coves. Our coastal seafarers are expressing their concern; just when their numbers are increasing, inshore surveillance is being reduced.

In recent weeks—particularly since the announcement of this debate—I have received expressions of frustration, anxiety and dismay from members of the service. They are dismayed, because the future is still so shrouded in official mist. The coastguards simply cannot understand why the bureaucrats, safe behind their desks, are being so slow and so secretive.

Why cannot we have the full picture now? Surely dogmatic insistence on a budget cut across the board—still rumoured to be a reduction of at least £1.5 million to be achieved by the end of March—is quite wrong for a service in which safety must be paramount. Saving lives must take precedence over saving money, if only because, in the long term, driving volunteers out of the coastguard service will cost huge sums to reverse.

Tonight is an opportunity for the Minister to reassure the coastguards and all who depend on them and represent them that the current review will not be allowed to weaken the service. We need to be confident that this review will not be penny wise, pound foolish.

10.26 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Steve Norris): I am grateful to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) for his kind words when introducing the debate. It is often said that a compliment from a colleague on the other side of the House is the kiss of death for a parliamentary career, but as mine has already received that self-inflicted wound, I shall accept the hon. Gentleman's kind words in the spirit in which they were intended. I can assure him that Epping Forest—when I last looked—had no coastline; but that no more diminishes my interest in the subject than if I were translated to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and were required to attend to matters there.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. The staff of the coastguard service, regulars and volunteers, provide a vital maritime rescue service around our seas and coasts. I can assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that we in the Department, and my noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping, hold the coastguard in the highest possible regard.

The hon. Gentleman will know that we have incorporated the coastguard in the Coastguard Agency. We have put it on a sound footing; we have given it some clear objectives; and we have provided it with the resources it needs to undertake its tasks.

I should like to say a word about the changes proposed to the service, which are expected to improve the already high level of service being delivered. I stress that the changes are supported by the chief executive of the Coastguard Agency and the chief coastguard—I have spoken to them both today, and they underlined the point.

The sea is vital to our economy, and it provides many opportunities for us all to enjoy our coast line in a variety of recreational pursuits. But as the hon. Gentleman, my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), who takes a close interest in these matters, and many other hon. Members here tonight know all too well, the sea is also unpredictable and dangerous. When problems arise, we turn to the coastguard service to provide a quick and effective response to any maritime emergency. It is a coastguard service that is recognised as the most modern in Europe, equipped as it is with state-of-the-art communications equipment, sophisticated helicopters and coastal response teams manned by auxiliary guards, who are volunteers prepared to turn out at any time in any conditions to carry out rescues or searches along the 10,500 miles of our coastline.

The House will recall the recent civil emergency on the Shetland islands, and I acknowledge the presence of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), who is an assiduous attender to these debates. He will know of the recent civil emergency over the Christmas and new year period. The local coastguards and the coastguard helicopter played a key role in maintaining vital communication links.

The helicopter carried out 23 urgent medical and other evacuations. It undoubtedly saved a number of lives. Coastguard officers maintained a fully operational rescue centre on Shetland, despite the appalling weather and the travel difficulties. Many of them spent the festive period away from their families simply to ensure that vital emergency services were maintained.

Many other examples of dedication and professionalism could be cited, and it is the unique mixture of highly trained professional coastguards, high-technology equipment and competent and well-trained volunteers that provides a first-class search and rescue organisation of which we can be proud.

The men and women of the modern coastguard service can also be proud of the vital maritime services they provide. During 1995, they dealt with a total of 12,220 incidents, involving more than 19,000 people—a 17 per cent. increase on the previous year. Those figures hide many dramatic rescues and, sadly, tragedies, but more than 98 per cent. of the incidents were brought to a successful conclusion, in the sense that they managed to avoid any loss of live. It is that record of achievement and success that we are committed to maintaining, but at the same time ensuring that the vital maritime emergency service is delivered as cost-effectively as possible.

I make no apology to the hon. Member for North Cornwall for asserting straight away that no organisation these days can afford to stand still. He is quite right to say that HM Coastguard completed a "coastal review" in 1991, which looked at the role, functions and numbers of sector officers around the coast. The implementation of that review took some four years, and has only recently been completed. More recently, the Coastguard Agency looked at the tasks, numbers and grades of staff at its headquarters.

[Mr. Steve Norris]

It was then the turn of uniformed coastguards at rescue centres. The number of incidents dealt with by rescue centres, as the hon. Gentleman said, has increased remorselessly over the years. My figures are broadly comparable with his. There were just under 6,000 in 1985. There were more than 12,000 last year. New technology has been introduced, in particular the action data automation system—ADAS.

The organisation has to adapt. The amount of overtime having to be worked by coastguard watch officers was increasing, and it was becoming harder to find auxiliaries with the time and skills necessary to provide us with the consistent and reliable backup that the service needed. It was decided to take a fundamental look at how the operational staffing of the 21 rescue centres could best be provided and organised.

That review, as the hon. Gentleman knows, became known as "Focus for Change". It was tasked straightforwardly to determine the best use of staff at the 21 rescue centres by more flexible shift working and to ensure that the staffing levels reflected the loading at individual centres. The current arrangement is that there is a basic standard complement, irrespective of the rescue centre's work load.

At the outset, it was fully appreciated that any such review had to take into account the special nature of the coastguard work if it was to achieve any credibility with the uniformed staff. Because of that, the review team was made up of three experienced coastguard officers of different grades in addition to the three Department of Transport staff inspectors.

The team visited all 21 rescue centres. Its members are said to have interviewed in the process 80 per cent. of watch-keeping officers and about 25 per cent. of watch-keeping auxiliaries. Many of the review's findings stemmed from that staff input, and ensured that the "Focus for Change" document was about the most thorough review of the structure, workloads and running of the coastguard service that we have ever seen.

The brief of the review team was to recommend the optimum staffing solution to meet the operational requirement. I should make it clear to the House that the team was given no instructions to meet any financial targets.

The proposals were made for each rescue centre's complement, tailored to meet the work that it had to do. In no instance is it recommended that fewer than three qualified watchkeepers should be on watch. A flexible working pattern was evolved to ensure that the right number of people would be on watch at any time. The proposals will markedly reduce staff shortages at critical periods, and hence overtime. They will make the local use of manpower more efficient in a variety of other ways.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Norris: I shall continue for the moment.

The main thrust of the review was to recommend the restructuring of the uniformed staff. It was concluded that, first, it was becoming more difficult to find reliable voluntary auxiliaries who were trained, proficient and familiar with the technical environment of the modern operations room. The review recommended the appointment of permanent coastguard watch assistants to replace the part-time voluntary service currently provided in operations rooms by auxiliary coastguards.

It was concluded, secondly, that the person in charge of a watch should have the rank, training and experience to take most key decisions without referring to a superior. He or she should also be part of the local management team. The review recommends the new grade of watch leader to fill that post.

Thirdly, it was found that coastguard officers in the management team of each district are too occupied with routine administrative work. The review recommended that they should have permanent administrative support, which would allow reductions in management. There was a variety of other recommendations, which are under review.

Throughout "Focus for Change", there has been full consultation with the staff and their trade unions. Copies of the report have been made available to all staff, who have been invited to submit their comments. It is proposed that recruitment for the two new grades should start in April.

Overall—I stress this against the background of the hon. Gentleman's remarks—the review requires an increase in employed staff. It means introducing 154 watch assistants, offset by a decrease in 51 watch officers and phasing out the use of auxiliaries in operations rooms. There will be a requirement for new higher grade watch leaders to replace the 84 senior watch officers. With proper administrative support at each centre, and taking into account the extra responsibility that the watch leaders have taken on, 21 fewer station officers will be required.

Bearing in mind all the figures, the review provides an increase of 82 in the uniformed staff of the coastguard service. To underline the fact that the review is about making the best of available resources, the effect is expected to be neutral in terms of paybill costs. The savings that are rightly demanded of the service in operational terms will be made on overtime, and on a reduction in the payments to auxiliary coastguards who formerly worked in operations rooms.

We have given repeated assurances about the future of the coastguard service, in the sense that efficiency savings can be achieved without compromising safety at sea and along the shoreline. That is something—

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Norris: Of course.

Mr. Harris: We have reached an important stage in the debate. There have been many allegations or suggestions about cuts facing the coastguard service. Is my hon. Friend able to give a categorical assurance that, especially in the south-west, there has been no reduction in the service provided by the coastguards, and there has been no cut in the Coastguard Agency's budget?

Mr. Norris: I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that the agency's budget for 1996-97 has been set at £25.1 million. Additional temporary funding to implement the

"Focus for Change" strategy has also been provided. The budget will enable the agency to continue to provide its main functions in terms of search-and-rescue co-ordination, counter-pollution, and sea safety education at the same high professional level as before while continuing the drive to eliminate unnecessary work, waste and inefficiency.

I can say specifically that no rescue centres will be closed and no staff will be made redundant. I repeat the remarks of the chief coastguard and the head of the agency: that the efficiency savings will not compromise safety at sea or along the shoreline.

The House should appreciate that it is perfectly possible to deliver efficiency savings—to deliver more efficient ways of doing the jobs that the service is tasked to perform—without compromising safety, provided that that is the objective that is set.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall is a serious observer of these matters. He mentioned the monitoring of distress signals and referred to the 2182 kHz frequency band now employed. All coastguard watch officers are trained in radiotelephony skills and distress communication procedures to a syllabus that is approved by British Telecom Maritime Radio Services. I checked the matter only today, when I discussed it with the chief coastguard. Neither I nor he is aware of any missed distress messages.

If the hon. Gentleman has details, I should be genuinely grateful to him—I do not say this as a challenge, but as an invitation to share the data—if he would let me know what that evidence is. My noble Friend in another place will be happy to investigate.

Our conclusion is that the 2182 kHz service monitoring is working well. That work being undertaken in-house—ironically, avoiding a dog-leg in the translation of information that previously went through a third party before it was received to be acted on by the Coastguard Agency—has made a saving to the service per annum of about £500,000 in running costs, without compromising efficiency.

Mr. Allen: I thank the Minister for his courtesy in giving way, and I compliment the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) on his choice of subject for debate.

Is the Minister personally reassured about the levels of skill and training of watch assistants who will replace the coastguard auxiliaries? We have heard some reports that those people will be trained to a lower level of skill than the auxiliary coastguards. If he cannot answer that now, it might be helpful if he wrote to the hon. Member for North Cornwall.

Mr. Norris: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. Because of the lack of time available to us this evening, I will write to the hon. Member for North Cornwall to set out the background of the present position.

He is right to focus on the fact that we have changed the nature of the watch service in terms of both rank and responsibilities. It requires us to concentrate the attention of the skilled personnel on what they are essentially paid for, while, for example, administrative work and work that can be undertaken by people who are less well qualified can be happily done in a safe environment. I understand that the chief coastguard remains content with the training level that is to be provided. I have had his personal assurance that he is determined that at no stage should the quality of the service's output be compromised by any lack of training in any part of the service.

It is important that hon. Members from all parties should be given the opportunity to express legitimate concerns about the service—it is right that that should be possible. We have heard from hon. Members from all three principal parties in the House. They are evidence of the fact that the interest here is a non-party political interest in a service of which, I think, we are all extremely proud.

The overwhelming evidence suggests that, although, with the greatest respect, it will always be possible to find one or two members in an organisation of this size who may express dissatisfaction, we have been able to deliver what the chief executive has frequently committed himself to: a more efficient service, able to deliver the better value for money that any Government have a right to demand of any public service, while at the same time ensuring that safety standards are not compromised.

I have discussed with the chief executive the whole issue of search and rescue, auxiliary coastguards and fixed-watch lookouts. I understand that all those issues are of concern to hon. Members, not least my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives, who has been particularly anxious about fixed-watch lookouts in the south-west. I hope that, over time, the efforts that the agency is currently making will assure his constituents that a more than adequate service is being provided.

As I said at the outset, our coastguard service is widely respected in Europe as the best in Europe. It is arguably the best in the world. The service that the agency and its staff provide is first-class. I know that hon. Members in all parties will wish to join me in complimenting them on that service.

Mr. Harris: My hon. Friend mentioned the fixed watch, which is indeed a particular concern of mine. I made my maiden speech on the subject. Now that the coastguard has been withdrawn from fixed watches, will my hon. Friend, and my noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping, examine the possibility of closer co-operation between the voluntary sector—the Sea Safety Group and the National Coastwatch Institution, of which I am a trustee—and Her Majesty's Coastguard?

Mr. Norris: I am happy to give my hon. Friend that assurance, but I hope he will accept that the Coastguard Agency is content that the service that it provides is fully compatible with the needs of seafarers of both kinds, both professional and recreational. My hon. Friend may be assured—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 14 February 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Education (Lancashire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robin Squire.]*

9.34 am

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd (Morecambe and Lunesdale): One thing that all Lancashire Conservative Members and county councillors are determined upon is to do everything in their power to help to raise the educational standard of the children of their constituents and that is why I am so pleased to see many of my colleagues here today. I look forward to contributions, if there is time, by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), and by my hon. Friends the Members for Wyre (Mr. Mans), for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson), for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) and for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans). My hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) is, of course, performing his ministerial duties at the Treasury and is unable to attend. However, he knows my views on education in Lancashire and I know that he accepts the broad thrust of what I am about to say.

I am especially pleased to see my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), who will reply to the debate. He has been immensely helpful both to Lancashire Conservative Members and to Lancashire Conservative county councillors in all our endeavours to press the county to recognise the supreme importance of education. I know that what he says will be read with particular care by all our constituents who have children or grandchildren at school.

Over recent years, successive Conservative Governments have introduced some important policies on education. I mention in particular the introduction of parent governors and teacher governors, the local management of schools initiative, which has enabled schools rather than counties to make many decisions about their future, the national curriculum and the league tables. I am pleased by the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment that she will publish primary school performance tables from next spring. The Government have also given the important freedom to schools to go grant-maintained, about which I shall say a little more later.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): My hon. Friend has mentioned a number of excellent initiatives introduced by the Government. Does he agree that all those initiatives were opposed by the Labour party and, more specifically, by Labour-controlled Lancashire county council, which is depicted as saying no to education at every turn?

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: I agree with my hon. Friend. The other aspect with which I shall deal is that the council says no to funds that the Government have made available to supplement the money that it has to spend on education.

All the changes have given immense opportunities to schools to improve their standards and they have been of immense help. However, there is one point that is often not properly understood by the public. Education policy overall is a matter for the Government, but the amount that is spent by any county council on the schools under its control is a matter entirely for that county council. It is the council's decision; it is not a matter for Government.

The Government, of course, make generous provision to Lancashire county council from central taxation to add to what the council raises from the council tax and the local business rate. However, it is the county's decision whether it spends the extra money provided by the Government on education or on something else.

Mr. Mans: That might be a wrong decision.

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: Yes, indeed.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, despite what he is saying, capping has implications for the county council? It has to work within that level.

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: My real point—the hon. Gentleman will be able to comment on my speech in his contribution—is to ask whether the £26.6 million extra provided by the Government will be spent by the county on education in the coming financial year. Will all that—

Mr. Pike: Yes, it will.

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: It is interesting to hear, that because we have not heard it from the council. Two things cause prime concern to Conservative Members—I have just touched on one. The first is when the county fails to pass on all the increase that the Government have found for education to the most important of its services. The second is when the county fails to manage its bureaucracy properly and, compared with the number of teachers working in schools, keeps too many officials in county hall pushing paper.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that parents in Lancashire, especially of children of nursery age, will be appalled to know that Lancashire county council did not become one of the pilot local education authorities to take advantage of the Government's expansion of nursery education?

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: My hon. Friend has made a valid point. I must add that, in their work, he and Conservative county councillors in Lancashire make it a priority to point out to the county, which as we know is Labour-controlled, precisely what is going on.

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman so soon, and I thank him for giving way. Does he recognise—in relation to the intervention from a sedentary position by the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans)—that spending on

[Mr. Colin Pickthall]

administration in education in Lancashire amounts to 1.6 per cent. of the total education budget, compared with the national average of 2.1 per cent?

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: I will comment later on what the hon. Gentleman has said.

The county's management of its funds for education over the years is a story of gross, in some cases outrageous, financial mismanagement. In 1994-95, it cut the schools budget by £5.1 million. As we know, last year the Government were able to increase their allocation to the county for education by only a modest amount—it was a tight settlement. Notwithstanding that, it was an increase, yet the county cut the schools budget by £19.2 million. It cut savagely what went to schools because it was not prepared to cut its education bureaucracy at county hall. Schools therefore suffered at the expense of officials in administration.

I find that remarkable, especially as, at this time, the Opposition are talking so much about the cost of administration in the national health service. For example, on 1 February at Prime Minister's questions, the Leader of the Opposition challenged the cost of administration in the health service and only yesterday those comments were repeated by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) in the debate on morale in the health service. Of course it should be remembered that she chose the services of a school that had opted out of a Labour council's control and was in a Tory borough outside the Labour-controlled borough where she lived. What are parents in Lancashire to make of it when they see what their Labour council does to them?

One must ask—this is where I come to the intervention of the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) who will perhaps comment on this—why it is that, despite the removal three years ago of colleges of further education from the county's control, the number of staff at county hall, which was already high then, has continued to increase.

Last year, parents and teachers were understandably concerned about the cuts that schools had to make. My hon. Friends, Conservative county councillors and I visited Ministers with responsibility for education, including my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, to make our concerns known. We lobbied hard. We also lobbied Treasury Ministers, because ultimately that is the point at which we must put on pressure.

Last autumn, there was a clear expectation that this year the Government would attach a higher priority to educational assistance to the county than they had been able to do in earlier years, yet, on 28 September, a disgraceful thing happened. Mr. Collier, the then chief education officer, wrote to all head teachers suggesting that the county might have to cut the schools budget by 8 per cent. We did not know what the Government settlement was to be then, but, in September, the county said that it might have to cut the budget by 8 per cent.

Mr. Collier has now retired. He was acting clearly on the political instructions of his Labour masters at county hall. It was an irresponsible thing to do. The letter generated fear, anger and frustration in everyone who read it.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my hon. Friend agree that the political master on whose instructions Mr. Collier acted was the chairman of the local education authority, Labour Councillor Stan Wright, who sits for a ward in Blackpool, who has, during his leadership of education in Lancashire, been guilty of the most appalling irresponsibility, and who has continually tried to scare parents of Lancashire children?

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: Following what my hon. Friend says, I hope that all Lancashire parents will write to county councillor Wright. What was said in September was uncalled for as, in December, the Government announced that they would increase the county's allocation towards education costs by £26.6 million or 5.5 per cent. I hope that all parents will write to him insisting that that increase from the Government goes directly into education.

Mr. Mans: Into schools.

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: Into schools.

Again, reasonable people will be astonished by the county's reaction to the wonderful news of such a substantial increase. So far, its reaction has been this. In early January, it published a discussion paper that outlined possible cuts in primary and secondary school funding of £25.2 million. That was greeted by parents. teachers and Conservative county councillors with outrage and frustration. No doubt because of that clamour, the county recanted just a little. It modified its proposals to say that there might be a cut in education generally of only £6.7 million.

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): Is my hon. Friend aware that many parents in my constituency are extremely worried that, even if the county does not proceed with its initial proposed cuts of 8 per cent. and cuts the budget by only, as he said, £6 million, that will constitute a real threat to some of the most valued parts of school life, such as music and sports provision, books and many extracurricular activities? Would it not be disgraceful if those services were threatened as a direct result of the county council's managerial incompetence?

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: I agree with my hon. Friend. What I and I am sure any parent in Lancashire find perplexing is how any county council could propose cuts of £6.7 million in education when the Government have increased its share by £26.6 million. That is what County Councillor Stan Wright must answer.

I am fortunate in the timing of the debate, because the county must make a final decision about its funding on 22 February next week. I hope that, between now and then, parents, teachers and governors will write in the way I have suggested.

Any parent or teacher who is frustrated by the county's education funding has a method of escape from the problem. It is to persuade other parents in their school to request a ballot so that a vote can be taken on whether the school should become grant-maintained. In that way, they will avoid the enormous burden that schools indirectly bear for under-employed staff at county hall.

It is clear—the figures are available for anyone to see, although they vary from school to school—that a large school may benefit by many thousands of pounds every

year by saving what is withheld by the county for administration by county organisers. Figures show that, in Britain, grant-maintained schools spend on administration only half what the county spends. For many schools, that is therefore the way out of the county's mismanagement of its finances, and I hope that more Lancashire schools will follow that path.

9.48 am

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): I think that Conservative Members pay too little attention to announcements by the county council, because they are too busy filling the soundwaves with their unjustified complaints about the county. Were this not so, they would know that the £26.6 million is all to be spent on schools, as the county council has made clear. I am pleased, however, that the parents, governors and teachers of Lancashire understand the issues far more clearly than Conservative Members do. They know whom to blame.

I was astounded to hear the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir M. Lennox-Boyd) say that the amount of money spent on education is entirely a matter for the county. The fact is that the Government set the parameters within which local authorities have to operate. The hon. Gentleman's astonishing statement suggests that the development of a rich imaginative life, which should form part of any good education, has taken root particularly effectively in his case.

Mr. Mans: Does the hon. Lady agree with her hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) that education should become the responsibility of Blackburn borough council and should be taken away from the county council because it has managed education so incompetently?

Mrs. Wise: My hon. Friend's views on unitary status for Blackburn are well known. They do not relate to any incompetence on the part of the county council. They arise from his view of a desirable structure for local government, and that view is not directed against the county council. Conservative Members should put that point to my hon. Friend, when they have the chance, and he will confirm what I am saying.

As I was saying, parents, teachers and governors clearly understand where the blame lies. I am pleased that they were alerted by the chairman of Lancashire education committee to what might be afoot, because their ensuing campaign has successfully prevented even worse excesses by the Government. It would have been no use waiting until decisions had been made and then complaining about those decisions. Far better to encourage a campaign to improve the quality of the Government's decision-making. The Government certainly need a lot of help in that respect.

My hon. Friends and I receive a steady stream of information and complaints from schools and parents in our constituencies—none of them directed at the county council. No school or parent in my constituency has directed any wrath at the county council. I recently received a typical such letter, which helpfully included the latest inspectors' report. It comes from Savick county primary school, whose head teacher has given me permission to use the information that he sent me, as he says,

"to fight the complacency of the present Administration".

The head teacher says that he is sure that I will wish to celebrate, with him, the many good things that the inspectors found to say about the school. So I do. The school's achievements are legion, and are a great tribute to the staff and pupils. But the report clearly establishes that class sizes are far too great. The report points out that, at the crucial key stage 2, class sizes are enormous, all but one containing more than 35 pupils.

This of course is not the fault of the county council. It is the fault of inadequate funding for education generally. Unlike Ministers and the chief inspector, the inspectors who looked at Savick county primary do regard class sizes as crucial to delivering a good education. They say:

"A combination of a reduction in the school's budget and the need to create a reserve fund has caused an increase in class sizes to over 35 at Key Stage 2. Some teaching areas are overcrowded, which not only affects teaching and learning but also health and safety, particularly in science and physical education."

The inspectors also say that financial control by the school is good; it continually seeks value for money. The recommendations of the most recent auditor's report have been put in place. Routine accounting is good and well maintained. The school, the report says, gives satisfactory value for money—yet the inspectors also say that the objectives of the staff and governors must include

"finding ways of reducing the class sizes".

That is tantamount to saying that teachers should be not just good teachers, but magicians too.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): As the hon. Lady well knows, it is not simply a matter of class sizes—otherwise, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) would not have sent his child past many state schools with smaller class sizes to the Oratory.

Does the hon. Lady agree that one way in which the county might make some savings is to stop campaigning in my constituency against schools that want to adopt grant-maintained status—including Archbishop Temple school, to which many of the parents in her constituency send their children?

Mrs. Wise: It was noticeable that the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale was unable earlier to answer the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) about administration costs in Lancashire. As he pointed out, they are below the national average. Until we hear a soundly based statistical rebuttal of that statement, Conservative Members should be quiet and cease their accusations against the county.

Mr. Nigel Evans: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You heard the question that I put to the hon. Lady. Is she not obliged to answer it?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): That is not a point of order. As the hon. Gentleman knows full well, it is entirely up to the hon. Lady how she chooses to answer.

Mrs. Wise: I have answered the hon. Gentleman in a way I think effective. My constituents will also think it effective. The hon. Gentleman is merely wasting time in this debate. If he has things to say, no doubt he will make a speech of his own.

[Mrs. Wise]

The outstanding feature of the views expressed repeatedly to me by parents, teachers and governors is their condemnation of the lack of Government funding and of the lack of importance attached by the Government to education resources. The Government continually imply that teachers and governors must become magicians. All this is clearly understood in Preston, and is often expressed in correspondence by my constituents. They are not misled by the attempts of Lancashire Conservative Members to divert attention from the gross iniquities perpetrated by this Administration on the county council, which its doing its very best in lamentable circumstances.

It is a gross distortion of the truth to keep repeating that it is entirely up to the county council how much to spend on education. The people of Preston recognise that. I look forward to the day when Savick county primary school and all the other schools in my constituency will be able to respond to an Administration who attach proper priority to resources for education.

9.58 am

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise), who represents a borough that is arguably even more incompetent than the county council.

I am delighted to be associated with the initiative taken by my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir M. Lennox-Boyd). It demonstrates again that on education, as on social services—about which my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) introduced a similar debate—it is Conservative Members of Parliament and county councillors in Lancashire who are really fighting for parents and children in the county.

The Government have in recent years increased the allocation to Lancashire year on year, yet the Labour-controlled county council has cut the schools budget by £5.1 million in 1994-95, by £19.2 million in 1995-96 and have proposed—we have heard nothing to the contrary to date—a £9 million cut in 1996-97. That information comes directly from the Conservative county councillors on Lancashire's education committee.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale said, we pressed my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and other Ministers to ensure that the mean and politically motivated attacks on our children's education were overcome by a further substantial increase this year. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, together with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), and Treasury Ministers recognised the concern of Conservative Members. Eventually, we got a substantial increase of some 5.5 per cent.—almost double the current rate of inflation.

When we pressed our case, the Government listened. That demonstrates the authority with which Lancashire Conservative Members fight the cause of Lancashire parents. It is up to Lancashire county council and its education committee to pass on the increase. We have heard suggestions that it will do so, but it is not the information we have to hand. I would like to know what the county is going to do when it comes to the final decision on 22 February. The signs so far are that it will not. If it is to pass on the increase, it makes it even more reprehensible that Mr. Collier and the controlling group on the education committee have suggested that there will be one. If there is not to be a cut, they have been misleading everyone in the county.

Last year, every Conservative-controlled local education authority in the country met the teachers' pay rise and school budget increases, and some were even able to recruit more teachers. Why cannot Lancashire county council, which has one of the most top-heavy bureaucracies—across its whole administration—in the country, do the same? My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) asked a pertinent question: why does Blackburn, for example, want to remove itself from the control of the county council? Whatever the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) may say in public, we know what he says in private. My hon. Friend hit the nail on the head.

To take one issue, when will the local education authority in Lancashire address the scandal of surplus places in secondary schools, especially in areas such as Skelmersdale and Burnley?

Mr. Greg Pope (Hyndburn): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that Lancashire met the target set for surplus places by the Secretary of State in 1981 and 1987, which are the most recent targets for which figures are available?

Mr. Atkins: I am not going to comment in detail on the case, except to say that I am advised that there are surplus places in certain parts of our county. Our constituents are entitled to ask why the problem of surplus places in Skelmersdale and Burnley, which happen to be controlled by Labour councils or represented by Labour Members, is not being addressed, whereas in parts of the county represented by Conservatives it is. That question needs to be answered.

I congratulate Leyland St. Mary's school in my constituency, which went grant-maintained in January 1994 and has made great strides ever since. In the past, it was a good to average school, but it is now excellent. In the recent Ofsted report, inspectors picked out Leyland St. Mary's as one of the five best schools in the county. Lancashire Members know that Leyland is not the wealthiest part of the county. Inspectors described it as a school

"well above the national average"

and still improving. It was granted technology college status three months ago. I hope next month to open its new all-weather surface, funding for which has been obtained since grant-maintained status was achieved. That is a measure of what grant-maintained status can do for an ordinary school that has become an excellent school in Leyland. That was the parents' choice. I am pleased that they were able to make that choice, which I applaud.

However, in a recent ballot at Lostoch Hall high school in my constituency, there was the most extraordinary interference by the Labour county council and other Labour activists who had nothing to do with the school. It was not in the area that the person involved represented. A number of parents contacted me to complain about the

activities of those Labour representatives. I do not quibble with the result; that is a matter for the parents to decide. That is the key point; the result is immaterial. The Government have given the parents the choice to be able to decide what they want to do about their schools. I hope that their decision not to go grant-maintained was what they really wanted.

I question the local Labour party's involvement, especially in sending leaflets—some without an address on them—which intimidated or misled parents. I and Conservative county and district councillors did not interfere in the process, which is a matter for parents, not politicians. Labour interfered in extremely dubious ways. I find that most reprehensible—especially when the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) was defying Labour policy by exercising her choice to send her son to a grammar school in a Tory borough 13 miles from her home.

The House may be interested to know that that action has been mimicked by Mr. Hindley, the Labour Member of the European Parliament for Lancashire, South, who represents my area and claims, with some justification, to be extremely left wing. Yet he sends his son to Clitheroe grammar school, in a Tory borough—just—a long way from his home.

Mr. Hawkins: The action of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) in sending her child to a grant-maintained grammar school in a Tory borough was applauded by her mother-in-law, who is a constituent of mine and a Labour activist in my constituency.

Mr. Atkins: That confirms that it is not only the hon. Member for Peckham and Mr. Hindley who choose, and I do not decry it, to take the opportunity to send their children to the school, whatever sort it may be, of their choice. However, Labour is trying to prevent parents in my constituency, and in those of my hon. Friends, from doing the same. That is a classic example of "do as I say, not as I do".

All that adds up to rank hypocrisy, allied to rank incompetence. I was interested by the report yesterday of the Secondary Heads Association, which had examined the Labour party's education policy and described it as "simplistic and bland", short of ideas, unlikely to assist in raising school standards, poorly thought out, uncosted and lacking in detail. It questioned the Labour party's assurances that local council powers to interfere in local school management would not be restored. That sums up Labour policy on education and is similar to the history of Labour control of Lancashire's education. It was Conservatives who fought for the review of the area cost adjustment—and got it; pressed for substantial increases in the Government allocation—and got them; pressed, locally and nationally, for improvements in and standards for regular testing, for choice and for more information for parents—and got them all. We continue to press the case for reducing class sizes.

This debate is important because parents, teachers and governors, who, like Conservative Members, really care about children's education, can learn the facts of the policies of both new and old Labour in Lancashire and realise that it is only the Conservative party that has their real interests at heart.

10.8 am

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I am glad to have the opportunity to speak on this important subject, but I regret that Conservative Members have used it as an opportunity not to speak about education in Lancashire positively but to have a go at Lancashire county council.

The right hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) referred to the problem of surplus places in Burnley. The problem is much more complex than he suggested. Another school may need to be built, or additional places may have to be provided, at one end of Burnley where there is excessive demand, while a school at the other end of the town may have to be closed. Along with John Entwistle, a member of the county council, I have tried to draw attention to the issue in the press. He and I want to involve the people of Burnley in dealing with the secondary school problem. No quick decision should be made; we must ensure that whatever decision is made is in the best interests of secondary school children.

The hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir M. Lennox-Boyd) said that county councils had the right to determine priorities in their budgets. That is true in theory, but Conservatives tend to forget that local authorities have been capped for some time. In theory, additional money has been made available for education through standard spending assessments, but the Government grant is not rising proportionately. To meet the capping criteria, Lancashire county council must cut its budget by some £45 million, or 5.1 per cent.

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify something that he said earlier? He is in close contact with Lancashire county council's ruling group. Is the council going to increase its education spending by £26.6 million in the coming year—the amount that the Government have provided?

Mr. Pike: I must emphasise that a standard spending assessment is not money from the Government; it is what the Government say a council can spend. In the current financial year, Lancashire county council is spending 7.5 per cent. above SSA. Yes, the £20-odd million that is being made available is going to schools; but, because the council must cut its overall budget, other education and social services must be cut proportionately more. The council will continue to spend well above its SSA. It already gives priority to schools, and it will pass the money on to them.

Mr. Mans: The hon. Gentleman said that Lancashire county council had problems because it had been capped. Surely it makes no sense for a council that has been capped to decrease the amount of money that is available for schools, as Lancashire did last year. A council with limited resources should make education a priority, rather than spending its money elsewhere.

Mr. Pike: The hon. Gentleman has not been listening. Lancashire is already spending 7.5 per cent. above SSA on education. Anyone who does not recognise that the council already regards education as a priority is not living in the real world.

Mrs. Wise: Does my hon. Friend agree that measures such as the proposed voucher scheme for four-year-olds

[Mrs. Wise]

are detrimental to areas such as Lancashire, where four-year-olds are already at school? Lancashire can only lose. Is that not an example of the inadequacy and stupidity of the Government's approach?

Mr. Pike: That is a valid point. Until nursery education is provided as of right for all who want it, and is included in the grant formula, counties such as Lancashire will be penalised even more by the move to the voucher system. Tory and Liberal members of Lancashire county council understand the problems better than Conservative Members of Parliament: they have lobbied the Government for more money.

Under the area cost adjustment, every primary school pupil in Essex receives an extra £147 this year. Secondary school pupils aged between 11 and 15 receive an extra £197, and those aged between 16 and 18 an extra £235. The arrangements should be reviewed.

Mr. Nigel Evans: I shall give this question another go, because I know that the hon. Gentleman is more up to speed than his hon. Friends. Does he agree that Lancashire county council could save money if it dropped its campaigns against schools that wish to become grant-maintained—such as Clitheroe Royal grammar school, where the Labour MEP Michael Hindley sends his daughter and where, no doubt, some of the hon. Gentleman's constituents send their children?

Mr. Pike: I totally disagree with what the hon. Gentleman has said. Like anyone else, including me, the council has the right to campaign against grant-maintained status. We have an absolute right to ensure that parents are in possession of all the facts before they vote. By law, every governing body must decide each year whether to ballot on grant-maintained status. Most have not done so, because they know that Lancashire has a first-class education record, and they want to remain part of mainstream education.

Mr. Pope: Conservative Members say that there has been an abuse of taxpayers' money. Will my hon. Friend join me in condemning the disgraceful way in which the Government have spent millions of pounds on the Grant Maintained Schools Trust and the Grant Maintained Schools Foundation? Millions of pounds of taxpayers' money have been spent on bribing schools to opt out.

Mr. Pike: I do condemn that, as I condemn the way in which the Government have spent millions of pounds on advertising their policy on issues such as privatisation over the past few years.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pike: As the hon. Member will not be a Lancashire Member for long—he is in danger of losing his seat—I will give way to him.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the hon. Gentleman remind his hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) that the Government have an electoral mandate? We won the election. Lancashire county council, however, is wasting taxpayers' money on improper campaigns.

Mr. Pike: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. Does he believe in local government or not? Education is a local government responsibility. In 1981, Labour won control of Lancashire county council, and—with or without an overall majority—it has been in control ever since. Having fought elections on the basis of certain policies, it has the right to implement them.

Conservatives often misleadingly say that Lancashire wastes money on administration. According to my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall), the figure is below the national average. In any event, such matters as student grants—on which Lancashire has an excellent administration record—are part of the education budget, and must be provided for.

The capital allocations have implications for education. The annual capital guideline for 1996-97 is £8.166 million, but the bid was for £37.227 million. The amount provided for improvement and replacement work within that sum is only £265,000. Indeed, in total, the bid is less than that for the committed county council programme for the forthcoming year.

We have many old schools that need to be rebuilt or improved if we are to provide education in the most suitable schools. In many schools, work needs to be done on the smaller programmes. In the forthcoming year, £265,000 is available to spend on 771 schools. What nonsense. Rosehill junior school is desperate to have toilets that are fit for 1996. The county has made that work a top priority. It recognises that the work needs to be done and it carried out some urgent work just over a year ago, but it cannot fund the main programme because it does not have the money.

The simple reality is that the education of our children in Lancashire is handicapped because we have a Tory Government. The quicker they go—just like the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins), who is looking for a seat—and we get a Labour Government, the quicker we can get on with providing a proper education for all our children in Lancashire.

10.20 am

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to say a few words about Lancashire and education.

Lancashire county council—particularly the education authority—likes to say no to education. It said no to local management of schools. When it was forced to do it, it delegated to schools the minimum amount that it could get away with. Even now, some years on, when many Labour activists and, indeed, the Labour leadership in London, understand how useful local management of schools has been, the county still delegates less to schools than virtually any other large shire county. That was the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd) made about costs outside schools and about bureaucracy.

Lancashire county council keeps back from schools nearly 15 per cent. of the general schools budget for costs outside schools. If they were among the best rather than the worst in the land, each school in Lancashire would have, on average, another 7 per cent. to spend on teaching, books and other things that help education, and Lancashire county council would have 7 per cent. less to spend on facilities outside schools and central bureaucracy.

Recently, the county showed where its priorities lie. As has been mentioned, the county council recently appointed a new chief education officer. It had an ideal opportunity to look again at the chief education officer's responsibilities, bearing in mind the fact that, since the last one was appointed, a number of schools in Lancashire have become grant-maintained—

Mr. Pope: An avalanche.

Mr. Mans: The hon. Gentleman talks about an avalanche, and that is precisely what will happen to Lancashire county council when Blackburn and Blackpool become unitary authorities, because then the responsibility and the scope of the education authority in Lancashire will be reduced considerably.

One might have thought that this would be an opportunity, perhaps, to dispense with the services of a chief education officer and simply promote one of his deputies, thus saving about £100,000 in administrative costs. But, no, the county council never even looked at his job specification; it simply appointed a successor, who may or may not be a very good man—I do not know—without considering his responsibilities or the scope of his task. That clearly shows Lancashire county council's priorities—not books and teaching, but looking after the fat cats at county hall in Preston.

It does not end there, because the county council said no not only to LMS but to teacher assessments and the testing of pupils. It is bitterly ironic that, having said no to the testing of pupils, the Labour party is trying to use the results of those tests—tests that it did not want in the first place—to criticise the Government. The Labour party should criticise its own education authorities for not teaching children better in the counties that it controls, such as Lancashire. We know why the Labour party did not want the tests—because the results in Lancashire could have been much better, and would have been had county hall practised Conservative policies.

Mrs. Wise: Does the hon. Gentleman understand that it is not the education authority that teaches the children but teachers, and that the burdens that his Government have placed on teachers have led to intolerable stresses, greatly increased sickness rates and the need to take early retirement on health grounds? Does he agree that the priority should be to enable teachers to remain in post so that they can do their job, which they do so admirably in the vast majority of cases?

Mr. Mans: That was an interesting intervention; the hon. Lady should address her remarks to Lancashire county council, which should put teachers before bureaucrats and ensure that teachers get the support that they deserve. Her comment about sickness is also interesting, because, as she knows, the record of absenteeism in Lancashire county council is disgraceful. Lancashire county council has more people absent for one reason or another than the vast majority of local authorities, which says much about its leadership and how it cannot persuade people to work for it.

Mr. Nigel Evans: I should also like to say something about the hon. Lady's intervention. She knows a lot about early retirement, because her daughter was forced to take early retirement as leader of Preston council because people in Preston and Lancashire are sick and tired of political posturing. They were extremely angry at the way in which Lancashire county council and Andrew Collier wrote to all the schools and scared all the parents, frightening them with an 8 per cent. budget reduction when they did not have any of the facts or statistics. The fact is that the Government were committed to funding education in Lancashire and in the rest of the country and to putting education first, and that is precisely what they did.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. In short debates, long interventions do not assist.

Mr. Mans: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making a point that I would have made a little later in my speech, but, of course, I shall not now do so, to ensure that a few more hon. Members are able to contribute.

Lancashire county council said no not only to testing but to grant-maintained status. That is hypocrisy of the worst order. We are told by the Labour leadership that it believes in stakeholding. What better example of stakeholding is there than to give parents, teachers and governors a stake in their school? That is what Conservatives mean by stakeholding. What the Labour party means, judging by its opposition to grant-maintained schools, is that it wants the bureaucrat miles away to have a stake in that primary, secondary or other school.

That cannot be right, and many Opposition Members understand that by their actions, because, as has been mentioned, Labour activists and Labour leaders throughout the country are voting with their feet and sending their children to Tory-controlled boroughs to grant-maintained schools. Even worse in terms of the doctrinaire policies of some Opposition Members is that some children were sent to selective grammar schools.

It is clear that the Labour's attitude to education has not changed one bit in 20 years. Opposition Members want to climb the ladder of opportunity and pull it up after them to ensure that no one else has the chance to take the opportunities that they had. That is precisely what the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) and the Leader of the Opposition have done. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Godsiff) went one stage further, because he made the interesting comment that people on MPs' salaries could afford to send their children to private schools. The hon. Gentleman exercised the option to do precisely that. Perhaps a few more Opposition Members would like to follow his example and provide more opportunities for people who do not have the chance to send their children to schools in their own areas.

The policy in Lancashire is clearly to get rid of selection, to get rid of the good schools, particularly in Lancaster, that have always had selection. That must be wrong. Parents must be given choice and the opportunity to send their children to the schools that they think are best for them. The county council wishes to deny that opportunity to parents and to create conformity and an image of levelling down rather than levelling up. That is what comprehensives are all about; we can see the effect across the county, because the results in comprehensives are not as good as they are in many other schools.

I shall now deal with the way in which Lancashire county council manages its budget. Last year, it cut the schools budget by 5.5 per cent., but, as far as I can ascertain, it did not cut the central administration for

[Mr. Mans]

schools at all. It increased the amount of money for social services. That is fine, but the money was not spent on helping the elderly. I do not know where it was spent, but I know that, at the end of January, the social services budget had a surplus of £3 million. The county council should spend that money now on helping people who need domiciliary care but have had it taken away from them, or it should be transferred back to the education budget so that it can be spent on books and teaching rather than sitting in county hall, which is where it is at present.

The record of the county council over the past decade shows that it has consistently put bureaucracy before books and administration before teaching. It is time that it stopped saying no to the education of our county's children and started saying yes.

10.33 am

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): I was somewhat puzzled, at the start of the debate, about its central matter, but it soon became obvious when the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir M. Lennox-Boyd) described what he said was a method of escape for people in the county—grant-maintained schools. Perhaps it is no wonder that he wants to wrap the debate around that assertion—I understand that there are no grant-maintained schools in his constituency. I take it from that that, despite his vigorous efforts, the people in the area are satisfied with the education service that is being provided by the county.

Since 1989, only eight secondary schools and six primary schools have voted to become grant maintained. As schools have periodically to take a positive decision on the issue, that means that 591 primaries and 98 secondaries have made a positive choice to remain within the Lancashire system.

Mr. Mans: The hon. Gentleman has said that schools have to make a positive choice to go grant-maintained. That is different from the situation 10 or 15 years ago, when grammar and other schools had no choice about whether to go comprehensive.

Mr. Pickthall: I am speaking about the system that appertains today and the system that Conservative Members try to advocate, which is at the centre of what they are about. They are desperate to get schools in their areas to go grant-maintained. However, schools do not want to do that and Conservative Members wrap a debate around the issue, using as many insults and myths as they can find. For example, the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) called the chairman of education in Lancashire, who is the mildest and gentlest of men, a political monster. I have seen letters from the right hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) in which he tells schools in his area that the county will not put the money from the last Budget into schools. The same hon. Member and his colleagues, however, tell us all the time that the county is trying to frighten the electorate.

The hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) said that Lancashire likes to say no to education. That is a preposterous and silly remark. He described many of the legislative measures in education that Lancashire people and Lancashire county council have opposed. However much we disagree with legislation, the key question is whether, when it has been passed, we in Lancashire put it into practice in the best possible manner. The answer to that is yes, as the record clearly shows. The hon. Member for Wyre said that Lancashire wants to get rid of good schools. That is absolute nonsense. What does it mean? Does it mean that they should be closed and thrown into the sea? That is plainly absurd.

The debate hovers around a self-seeking agenda that has been set by Conservative Members who pretend that they are concerned about the generality of education in Lancashire. They elide education funding and schools and use the two interchangeably. I remind them that education in Lancashire covers a heck of a lot more than schools, although schools form the central and most important part of it.

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: The hon. Gentleman says that Conservative Members are self-seeking. In January, a discussion paper, not a decision, was issued by county hall for consideration by county councillors. It dealt with cuts in primary and secondary school funding of £25 million. I appreciate that we must draw a distinction between specific cuts and cuts in education generally. The figure was later changed to cuts of only £6.7 million. How does the hon. Gentleman explain those figures against the background of the Government increasing funding by £26.6 million?

Mr. Pickthall: They are explained against the foreground of the Government's Budget. The county council estimated what it would get from the Budget and it made its expectations public. Although I would quarrel with the nature of the extra money that was targeted at schools in the Budget, Lancashire decided to put that money into schools, and 5.1 per cent. extra will go to schools to account for the extra money. That extra money did not take account of the fact that, next year, a large number of extra pupils will come on stream in Lancashire or that a large extra amount will be spent on special educational needs next year. It did not take account either of next year's pay rise for teachers, which is likely to be higher than the rate of inflation. All those matters have to be taken into account when considering the money that Conservative Members perceive as extra, as a bonus. It is nothing of the kind.

As I have said, Lancashire is putting 5.1 per cent. extra into the schools budget—not into education in general. To be able to do that, it has to make cuts of 6.4 per cent. in spending on the rest of its services. They include not just highways and social services but the rest of the education service, the youth service and discretionary awards. They will have to be cut to pay for the extra spending on schools. That is an agonising decision for the county, and it has had to make such decisions for 10 or 12 years.

I do not have much time left, but I want to mention one or two other matters. Conservative Members consistently argue that Lancashire spends a vast amount on its central administration, but that is just not true. They say it over and over again, as if doing so might make it true. I repeat that Lancashire spends 1.6 per cent. of its education budget on central administration. Not only is that a lower proportion than all other local authorities in the country bar nine: it is lower than most private enterprise firms spend on central administration. Lancashire is an extremely efficient outfit.

My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) mentioned the area cost adjustment and the difference that it makes. The adjustment means that a secondary pupil in Essex—a similar county, according to the Shaw criteria—is deemed to be worth £235 a year more than a pupil in Lancashire. All the Lancashire Tory Members in the Chamber today have voted year after year to maintain an area cost adjustment and a funding system for nursery education that disadvantage Lancashire, and they have the cheek to come here today to argue that the county council is doing a bad job. There is an awful lot more that could be said, but my time has run out. I find the origin of the debate offensive and its execution futile and silly.

10.41 am

Mr. Greg Pope (Hyndburn): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir M. Lennox-Boyd) on his good fortune in securing this important, if brief, debate on education in Lancashire. I declare an interest—I am the parent of three children, all of whom are receiving state comprehensive education of high quality in Lancashire schools.

The hon. Member sought to paint a picture of failing education in the county, but that view is obviously not shared by teachers, governors or parents in his constituency, where not one school has chosen to opt out. Indeed, at Morecambe high school—the one school where a ballot has taken place—parents voted against opting out.

On the subject of opting out, the House will be aware that the Funding Agency for Schools for England takes over the functions of the local education authority when 75 per cent. of pupils in any sector attend grant-maintained schools. At the current rate of opting out in Lancashire primary schools, that will happen in 2704. That is hardly a real date—it is more of a captain's log star date. It will happen only when we are run by planet Portillo.

The House has seen this morning a grotesque collection of selected half-truths and truths from Tory Members who have sought to distort the real picture of what is happening to education in Lancashire. The truth is that Lancashire has much to be proud of in its education service, despite the damaging funding regime imposed by the Government and supported by Tory Members.

As my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) said, Lancashire has suffered particularly because of the area cost adjustment. If we look at authorities of a similar size, we discover that Hampshire, for example, receives £137 per secondary-aged pupil more than Lancashire, that Kent receives £162 and that Essex receives a staggering £197.

Mr. Atkins: May I ask the hon. Gentleman as a Front-Bench spokesman, rather than as a Lancashire Member, whether he would tell his colleagues in Labour-held seats and Labour-controlled councils in the south that they must do without the money that the area cost adjustment gives them in order to benefit Lancashire? I would be delighted, as would my constituents, if that were the case.

Mr. Pope: The Government—supported by the right hon. Gentleman—have cut funding year after year, and Opposition Members will take no lectures from them on education funding. Despite the effects of the area cost adjustment, Lancashire is spending 7.5 per cent. more than its education SSA. In the financial year 1996-97, Lancashire is likely to spend 5.1 per cent. more on its schools budget, despite having to bear cuts of £6.4 million in other areas of the education service.

Year-on-year Government cuts in section 11 funding have led to a loss of income of £1.65 million to Lancashire county council, yet the Minister of State, Home Office said that the Home Office used Lancashire's work with under-achieving ethnic minority pupils as a model of good practice. We should consider the voluntary-aided sector, as Lancashire has more aided schools than any other LEA in the country. The Roman Catholic Bishop of Lancaster said that his diocese had been

"extremely well served by the Lancashire Education Authority."

Across the range, Lancashire pupils are doing well. Lancashire's 1995 GCSE results compare favourably with those in other LEAs in the same Shaw group. Between 1988 and 1993, the number of pupils getting five or more A to C grades increased by 37 per cent. nationally. In Lancashire, the increase was 51 per cent. A-level performance in Lancashire schools has also been good for a number of years. In 1993, the number of students in Lancashire schools entered for two or more A-levels placed Lancashire fourth in the entire country. I would be the first to accept that that is based on a small sample, because most Lancashire pupils receive their post-16 education in further education colleges.

While mentioning FE colleges, perhaps I might say in passing what a disgrace it is that, at colleges such as Accrington and Rossendale in my constituency, lecturers are being made redundant and class sizes forced up as a direct consequence of the actions of the Government and the Further Education Funding Council.

Lancashire has a good record on special educational needs and is committed to a policy of integrating children with special needs into mainstream schools. There are now more pupils with statements in mainstream schools than there are in special schools in the county. For the past two years, more than 70 per cent. of the statements that have been issued were for children in mainstream schools.

Lancashire is a nationally outstanding authority in terms of the range of provision available for children with special needs. The county provides more than 50 special schools, special facilities in mainstream schools for hearing impairment and language difficulties and specialist teams of teachers for children with complex learning, reading and language, and behavioural difficulties. Perhaps best of all, a new centre for pupils with autism was opened this year. In addition, Lancashire provides specialist inspectors, advisers and psychologists.

In early-years education, Lancashire again leads the way, spending well above the under-fives element of its SSA and providing every Lancashire child with a school place at the start of the school year after their fourth birthday. That means that many Lancashire children—such as my four-year-old son—receive a school place a full year before the law requires. In addition, there are part-time nursery places for about half of all three-year-olds in the county.

Lancashire has been keen to expand the number of nursery places it can offer, but has been prevented from doing so by the low level of capital allocation from the

[Mr. Pope]

Government. Indeed, the present Secretary of State—like previous Secretaries of State—has turned down specific requests from the county council for extra nursery classes for aided schools in rural areas. Lancashire has a proven track record of being a high-quality, high-level provider—precisely the kind of authority that will be damaged by the Government's half-baked plans for nursery vouchers.

We have heard much from Tory Members this morning about the perceived failings of the Lancashire education service, so let me put this point directly to the Minister. In the last year for which comparable figures are available, Lancashire students received more new mandatory awards than did those in any other LEA in the country. Furthermore, the total number of mandatory awards was the highest in the country in both 1993-94 and in 1994-95. If Lancashire is the failure that Conservative Members have tried to suggest, why does it have the highest number of pupils of any LEA going on to higher education? Is that not a clear indicator of the success of Lancashire schools and colleges?

Efficiency has been mentioned by several hon. Members. The facts are these: on surplus places, Lancashire has met in full and exceeded the targets set by the Secretary of State; on central administration, Lancashire spends only 1.6 per cent. of its education budget compared with a counties' average of 2.1 per cent; on efficiency in administering student awards, the district auditor found, in a national review, that Lancashire had the second highest number administered per employee and the second lowest staff costs per award processed. If Lancashire is as inefficient as the Conservative party claims, why is it that, since 1989, only eight secondary schools and six primary schools have voted to become grant maintained, while over the same period 591 primary schools and 98 secondary schools have chosen to remain in partnership with the local education authority?

The fact is that the gap between the parties on education, both in Lancashire and throughout the country, could not be clearer. The Tories want a divisive, two-tier education system. Their hidden agenda is a return to selection—a system that wrote off three quarters of our children as academic failures at the age of 11, often with disastrous consequences for the children themselves and for the long-term interests of our economy and society.

Labour in Lancashire, like Labour in the House, is about driving up standards for all our pupils, not just the privileged few. We look forward to the day—in the near future—when Lancashire children will get the support they deserve and need and which they can get only from a Labour Government.

10.50 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) on his first speech from the Opposition Front Bench. He will be reassured to know that I agree with little of what he said.

I want to respond to the point about capital spend immediately, in case I am unable to do so later in the short time available to me. In the last three years alone, the Government have made available some £2 billion for county and voluntary-controlled schools capital spend, and the increase for the forthcoming year will be some 7 per cent. Conservative Members recognise that, against the tight financial position that we are still in, that is an excellent settlement that will allow opportunities for all local education authorities to carry out the necessary maintenance and improvements in their schools.

Mr. Hawkins: Is my hon. Friend aware that I received a letter this week from the secretary of the Blackpool association of the National Union of Teachers? I shall ignore the bad spelling and typographical errors. It says that I will be pleased to hear that school budgets are to increase by 5.1 per cent. and, referring to the average for English county councils, that that makes Lancashire's 5.5 per cent. "seem a real bonus".

Mr. Squire: I intended to deal with revenue budgets in a moment. My hon. Friend has provided us with a useful hors d'oeuvre.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir M. Lennox-Boyd) on initiating this debate. He has done a service to his constituents and to everyone living in Lancashire by drawing the attention of the House to his concerns about education in the county. He was eloquently backed by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) and, by their presence and occasional interjections, by my hon. Friends the Members for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson), for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) and for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans). My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, the hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), has also indicated his support.

If I dare say so, we witnessed a St. Valentine's day massacre of the Opposition.

Mr. Elletson: Has my hon. Friend noticed several prominent absences during the debate, in particular that of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw)? Obviously he is absent because he is embarrassed by the record of Lancashire county council. Other prominent absences include Liberal Democrat Members, who consistently claim that they say yes to education, but not one of them has bothered to turn up today. Does not that say a great deal about the Liberal Democrats' real attitude to education in Lancashire?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. By their refusal to join in our discussions on Lancashire, Liberal Democrat Members show the priority that they give to that county.

All my hon. Friends emphasised the importance of raising standards and of making the best use of the considerable resources that the Government have made, and are making, available to schools in Lancashire, as elsewhere, to support that end. Government policy is pushing forward all the time across a wide front, with policies designed to raise achievement and to encourage choice and diversity. I shall touch on just some of those.

To begin with, and as the hon. Member for Hyndburn knows, we are currently discussing in Committee the Nursery and Grant-Maintained Schools Bill, which will tackle excellence and opportunity of choice for the

pre-fives in a way that will lead to a big expansion in provision and obviously contribute to quality of education for those children, especially later in their school lives.

My hon. Friends sought, understandably, a guarantee that the money made available for education in Lancashire would find its way into schools. I know that all my hon. Friends accept that, in practice, it is for Lancashire county council to set its own budget and to decide its priorities within and between services. The council has the last word on how much is spent on education and how much is spent on other services.

Hon. Members should be aware that I have received many letters saying that, this year, Lancashire has been forced to cut school budgets by more than 5 per cent. That is simply not true. The fact is that Lancashire has been able to increase its budget for all services by some £4 million and can spend £888 million on all services. That is a very large sum and it is for the county council to decide how much of it should be given to schools.

I hope that there will not be a repeat performance of so-called cuts—which are not actual cuts, but are based on a wish list drawn up by a local authority, including full allowance for all movement in cash and volume changes. It is then suggested that cuts on that final figure represent a reduction in support. I hope that that will not be repeated in the current year. As my hon. Friends made crystal clear, the Lancashire LEA had an increase in its spending assessment of more than £26 million, or 5.5 per cent. I have to tell the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) that that is real money. He implied that it was fictional money, but he should have a word with my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is very clear that it is real money.

I repeat what my right hon. and hon. Friends have said on other occasions. We are unclear from today's debate whether Lancashire is committed to feeding all the increase into schools, so it must be made crystal clear to all parents and teachers in the authority that if that does not happen, it is the responsibility of the county council and no one else.

The hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) referred to concern about class sizes in Lancashire schools. Despite the horror stories that occasionally appear, the latest available data show that average class sizes in Lancashire are 28 for primary schools and 22 for secondary schools. If there are class sizes of 35 plus, it is for the county council in the first place, and those managing school budgets in the second, to explain to parents why they are so far above Lancashire's average.

My hon. Friends made several references to the quality of grant-maintained schools. I join them in urging parents in Lancashire to think carefully about the benefits that GM status can bring. As we have heard this morning, Lancashire has a tiny number of GM schools—13, representing only 1 per cent. of its primaries and 8 per cent. of its secondaries. Nationally, one in five secondary pupils is now in a GM school.

A glance at the school performance tables or Ofsted's list of recently published oscars shows just how well GM schools are performing—they comprise 40 per cent. of outstanding secondary schools: 29 per cent. of improving schools, against a national average of 18 per cent; and 6 per cent. of excellent primaries, against only 1 per cent. nationally. Going GM sets schools free to make their own choices and develop their own characters. We see evidence all around us of just how much that can do for a school. It releases the energies and talents of staff, and it is the key to raising the attainment of their pupils.

In Lancashire, only 5 per cent. of schools have even held a ballot on going GM, which is half the rate in the country as a whole. Governors are not offering parents the chance to choose; but parents need not wait for governors. They can ask for a ballot themselves, and I urge them to do so.

In relation to the much-reported activities of Labour councillors and Labour Members of Parliament in Lancashire and elsewhere who have been campaigning ferociously against schools being given the freedom to run themselves, while their colleagues are sending their children to GM schools, I can only say that it is not only a desperate and disgraceful situation—it is hypocritical in the extreme. One does not drive up standards in our poorest schools by abolishing some of our best schools. The Labour party needs to learn that lesson.

This debate has been wide ranging and interesting, and I am grateful to my hon. Friends for raising so many important issues. They have clearly ensured that the Lancashire LEA is charged with the responsibility.

Air Crash (Coventry)

11 am

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): I should like to express my thanks to Madam Speaker, on behalf of the residents not only of Coventry but of Warwickshire, for this debate. I thank the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House for their support in arranging the debate. I also thank my colleagues from Warwickshire and Coventry and from Bedworth, and my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner).

I particularly thank the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) as over the past couple of years, even before the crash, he and I have tried to introduce legislation in the form of regulations to deal with small airports. I am appreciate all my colleagues' assistance. So far as possible, we have sought to take a bipartisan approach to the air crash as we see no need for it to become a party political issue, although it is certainly a political issue with a small "p".

The crash caused tremendous grief to the residents of the Willenhall area and, indeed, to the citizens of Coventry and of Warwickshire. It was a traumatic experience for them. Anyone who visited the scene of the crash on that day, as I did, could not help but be astounded—it was a miracle—that the aircraft did not land on the houses. I understand from the report that the aircraft clipped the roof of one house and came down about 100 yards away. Had it come down on the houses, it would have been a great catastrophe and no doubt the Government would have rushed legislation through the House to deal with it.

I see the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), on the Government Front Bench. As he knows, there have been a number of meetings. However, my colleagues and I would like to know when the Government will find the time to introduce regulations, based on their own proposals, so that we can debate and amend them and pass them through the House. It is vital that he answers that question today. My colleagues and I cannot keep on going back to residents—I have been to three public meetings—and telling them that it is a matter of finding parliamentary time. The Minister must come clean and tell us whether it is really just a question of parliamentary time or whether the Government do not have the will to regulate on the basis of their own report.

We must discuss the Coventry air crash of December 1994 and the report into that tragedy that was published on 10 January this year. In this debate, I wish to accomplish three main aims. First, as the title of this debate suggests, I intend briefly to discuss the events of 21 December 1994—the crash that left five people dead. That was, in itself, a tragedy. Secondly, I shall highlight the air accident investigation branch's report into the crash, and the implications of that report for future action. Finally, I shall raise the important issue of airport safety—an issue that I have been raising for two years, and the reason for this Adjournment debate—and discuss the impact of the crash and the subsequent report. It would be a mistake not to highlight the issue of air safety.

The crash in Willenhall, Coventry occurred at 9.52 am on 21 December 1994 and left three crew members and two handlers dead and a community in shock. The aircraft involved was a Boeing 737, owned and operated by Air Algerie and leased by Phoenix Aviation to conduct a series of live animal export flights from the United Kingdom to airports in France and the Netherlands. I should add that, as a result of those flights, a young lady from my constituency, Jill Phipps, was killed when standing up for what she believed was right. We should not forget her; she was another casualty.

I shall discuss the reasons for the crash later in my speech when I discuss the report, but it is important to stress that the disaster could easily have been a catastrophe. I do not wish to diminish the seriousness of the events that occurred, but if the aircraft had been just a few feet lower it would have landed on a densely populated housing estate in Willenhall, causing severe loss of life. Nevertheless, the crash was a dramatic episode in my constituency, which had a profound effect on residents not only in Willenhall but also in Baginton and throughout Coventry.

Anyone who visited the crash scene that day or shortly afterwards would have been moved by the residents' reaction and awestricken by the response of the emergency services, whose reaction and work throughout the disaster deserves the highest commendation: neither I nor the residents could find fault with their efforts, and I am sure that all hon. Members present in the Chamber will concur with that sentiment.

The huge emotional impact made by the crash on the residents of Willenhall has not subsided with time. I recently attended a residents' meeting to debate the crash and the report with residents and local councillors. Throughout that well attended meeting, a depth of feeling was demonstrated which made it obvious to me that the crash has been very much in the minds of the people of Willenhall.

The implications of the report were debated at the meeting. The report was conducted by the AAIB in accordance with the 1989 civil aviation regulations, submitted to the Secretary of State for Transport on 7 December 1995, and made public on 10 January 1996. It reached a number of conclusions and made several important recommendations, ranging from the reasons for the crash to suggestions for future action. It is constructive to highlight the key recommendation, as that will contribute to the debate.

The report's first conclusion was that the flight crew allowed the plane to descend lower than is recommended in the guidelines on approach to Coventry airport. Furthermore, the members of the crew were over-tired, because they had been on duty for too many hours. There was a lack of communication between the pilots, and their comprehension of English was limited. To compound the problem, some of the aircraft's navigational equipment was not compatible with devices in the control tower, and the crew would have seen an electric pylon too late to avoid it.

The plane's commander had received an inadequate weather warning and tried to land in foggy conditions. Air traffic control in Coventry had failed to give details of weather conditions and advice on landing visibility. Finally, the radar systems at Coventry airport could not determine the actual height of the plane. Ground staff could not have been aware that the aircraft had gone lower than recommended by guidelines and could not warn the crew and thus prevent the accident. That was coupled with the fact that a newly qualified weather watcher was on

duty in the air traffic services unit at the airport without adequate supervision. The lack of accurate information contributed to the crash.

Those are clearly important conclusions, and I urge the Minister to take note of them and to take some action. The people of Willenhall have been profoundly affected by the crash, and it is vital that the Minister should implement the recommendations if he is to restore public confidence. It is essential that the citizens of Coventry are assured, now that the report has been published, that it will be acted upon. To disregard it would not only limit future improvements in airport safety but deal a substantial blow to the confidence of the people who live near the airport at which the tragedy occurred. I acknowledge that, on publication of the report, the Minister announced in a press release that the issuing of permits to foreign aircraft was to be tightened. I await implementation of that announcement, but I must make it clear that that in itself does not go far enough.

Finally, I stress the need for the regulation of airport safety. Quite apart from the 1994 crash, this has been a theme that I and my colleagues have pursued consistently for the past two years, during which I have tabled a number of questions about problems at Coventry airport and had a number of meetings with various Ministers. I hope to meet the Minister for Aviation and Shipping with my colleagues next month when we have sorted out a date.

In March 1995, I travelled to Brussels to meet the European Transport Commissioner, Neil Kinnock, who said that regulation of small airports was needed and that he would be very interested in the results of the report. I have sent him a copy and await his comments.

In July last year, the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth and I led a delegation of Coventry Members of Parliament to meet the Minister for Aviation and Shipping to raise the concerns of residents of the city of Coventry. One important issue raised at that meeting was the Government's own 1993 proposals for the regulation of small airports. The Minister assured us that he was very much in favour of his own proposals, which I shall outline, but said that he was not responsible for their introduction. Like other Ministers, he claimed that there was insufficient parliamentary time available to discuss them. Now that the report on the crash, which contains clear recommendations, has been published, there can be little excuse for not making the time to discuss such an important issue.

The proposals are that the Department should commission and consult on guidance to create a national network to assist the preparation of noise amelioration schemes; that the Department should encourage aerodromes to review existing noise amelioration measures and their enforcement and arrangements for local accountability; and that the Department should open discussions with the British Airports Authority and local consultative committees about making Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports more responsible and locally accountable for their noise control measures. Why cannot we do the same for airports such as that at Bagington just outside Coventry?

Other sections of the proposals include new enabling powers for aerodromes to establish and enforce noise control arrangements, including ground noise. Designated aerodromes should prepare noise amelioration schemes, consult locally and agree with the lead local authority what is to be established. Where disputes arise, the Secretary of State would have the power to settle them.

Those are important proposals and, although far from exhaustive, could make a real difference to people living near small airports such as that at Coventry. I urge the Government to find time to debate them and, if the House so wishes, to implement them.

I hope that I have shown that the crash and the report resulting from the tragedy should prompt the Government to implement not only the report's recommendations but the proposals for the regulation of small airports produced by the Government themselves in 1993.

11.12 am

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) should be congratulated on raising such an important matter. As he said, many of us—notably, he, my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), in whose constituency the airport is situated, and I—have become increasingly concerned, but have not had a very satisfactory response from the authorities.

The worrying aspect of the situation that the hon. Gentleman described is illustrated by the deficiencies of the doomed aircraft and its control. As I understand it, some essential safety elements were lacking.

I have known Coventry airport since I have represented Warwick and Leamington. Indeed, it was in my constituency until the boundary commissioners decreed some years ago that it should be located in the patch represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth. To use a sporting analogy, the airport resembles a third division or non league football ground suddenly taken over by Manchester United and run with all the corresponding panoply.

Coventry airport is small, but it is nevertheless among the top three or four in terms of the movement of freight. That may seem unbelievable, but freight movement is constant, and it is likely to increase. The Coventry *Evening Telegraph* of 16 January said:

"Freight business that would increase the number of bigger planes using Coventry Airport is being sought in an attempt to turn losses into profit.

AM & I, the private firm now running the city council-owned airport want to maximise the volume of cargo dealt with in each flight at Bagington.

It would mean fewer small aircraft and an increase in large jets, including Airbuses and Boeing 737 and 727 aircraft. There is unlikely to be any significant overall increase in the number of planes landing and taking off."

I beg to doubt whether all that is true and, in any event, the question of noise must also be considered.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East will agree that the salient point is that the airport was not built for such operations. Clearly, safety is critical at any airport. I live near Coventry airport, as does my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth, and I see the planes flying in fairly low. I remember that at the time of the accident, which the hon. Gentleman described so graphically, people were already complaining about the noise and saying that there was an accident waiting to happen. When it did happen, it caused

[Sir Dudley Smith]

pandemonium in Warwick district council offices—I was there at a meeting. People there said that they had always felt that something of the kind could occur.

The noise generated, especially at night, causes distress and irritation to my constituents in the Leamington Spa area and the surrounding villages. In terms of air travel, a distance of 30 or 40 miles is nothing and is accomplished in a few minutes, but the effects are widespread on the ground. Last year we had a very good summer and noise carried even further than usual. People were unable to have their windows open during the hottest period. I, too, noticed the effects, but this is not a special plea. I do not live on one of the main arrival or departure paths, but I see and hear the planes and I am all too well aware of the extent to which my constituents are troubled by it.

The onus lies firmly on the council. I approach the matter in a non-political way, and my approach would be the same even if the council were not of a different political complexion from my own. The council says that it needs to consider the generation of jobs and income for the people of Coventry. That is a laudable aim, but we also have to consider the environmental needs and safety of individuals who live in the area. In the three constituencies alone that I have mentioned—those of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East, my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth and myself—so many people are affected by noise from the airport that environmental and safety considerations overpower arguments about jobs and expansion.

I, too, have been part of deputations to the Minister for Aviation and Shipping, but we got short change from him. The Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), is a very fair-minded man and may perhaps take a rather different approach. The problem will not go away. I appreciate the difficulties as international airports are governed differently, but we want new regulations for small airports in this country. We also want higher standards on aircraft noise generated from them.

I have the greatest pleasure in fully supporting the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East.

11.19 am

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) on being fortunate in securing the debate. Although my constituency might seem a fair way from Coventry airport, my constituents in Binley Woods are very much affected by the activity at Baginton airport. I keep referring to Baginton airport because, to many people who have lived in the area for many years, that is how it is known.

Baginton, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), used to be a small village—indeed, it still is. Coventry airport was a small airport at Baginton village. Activity there has since grown out of all proportion. I receive many letters from residents of Binley Woods who complain bitterly that their sleep is broken in the middle of the night by loud aircraft landing at Baginton airport. If it happened on a regular basis, one could adjust one's sleeping pattern and forget about it, but it does not. The noise is spasmodic and occurs five and sometimes six nights a week.

It is time that the Minister considered the conclusions announced in 1993 on how airports such as Baginton can be controlled properly. My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East has been extremely diligent, as have all Members who represent Warwickshire and Coventry, in meeting the Minister, but, as my hon. Friend said, we can only do that for so long. Firm action needs to be taken to regulate the airport.

There is a lack of transparency in the complaints procedure and a lack of action as a result of them. Some of my constituents who live in Binley Woods regularly telephone the airport to complain, citing exact times of the aircraft noise, yet they are—virtually—fobbed off. They are told, "It is nothing to do with us. It is to do with the Civil Aviation Authority". Yet when they telephone the CAA, it says that the problem is nothing to do with it either. There is a lack of accountability.

I do not want to speak about the crash because my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East portrayed it well. I agree with the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith) that the crash was waiting to happen. I must impress on the Minister that if that airport is not specifically regulated, further crashes could happen. Indeed, although noise is a problem, the big fear in people's minds is that further crashes—heaven forbid—are waiting to happen. Urgent action should be taken to regulate the airport correctly to ensure as far as possible that another crash will not happen. Otherwise, the circumstances will remain exactly the same as those before the crash in 1994. There is also a lack of noise regulation. Aircraft noise was specifically removed from the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and that should be redressed.

I want to extend the analogy drawn by the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington between non-league and first division sides. Nuneaton happens to have a fairly good non-league side; Nuneaton Borough is excellent. He mentioned Manchester United—I have no arguments against them—who are excellent and first class. The problem is that the aircraft that use Baginton airport are not excellent and first class. Older, noisier aircraft tend to use regional, very small airports such as Baginton, which increases the problem. To most people, regional airports are airports such as Birmingham. The amount of freight traffic landing at the small village airport in Baginton gives it a regional status, so there must be some enactment and enforcement of procedures to ensure that the airport is properly regulated.

The control of aircraft noise has been discussed since 1991, when the consultation paper on the subject was issued. Conclusions to it were announced in March 1993. My constituents who live in Binley Woods and I want to know why, after all that time, no regulations have been put in place to enable people who are affected by airports to voice their opinions and concerns, and why they have not been promised the safety that they surely deserve.

11.26 am

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) on his success in arranging the debate, the way in which he delivered his speech and the amount of homework that he had clearly done. His speech was comprehensive and included enormous detail. It is a fairly short debate and therefore, of necessity, my speech will be fairly brief.

Coventry airport, as has been said, is in my constituency. It originated before the second world war. Since the airport was built, many houses in its general vicinity have been constructed—some very much closer to the airport than others. For example, Oak Close in Baginton was built immediately adjacent to the perimeter fence. One cannot get any closer to the airport. I invite the House to consider and reflect on the implications of that proximity.

Planning permission was given and building took place because Coventry airport at that time was a small airport, catering for small, light aircraft, which predominantly used the airfield during daylight hours and were not especially noisy or offensive. Some hon. Members might argue that houses in Willenhall in the constituency of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East, in Binley Woods in the constituency of the hon. Member for Nuneaton, and in Baginton in my constituency should not have been built, and perhaps they are right. The debate on the Coventry air crash should, however, starts from where we are today and not from where we would like to be.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith) that much responsibility for the increased use of the airport must lie with Coventry city council, which has long been directly responsible for the airport and its management. It has deliberately sought more business and more flights to offset the substantial losses of the airport. That position has continued under new management.

On 25 January 1995, Paul Dale, the political editor of the *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, one of our excellent local newspapers, said:

"The city council's aim has been to turn the airport from a £1 million loss-making white elephant into a profitable outfit. The fact that Baginton is now the sixth busiest freight airport in the country is viewed with some pride at the council house."

I must say that distance lends enchantment. I well understand that that may be good news for Coventry council and Coventry ratepayers, but it is bad news for my constituents and those of the hon. Member for Nuneaton and my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington. The noise and nuisance of those flights are considerable.

I come now to a point rightly touched on earlier by hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East. He drew attention to the fact that more flights naturally increase the risk of accident, particularly in a congested and built-up urban area. Here, for the benefit of hon. Members, I should say that the airfield is on the eastern periphery of Coventry, surrounded by a number of villages. It is now badly sited, which, unfortunately, is placing many people at risk.

During the past few years, the character of Coventry airport has changed substantially—the very point made by the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* in the passage that I have just quoted. It is now predominantly a freight airfield. The aircraft which crashed on 21 December 1994 in the constituency of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East at, as he said, a cost of some life, was a Boeing 737 owned by Air Algerie. It was due to land at the airport, collect freight—in this case, calves—and fly out. It would appear that the equipment in the aircraft was not entirely compatible with ground equipment at Coventry airport, a contributory factor to the accident.

The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East, in his admirable speech, touched on the report that was produced by the air accident investigation branch on 10 January. He went into it in some detail, so I shall not go over the ground that he covered. However, the whole issue is a genuinely important matter and a source of real worry to my constituents living in the villages of Baginton and Stoneleigh which are close to the airfield. They do not want any aircraft from any airline flying with equipment which is not entirely compatible with the equipment that is used at Coventry airfield, and I entirely agree with them.

Already my constituents and those of other hon. Members have much to complain about. The noise and nuisance from aircraft landing and taking off is intrusive. Better and stronger controls are required to safeguard the environment of those living and working close to airports. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington, I am not opposed to jobs or progress, but those laudable objectives have to be set against the danger and nuisance caused by night flights. They must be set against the disturbed nights and general inconvenience that they cause to the many thousands of people living near to the airfield who cannot escape the substantial noise intrusion caused by aircraft landing and taking off.

I have visited the airport on several occasions, one of which was fairly late in the evening with members of Baginton parish council. I could not only hear the noise of the aircraft and the substantial ground noise that is created, but smell and almost taste the fumes of the kerosene used by the aircraft. It was singularly unpleasant. There are few bonuses for anyone living close to an airport.

The crash has far-reaching implications, not simply for Coventry airport. Clearly, we must prevent anything similar from happening in the future. It may be helpful for the House to know that, on Wednesday 12 July 1995, I, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington and the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East, the author of the debate, met the Minister for Aviation and Shipping who is in another place. At that meeting, all three of us stressed two separate issues. The first and most important was aviation safety. No one wants a repeat of that terrible December day in 1994. The second was the noise and nuisance caused to so many people by the operation of the airport itself.

I have had meetings with Warwick district council, in whose area the airport is situated, and I have met Baginton parish council and, like other hon. Members, many residents who all say that the nuisance is growing and at a substantial rate. They all naturally ask what action might be taken to mitigate the problems that are being caused by Coventry airport.

A solution may be contained in the Department of Transport document entitled "Review of aircraft noise legislation—announcement of conclusions". Again, that was a point made by the hon. Member for Nuneaton. The main points of that document are to commission and to consult on guidance designed to produce a national framework for noise amelioration schemes. The Department should also undertake to encourage airfields to review any noise amelioration measures and their enforcement, and to make much greater arrangements for local accountability. Hon. Members whose constituencies surround the airport clearly understand the need for real local accountability to come back into the equation—a point that is not sufficiently addressed in the present arrangements.

[Mr. James Pawsey]

The same document says that there should be a new enabling power for aerodromes to establish and enforce noise control arrangements, including those for ground noise—in itself an important point. Additionally, the Secretary of State should have a call-in power so that he can approve schemes. A number of other measures are suggested in that admirable document which would do a great deal to enhance and improve the quality of life of those who live not just around Coventry airport but around other airports up and down the land.

However, I must tell my hon. Friend the Minister, who is listening carefully to the debate, that such measures are no use in a simple report. They should be enshrined in legislation—the very point made so well by the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East. I believe that I have the support of all hon. Members present when I say that we want the Department of Transport speedily to enact a Bill giving greater powers to local authorities and the Secretary of State which will ensure a greater measure of control over local airfields such as Coventry.

11.39 am

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) for securing this debate and for the tireless way in which he has doggedly pursued this issue since the day of the air crash at Coventry. Since that tragic day in Coventry, he has applied pressure in every circumstance that one can imagine: he has met the local authority, Ministers and local residents. I hope that he will continue those efforts until we are rewarded with better regulation in Coventry.

I share an office with my hon. Friend in Coventry, and we were there on the morning of the air crash. People had to be in Coventry—which is a reasonable-sized city—to understand the impact of what happened that morning. My hon. Friend and I were working in the office and we heard sirens outside. We did not know what had gone on—whether there had been a terrorist bomb, whether a gas main had leaked or whether the canal had burst its banks. It was then announced on the radio that there had been an air crash. My hon. Friend immediately went to the crash site. The people of Coventry were in a state of shock, and heaven knows how the people of Willenhall were feeling.

Many people had said that there was an accident waiting to happen at Coventry. The plane that crashed was involved in the export of live animals to the continent, following the ferry companies' ban on that trade and the inability of people to export live animals through the ports. We knew that cowboys would be attracted to that trade—they were cashing in on a short-term profit opportunity to transport live animals out of the country by air.

There is no long-term future in such an operation—everyone knows that, so everyone knows what sort of an operation would fill the gap. Local people were concerned about the safety regulations, the aircraft that were being used and the nature of the company that was running the operation out of Coventry airport. The local authority was in a dilemma because the operator was threatening it with legal action if it did anything to prevent his trade.

Lord Goschen has told my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East that the problem is parliamentary time. Does any hon. Member believe that there is a problem with parliamentary time? We have heard the Queen's Speech and we know its content—or lack of content. Parliamentary time is not at a premium this year, nor was it last year. It is a smokescreen for anyone to suggest to hon. Members who represent Coventry and Warwickshire that the problem is parliamentary time.

I do not want to bring party politics into this issue, but I ask the Minister whether the problem is not tied up with the paranoia in sections of the Government about regulation of any part of the economy and with improving or increasing the powers and abilities of local authorities to respond to circumstances such as this. If the only excuse that we are being given is lack of parliamentary time, I suspect that there must be another reason why we are not acting to regulate small and medium-sized airports properly. Perhaps we will get a response from the Minister on that issue.

The local authority was in a dilemma. Phoenix Aviation, the operator of this enterprise, was threatening court action if the local authority did anything to restrain its trade. There were demonstrations outside the airport and this operation left an awful lot to be desired in relation to health and safety at work and safety in the air. The company threatened to take the local authority to court if it took action.

Six people died because of Phoenix Aviation's activities in Coventry, including one demonstrator who fell under a lorry at the gates of Coventry airport and five people in the air crash. I have visited the site—I did not go with my hon. Friend on the morning of the crash; it was his constituency, and it was right that he should be involved at that time—and there would have been mass slaughter in Willenhall if that plane had been on a slightly different path. The plane clipped a pylon, turned upside down in the air, clipped the side of a house and then, mercifully, crashed into woodland at the side of the housing estate.

The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) asked whether those houses should have been built—they were built in the mid-1950s and the nature of the airport has changed over that time. When the housing estate was built at Willenhall the airport was a Sunday flying school.

Mr. Pawsey: In the days when much of this development took place, the airfield catered for small, light aircraft. A fundamental change in the role of the airport has occurred over recent years, and that is causing so much worry to those of us who have constituencies around it.

Mr. Ainsworth: I shall refer briefly to the change in the nature of the airport, the problems that have arisen as a result of that and the council's policies towards it. The airport has been a controversial issue within the local authority for a number of years—some people have been staunch supporters of its continuation and others have been totally opposed to it. A few years ago, we thought that we might be able to close the airport and build a car factory on the site—I do not think I am giving away any secrets—but that deal fell through.

In my view, the local authority sometimes exaggerates the economic importance of the airport. I have talked to local business leaders, most of whom believe that Coventry airport brings very little economic advantage to

the city. The airport is only 10 or 12 miles from Birmingham, and because of the nature of freight these days, there are not a lot of jobs involved with it, although there are people who depend on it for their livelihoods. The local authority should bear it in mind—and review its policies accordingly—that an alternative to the continuation of Coventry airport is other economic development.

I have some difficulties with the local authority's powers over the airport. If we are going to put responsibilities on councils, we need to give them power to take action so that we can hold them accountable.

There is a desperate need for regulation that will prevent such an accident from occurring in the future, or at least minimise its likelihood. The British people know and understand certain aspects of the life that goes on around them.

For example, they understand why new regulations are being introduced to control the number of hours that lorry drivers are allowed to drive. They were amazed by this report when it revealed that in the 1990s people were allowed to fly excessive hours; people were in charge of an aircraft when their command of the English language left a lot to be desired; and people were able to operate an aircraft into and out of an airport when their instrumentation was incompatible with the instrumentation available at the airport.

People in Coventry and throughout the length and breadth of the country find it incredible that such things are allowed to happen. The central demand that arises from this debate must be that the Minister should look with some urgency at the regulations that have allowed this to happen. They must be brought up to date to ensure that the air space around our towns and cities is operated in a modern and safe manner so that we are not imposing a massive danger on people in the future.

Lord Goschen, the Minister for Aviation and Shipping, said that the main issue was parliamentary time. I have already said that I cannot believe that. If it is not about a dogmatic desire to deregulate in every area of our public life or a strange fear of giving local authorities any powers, the Government must take some action and take it now, without further delay.

11.50 am

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): This has been an important debate. It is a particularly appropriate subject for the longer Adjournment debates that have been introduced in the House. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) on initiating the debate and on the tenacity with which he has pursued the issue over a long period. It must be a source of satisfaction to him to raise the subject on the Floor of the House and to find such consensus on the need for prompt action from the Government. We will listen to the Minister with great interest.

This is a good example of someone saying what he has to say in a relatively brief speech so as to enable others to participate. As a result, we have heard a range of excellent speeches from both sides of the House, displaying a remarkable degree of agreement on the causes of the problem and the need for a Government response. The onus will be on the Minister to provide that response.

The debate has taken place on several tiers. First, there was the immediate tragedy and the clear consensus that it was an accident waiting to happen. There were also the particular circumstances at Coventry airport. There does not seem to be much disagreement within the House that, for a long time, the arrangements there have left much to be desired.

On that score, the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith) said that it was a matter for the local authority. Clearly, the local authority has played a prime role as the owner of the airport and has pursued the policies that have been described in order to attract extra business. However, such action creates a potential conflict of interest between ownership and self-regulation. Therefore, it cannot be a matter only for the local authority.

Local authorities, irrespective of political complexion, need to be controlled when commercial interests are involved. It must be a matter for regulation. Our prime concern is that it has taken so long to put in place a regulatory regime that takes the onus off the local authority. If one is not allowed to do certain things, one cannot do them. If one is allowed by law to operate in a certain way, when commercial interests are involved, the limits are often pushed to a point at which they conflict with other legitimate interests.

The overwhelming view of the House is that the Minister should tell us that regulatory measures will be put in place to constrict the activities of the operator at Coventry airport and other operators throughout the country. I agree strongly with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) that it is laughable to say that such measures cannot be put in place because of a lack of parliamentary time. As everybody knows, the business of the House is being spun out on a weekly basis to try to find something to do in the pre-election period. The idea that there is no time to legislate on a matter that involves safety and appears to command a remarkable degree of consensus is wrong. It is wide open for the Government to legislate and to build on the consensus.

Mr. Pawsey: Do I understand from what the hon. Gentleman said that he would support the introduction of legislation based on the Department of Transport's "Review of aircraft noise legislation—announcement of conclusions"? I agree that we should find time to introduce the legislation, but I do not agree with his statement about spinning out time in the run-up to a general election. I thought that that was gilding the lily a bit.

Mr. Wilson: Far be it from me to disturb even mildly the spirit of consensus that has prevailed for all of 55 minutes.

The point is that, if there were a will to legislate, there would be time to do so. Obviously, the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) would not expect me to give any specific commitments when we have not seen any legislation, but it is clear from what has been said this morning and from what I hope will be said by the Minister, that there is general agreement on the need for legislative action. If I was being non-consensual, I would throw the question back and ask why there is a consultation paper dated August 1991 on aircraft noise legislation and a review of aircraft legislation dated March 1993, yet we still have no legislation before the House.

The debate has raised wider issues which cause me great concern. They relate to the regulation of international aviation and the way in which it impinges

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on our country. The list of conclusions raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East includes national and international issues as well as those specific to Coventry. The crew allowed the plane to go too low, so there was a question of competence. The crew were over-tired, and there are enormous issues involved in that. There was a lack of communication between pilots, and the pilot involved spoke little English, which is the international language of aviation. There was inappropriate navigational equipment and there were inadequate weather warnings from Coventry.

Some of those issues are specific to Coventry and to the particular incident, but others fit into a far wider framework. We must look to the Minister to say what will be done at Coventry and to talk about the national regulatory issue. The Government must press hard in international forums to ensure that the potential for such abuse is extinguished.

I find strong parallels between what has been described here and the way in which the maritime industry has moved in recent years. As it happens, I was at a lunch yesterday addressed by the chief executive of Singapore Airlines. Quite independently of this debate, his description of competitive trends in international aviation made me think in the same way as this debate. He was talking about hiring foreign flag crews in aviation. That conjures up images of the factors that contributed to the decline of merchant shipping in this country and to a sharp reduction in safety standards. He said that it was because of the growth of commercial pressures and competition. However, we have to ensure that there is an international order in aviation that draws a high bottom line and precludes the possibility of cost cutting through a reduction in safety measures.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Steve Norris) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Wilson: I see that the Minister agrees with that point.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East said, people find it incredible that in this day and age, quite legally, substandard aeroplanes can fly into Coventry, or any other British airport, with pilots who do not speak English and who cannot properly communicate. Our concern goes far beyond the specific tragedy. We need an urgent and strong reaction from the Government to counter such problems, because a similar tragedy could happen at any airport that is used by aircraft in which the same conditions prevail.

It is always attractive to think that good can come out of tragedy. It would be satisfying to my hon. Friends, to Conservative Members who have spoken in the debate and to those who have been bereaved by the tragedy and who have suffered such trauma if, as a result of the lessons that have come to the surface following the Coventry air crash, steps were taken that were specific to Coventry, the Government showed urgency in introducing noise regulations to alleviate the burden of those living in proximity to over-used airfields and alarm bells rang about the potential for disaster on a much wider scale unless we accept that there is a real threat from a reduction in acceptable safety standards in the operation and crewing of aircraft. On all those fronts, we shall listen with interest to the Minister.

12.1 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Steve Norris): I shall pick up the invitation given by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson). I believe that he is right to say that this is a useful opportunity to review some of the circumstances surrounding the accident, both in the specific context of Coventry and in the wider context of the issues he raises about the control of international aviation. I congratulate the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) on securing this debate. He is an assiduous Member of Parliament, and he has prosecuted the interests of his constituents with his customary assiduity. I very much welcome the general thrust of the contributions from the hon. Members for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) and for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner), and from my hon. Friends the Members for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) and for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith).

It is clear from all six speeches that we are, essentially, dealing with two major issues: first, the circumstances surrounding the crash of the aircraft at Coventry and the issues that flow from that, which were rightly identified by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North; and, secondly, the general issue of the location and status of the airport and its subsequent development, and the developments in the law and in the powers available to various authorities to deal with the development of Coventry airport and other similar airports.

I share the desire of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East that I should restate my Department's sympathy for those bereaved as a result of the tragic accident. My noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping wishes specifically to join in that expression of sympathy. I fully understand the anxiety of many of the hon. Gentleman's constituents who live close to Coventry airport. I hope that we can allay some of those concerns by going through the action that my Department has taken to ensure that foreign aircraft that fly to the United Kingdom are safe and by reiterating our determination that foreign aircraft should operate to an acceptable level.

It may be helpful for me to say a little about the safety system under which international aviation operates. International civil aviation, since the second world war, has operated on the basis that all states join the International Civil Aviation Organisation—ICAO—and, as signatories to it, accept and comply with the annexes to the Chicago convention, which establishes a number of minimum standards for the safe operation of aircraft. The system of mutual interdependence is reinforced by specific articles in the convention, including an obligation that states will accept certificates and licences provided by another state.

In practice, that system is the only sensible way in which to establish standards on a worldwide basis. Without that system, every state would need to check every foreign aircraft entering its territory against its own national standards, although it would, presumably, be obliged to allow the aircraft to land. It might be possible to detain the aircraft and to prevent it from flying off, but it would not be practical simply to have national legislation that imposed standards on aircraft coming in unseen to any nation state. The obligation has to be to have an international agreement which requires all signatories to the ICAO convention to reach an acceptable standard.

We firmly believe that the ICAO system provides the only practical basis for organising safety on a worldwide basis. In a moment, I shall refer to the detailed ways in which the present arrangements are being improved. The Government have taken a number of measures following the Coventry crash.

Mr. Wilson: May I again draw the maritime parallel? What the Minister has described was, until quite recently, the Government's view of how to handle the safety of ships coming into British ports. There was then a significant and welcome policy change as a result of which the level of inspection in British ports was greatly increased, with dramatic results. The inspection established the high proportion of foreign flag vessels in particular that were seriously substandard. There must be a parallel to that which does not conflict with the general formula that the Minister has set out. It would be widely welcomed if we knew that we had an inspectorate that was liable to turn up at Coventry airport, or any other airport, and say, "Right, we are holding this plane until we have checked every nut, bolt and crew qualification."

Mr. Norris: It is perfectly fair for the hon. Gentleman to draw that analogy. He knows that, in maritime terms, there are two issues. One is that an individual port state can take action to improve maritime safety. The other is that it is, none the less, necessary to seek, through the International Maritime Organisation, a general increase in safety standards. The hon. Gentleman knows that the greatest truism in marine safety is that flag state control is infinitely superior to port state control.

The aviation equivalent is that, although it is important to have appropriate safety checks in this country to deal with aircraft, from whichever country they arrive, to ensure that their safety is adequate, we also need—this is recognised throughout the world and is underpinned by the point the hon. Gentleman correctly made about the proliferation of airlines throughout the world, whether from the former Soviet Union, from Africa or elsewhere—a basic, high standard of safety, operated worldwide by nation states that allow aircraft to be registered by them and then to take to the air.

Mr. Wilson: I want to pursue that last point, because the Minister attributed to me a view that I do not hold. I am sure that 90 per cent. of flag states control their shipping more effectively than port state control can. However, we both know that there are flag states with disastrous records which have no interest in controlling their shipping, but see it purely as a commercial operation—I refer to the flags of convenience states. By the same token, if there is a possibility that there are countries that register aeroplanes, but do not carry out proper controls, port state controls become much more effective.

Mr. Norris: In all honesty, there is not much between the hon. Gentleman and me on this matter. He makes a fair point. The parallel is that no one has an interest in allowing airlines to operate substandard aircraft from countries whose standards are perhaps not as good as those operated in the United Kingdom, but my point is none the less valid and extremely important. It is necessary, despite its imperfection, to have an international system that requires standards from its members and enforces those standards to whatever degree possible while ensuring that domestic legislation allows for effective safety monitoring. The parallel between marine and aviation safety is fair, at least on that point.

At present, we fully reflect our ICAO obligations. With the exception of European economic area aircraft performing intra-EEA flights, which do not need a permit, all other aircraft wishing to perform a public transport to or from the UK must obtain a permit from my Department. Before that permit is granted, we must be satisfied on a number of points.

Mr. Olner: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Norris: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I would rather make some progress.

The key points are: first, has the airline been approved by its authorities as being competent to operate the type of flight concerned? Secondly, has the aircraft been certified as airworthy by the aeronautical authority of the country of registration? Thirdly, does the airline have adequate insurance? Confirmation of those points is normally obtained by the airline submitting appropriate documentation. If we have any doubts about safety standards, we do not issue a permit until those doubts have been resolved. That may mean that we have to consult the aeronautical authorities in the country concerned, asking the Civil Aviation Authority to conduct a physical inspection of the aircraft or to visit the country concerned and to clarify safety oversight procedures.

For example, in this case, in view of local concern about cargo charter flights operated by foreign airlines, we decided to ask the CAA to inspect any aircraft wishing to perform similar flights from Coventry airport. Aircraft operated by Nigerian and Russian airlines were inspected. In both cases, the CAA identified breaches of ICAO safety standards. As a result, we deferred consideration of the permit applications while we took up the matter with the Nigerian and Russian authorities.

In the event, the Nigerian airline subsequently withdrew its application to operate from Coventry. In the case of the Russian airlines, permits were granted, but only after the faults identified by the CAA had been rectified and the CAA had re-inspected the aircraft to confirm airworthiness standards. During the past year, the CAA has undertaken a number of inspections of foreign aircraft at our request. In two cases, aircraft from Tajikistan and Sweden were detained on safety grounds.

Turning to the circumstances of this unfortunate accident, may I deal first with the unauthorised nature of the flights. Although an application for the flight had been received from Phoenix Aviation, the UK charterer, at the time of the flight, no permit had been issued. We had not been satisfied that all our documentary requirements had been met and were waiting for Phoenix Aviation to provide the outstanding documents on behalf of the airline. In particular, we were seeking to clarify the leasing arrangements.

Although an Air Algerie aircraft was to be used, it was to be wet-leased—Air Algerie would provide both aircraft and flight crew—by a Ghanaian airline known as Race Cargo. That meant that checks had to be made with the Ghanaian authorities to ensure that Race Cargo was certified to use the Air Algerie aircraft and that Air Algerie's insurance arrangements covered the type of

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flights concerned, I stress that responsibility for the safety of the aircraft rests with Air Algerie rather than with Phoenix Aviation or any of the other parties involved.

As the operation of flights from Coventry by Air Algerie had not been authorised, any flights operated were in breach of the air navigation order. Therefore, with the assistance of the CAA, we conducted an inquiry into the circumstances of the flights to consider whether any prosecution action should be initiated. However, Phoenix Aviation was placed into voluntary liquidation before any charges could be laid.

The inquiry revealed that a number of flights had operated without the Department's knowledge. It was clear, therefore, that existing procedures for monitoring permits should be reviewed. Under the existing system, copies of all the permits issued to foreign airlines are sent to the relevant UK airport to be used by the foreign airline. If an airport authority had doubts about whether an airline had been granted a permit, it was expected that that authority would contact my Department to clarify the position. This case clearly suggested that that system might not be working as effectively as it should. We are therefore consulting the Aerodrome Operators Association, which represents UK airports, to consider whether the existing liaison arrangements between it and the Department can be improved.

It is clear from the findings of the accident report recently published by the air accident investigation branch that this unfortunate accident resulted essentially from human error. In its thorough report, the AAIB has considered all relevant factors, including the condition of the aircraft. In its view, first, the aircraft had been maintained and was serviceable with no significant defects; secondly, there was no evidence to suggest that the aircraft experienced any systems failure or malfunctions that would have caused the collision with the pylon; thirdly, the estimated weight and loading of the aircraft were within normal limits at the time of the accident; and, fourthly, there was sufficient fuel on board to divert if necessary.

There has been some suggestion—it has been mentioned in the debate today—that the aircraft's inability to receive the Coventry instrument landing system may have been a contributory factor to the accident as it meant that the crew were unable to perform what is known as a precision-approach landing. I am advised that the approach performed by the crew—a non-precision approach—was consistent with the approach procedure set out in the aircraft's operating manual.

On whether aircraft in the UK are required to have ILS equipment compatible with the equipment at Coventry airport, the use of the ILS is just one of a number of acceptable methods for landing in conditions of poor visibility. UK aircraft are required to carry varying levels of radio and radio navigation equipment according to the circumstances of the flights that they are undertaking.

In this case, the AAIB report noted that the crew failed to comply with the operating procedures for non-precision approaches set out in the aircraft's manual and that the aircraft was allowed to descend below the normal approach glidepath. The AAIB also considers that the performance of the flight crew was impaired by the effects of tiredness resulting from the change from day duty to night duty, which was extended to just over 10 hours because of unforeseen circumstances.

There is no international common standard for crew flight time limitations, although the European Joint Aviation Authorities is in the process of agreeing on harmonised FTL requirements. Every state has the option of determining its own standards in this sector. The Algerian FTL for night duties allows for a maximum duty period of seven hours 45 minutes on four sectors. That scheme is more restrictive than that allowed for pilots in the UK.

In this case, the Algerian crew had been on duty for more than two hours in excess of the normal limit laid down by the Algerian authorities, but there is provision in the FTL scheme for duty hours to be exceeded under exceptional circumstances such as a weather diversion. That is in the nature of operating aircraft internationally. The aircraft had been diverted from Coventry because of visibility conditions and landed at East Midlands airport. Once advised of improved weather conditions at Coventry, the aircraft took off from East Midlands and made a second unsuccessful attempt to land at Coventry. It would appear, therefore, that the Algerian crew were operating in accordance with their FTL scheme, although there is no question but that they had been on duty for about 10 hours.

The AAIB makes a number of recommendations. One of them, specifically directed at the Department, calls for a review in permit procedures. My noble Friend the Minster for Aviation and Shipping announced on 10 January that the Department had already acted to amend its procedures for the approval of the operation of wet-leased aircraft by foreign airlines. Those amended procedures now require the provision of a statement from the applicant airline as to which airline's operations and flight manuals will be applicable for the proposed flight. That change will clarify permit responsibilities as regards future applications involving the use of wet-leased aircraft.

On the general issue of safety, my Department has been reviewing how best to monitor the safety standards of foreign aircraft operating to the United Kingdom. I referred earlier to the ICAO system for establishing international standards. The fact that there has been generally good aviation safety is a tribute to the effectiveness of that system so far, but concerns have rightly been expressed about whether these standards are being uniformly applied. We have therefore decided to introduce a number of new measures designed to increase the safety oversight of safety standards of foreign aircraft operating to the UK. Details of those new measures were announced on 10 January by my noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping.

The measures will include increased surveillance of foreign aircraft operating to the UK, as the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North suggested. My Department will ask the CAA to undertake more inspections of foreign registered aircraft when there is doubt as to whether international safety standards established by the ICAO are being observed.

We shall also assist the ICAO in the implementation of its own system to monitor member states' adherence to the ICAO safety standards. This follows extensive lobbying by the UK Government to persuade fellow member states that ICAO needed some form of monitoring programme to

ensure that its standards were being observed. Starting next month, teams including experts from the CAA will be visiting ICAO member states to assess whether ICAO safety standards are being observed.

The Government believe it essential for all countries to ensure that they fulfil their obligations under the Chicago convention and ensure the safety of all aircraft for which they are responsible. It is the responsibility of all states to maintain vigorous oversight of all aircraft that they license and certify. As for the UK, foreign aircraft are now subject to increased surveillance; and if doubts emerge about the safety standards of particular aircraft, we shall not hesitate to take action to ensure that international safety standards are observed.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Am I right in understanding the Minister to say that the Government are refusing to improve the regulations as they apply in the United Kingdom, or to make them stricter than the minimum international regulations? Is the Minister proposing merely to improve the surveillance of those international regulations? The people of Coventry want to know whether the Government are prepared to take action to improve the regulations as they apply to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman will serve his constituents best by properly reflecting the position that I have just outlined. The ICAO safety standards are acceptably high. If properly observed and maintained, they allow for the perfectly safe operation of international aircraft. The British Government have always maintained such safety standards. The thrust of my remarks and of those by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North is that some member states do not comply as thoroughly as they should with the ICAO conditions. It is important, therefore, to carry out more inspections on the ground of these aircraft—that is what the Opposition spokesman called for—and to target those inspections on airlines that may be identified as not operating to the correct standards.

The citizens of Coventry may take considerable reassurance from the speed and urgency with which the British Government introduced the new regulations following this incident. They should also be encouraged by the speed and assiduity with which the Government were prepared to react to an event that exposed some of the inadequacies of the present reporting arrangements.

Another important element in this debate, raised by several hon. Members, concerned the extent to which Coventry airport has changed over time. I would not dream of contradicting them; after all, hon. Members who are local to the area see what happens there every day and every week. Coventry now ranks as the sixth largest freight airport in the UK. Its freight tonnage rose from 700 in 1990 to 28,900 in 1994. This expansion of freight activity has doubtless been responsible for a considerable improvement in the local economy.

I fear I cannot agree with the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East, who suggested that the airport had brought very little to Coventry—if I quote him correctly. Instead, I agree with my hon. Friends who have said that everyone recognises that airports are two-headed beasts: they bring considerable benefits to local economies, which is why they are sought after by many towns and cities, and why improving them plays a prominent part in the plans of many Labour local authorities and local authorities of all complexions; but they have a significant environmental impact, which is why it is necessary to institute a proper regime of control.

We have consulted on, and published, our proposals for new aircraft noise legislation, and we believe that they are the right way forward. They are quite separate from planning legislation and are not intended to deal with planning issues. In theory, it would be perfectly possible for the local authority to alter the planning consent that the airport currently enjoys and within which it operates, but to do so would be unprecedented, not least because it would almost certainly require substantial amounts of compensation to be paid out—an inevitable part of the planning system.

Our proposals, on the other hand, are designed to strengthen the local accountability of aerodromes and to encourage the development of best practice and of measures to reduce disturbance caused by activities allowed under current planning permission.

The operator at the airport has established an airport consultative committee which meets regularly. It is not my place to comment on the efficacy or otherwise of the arrangements—except to say that at the heart of the Government's proposals are enabling provisions to underpin the voluntary measures taken by aerodrome operators. They would be backed by reserve powers to designate an aerodrome if voluntary measures are shown not to be effective.

We remain firmly of the view that this is the right way forward. Work on producing national guidance is currently in hand. I should make it clear that we do not believe it appropriate for central Government to play a role in determining what is best for the circumstances at each aerodrome, of whatever size. As the hon. Member for Nuneaton suggested, the airport was originally very small. There are many similar airports throughout the country, and it would not be right for central Government to override the legitimate interests of local communities, which should be the arbiters of what might constitute the right operating regimes. We lack the local knowledge to undertake the task, and it would be wrong to do it.

Mr. Wilson: I am slightly disturbed by that rather broad statement of principle. There must obviously be local discretion as regards detailed operations, but is the Minister suggesting that any commercial operator or entrepreneurial local authority can turn an airstrip into a major cargo airport, and that it is not the business of the Government to offer any form of protection to people living in neighbouring areas? If so, that is a dangerous principle.

Mr. Norris: It would be if it was the one that I was articulating, but it is not. I repeat that the proposals suggest that we would back, by reserve powers to designate an aerodrome, the voluntary measures that we believe are, in the first instance, the right way forward. That arrangement allows for maximum local input. The hon. Gentleman is right that it would be necessary to ensure that if arrangements for, say, local consultation were blatantly inadequate, statutory underpinning would be necessary. That principle is not disputed by any hon. Member.

Contrary to what was suggested by the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East, parliamentary time is at a premium. While it has not been possible to incorporate the legislation in the current Session, we remain committed to its introduction as soon as the parliamentary timetable allows.

Retail Parks (Leeds)

12.30 pm

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): I welcome the opportunity to draw my hon. Friend the Minister's attention to issues in my constituency, notably those triggered by the proposal by the John Lewis Partnership for a large department store and Waitrose supermarket on the university halls of residence playing fields at Bodington.

Local councillors and action groups have for some time wanted me to raise the matter at the highest level that I could. Councillor Keith Loudon said:

"This proposal to put a department store on Bodington field is opposed by virtually the whole community, from university students, who see their sporting facilities moved to an almost inaccessible location, to the elderly in Holt Park, who see their supermarket within walking distance threatened with closure, to users of the A660 and the ring road, who fear the traffic congestion."

That is the view of the councillor for the area.

The councillor in the adjoining seat, Ann Castle, said that a public meeting at St. Chad's showed the public dissatisfaction with the council about the future of Bodington. She drew attention to the fact that Leeds city council tried to

"railroad planning permission through when it had an alleged interest but rejected permission when it does not."

That she, understandably, regarded as "breathtaking duplicity".

The leader of the Conservative group, Andrew Carter, summed up the underlying issue when he said that there was

"a grave question mark hanging over the council's ability to neutrally administer planning applications".

I am not sure whether that is the right English, but the proposal has certainly triggered important broader issues.

The proposal has highlighted the unsatisfactory nature of the unitary development plan, or UDP, system. That process is going on now and has been for ever and a day. It has highlighted the double standards of the Labour group that controls Leeds in handling planning applications. Moreover—this is germane to my hon. Friend the Minister—what may happen in my constituency is in blatant disregard of the Government's planning guidelines.

The university vice-chancellor has stressed to me—this is the university's land and he clearly needs substantial development money—that there is no deal. He said:

"There is absolutely no question of the city council receiving any money from the proposed sale of our Lawnswood land to John Lewis."

I do not for one moment challenge that, but it does not address the real issue, which is that Leeds city council tried to enter a deal and wanted money from it. It wanted half the net profit that the university would have got from the sale of land. The vice-chancellor says that that deal was at a much earlier stage, but it was as late as 1993.

I have a copy of the co-operative agreement that was drawn up and of the commentary on it by the chief development officer. In his commentary, dated 31 March 1993, he outlines the scale of the pay-off. It would have provided the city with £1.5 million if the net offer had been low as £3 million—that is 50 per cent. If the offer had been more than £12 million, it would have got £4.5 million. It is hard to understand how, as the city council has such an interest in the site—even though it did not ultimately sign the deal—it can be objective and neutral. In fact, it backed off as soon as Tory councillors found out about it. They blew the whistle on this hole-in-the-corner deal and it was never signed.

Paragraph 2.4 of the chief development officer's document says that, in return for the money,

"the council would accept specific limitations on the use of its own site"—

the Lawnswood school site, on the other side of the ring road and—

"not submit a competing retail planning application; nor will it as landowner object to a superstore application on the university site."

That is trying to create a Chinese wall, which is not how the Labour caucus works in Leeds. The vice-chancellor emphasised that he had been talking to the council

"in its capacity as a landowner rather than as a planning authority."

That is to regard the city council as a two-headed monster. It is a monster, but to believe that its planning decision will not be influenced by the fact that it is trying to get £4.5 million out of the site is perverse.

The essence of my argument is that people perceive the decision as having been influenced. However good the scheme is—I met the John Lewis Partnership people so that I could know exactly what was being proposed, and in many ways, it is a sensitively designed scheme—if people believe that the city council has different standards for gauging different planning applications, the planning process is brought into discredit.

Nobody in my patch believes that the council can be objective or impartial about that development—or any development on the site. It is determined to develop it. If, as the council admitted in the 1993 document, it was not prepared to propose an alternative scheme or to object to an application for a superstore, the clear implication is that it was prepared to agree to such an application. As a result, local newspapers have carried headlines about the £4 million deal uproar. The widespread opposition triggered this debate.

In considering more closely how the city council handles its planning applications, I draw attention to another example on the edge of my constituency. The Government rightly set up the urban development corporation for the central part of Leeds and especially for the Kirkstall valley, where Headingley rugby football club needed to sell its playing fields to merge with Roundhay, to produce a more viable and effective Leeds rugby club. Over many years, its proposals for developing the site were objected to by the city council and by Labour councillors.

The UDC took a more sympathetic view and planning permission was given to Morrisons. Since then, the city council and the Labour group have not accepted the procedures, and fought tooth and claw on every conceivable ground to delay the scheme. It is still being delayed by High Court actions. Another case is due in a fortnight or so. It is challenging part of the scheme involving land belonging to a charity, the Leeds Schools Sports Association, which desperately needs money. Its small playing field, which is attached to the main site, should be part of the scheme. Writs have been issued against the charity commissioners. Anything that can be challenged, such as this, or highways approvals—

a 278 highways agreement—is being challenged to delay the development. Yet within a mile of that site, on the site of the old Burton clothes factory—the Cardigan fields site—the city council raised no objections to an even bigger development than the Morrisons development on the Headingley rugby ground. I think that the reason for that is obvious: in the case of Cardigan fields, the council hoped to gain about £1.5 million.

Squeezed between the different approaches that could be described as double standards is a valuable charitable body, which does much good work in helping inner-city Leeds children to develop their sporting capabilities. Because of delays, the Leeds Schools Sports Association has already lost £500,000, and, if the project does not go ahead, it is likely to lose £1 million. Labour is very good at bleating about its capacity for care, concern and compassion, and its interest in the redevelopment of inner cities; but when it comes to the test, the party acts very differently.

Rumour is rife in the city, and the council's integrity in regard to planning matters has been damaged. Indeed, it is being said that planning approval is more probable if the council is likely to make money out of it. Will my hon. Friend the Minister give an indication—I doubt that he can do more—that, if and when the John Lewis Partnership makes a planning application for the Bodington fields site, he will be minded to call it in and take the decision out of the council's hands? I know that the matter is not of great regional significance, but it is very important to the city of Leeds. Given public opinion, I do not think that the council will be able to convince people that its view is impartial and neutral.

Let me deal with the broader issue. The unitary development plan may be a dream for planners and lawyers, but for the rest of us it is a nightmare. It is imposing huge costs and anxieties on individuals, parish councils and anyone who challenges proposals; it is a process that is going on and on. The inspector is assiduous; everyone speaks favourably of the way in which he is handling the matter, and everyone is allowed a say. This, however, must be the biggest single plan for a city in the history of planning. My hon. Friend the Minister may be able to confirm that no structure plan has been opposed by so many people, on the basis of so many features.

There is now a planning hiatus, and a serious risk of prolonged planning blight. Part of the reason for that relates to the council's UDP procedures. Is Leeds behaving in a way that is out of the ordinary, and should it have acted more expeditiously? Perhaps my hon. Friend can clarify that. Nothing can be decided in any part of the city until every aspect of the plan has been decided. When will the protracted agony end, and when will my constituents know what will happen to Bodington fields? I fear that we shall know nothing until well into 1998, and the problem will not be over: my constituents will have to deal with the same arguments again when John Lewis submits a formal planning application.

The John Lewis plan is very detailed. It shows all the greenery, raised areas for screening purposes, buildings and so forth. Why is a UDP inspector being given such a detailed plan? I have always understood that structural plans are about broad general use.

Let me be more specific. If the plan is approved on the basis of all that remorseless detail—traffic flow information, for instance—what will happen if John Lewis pulls out, or wants to change its plans? Will the inspector be able to tie down the development so that it remains as he approves it? Alternatively, will John Lewis—or someone else—be able to submit yet another plan which, because the site was approved in the UDP for retail development, could produce a quite different planning application? Given that none of us trusts the city council to do other than pass a retail application for the site, my constituents might then be landed not with a relatively sensitively designed scheme but with something appalling, as happened in 1986.

In 1986, when the university and the developers submitted a scheme, the city council was on the residents' side, and opposed it. There has been a remarkable U-turn. In its appeal, the council then said:

"There is . . . a clear and unavoidable conclusion that the development of the appeal proposals would seriously threaten the attempts of the City Council to maintain and enhance its city, town and district centres . . . Such development would undoubtedly conflict with the strong and unequal guidance from Central Government which seeks to prevent development which would undermine the vitality and viability of existing centres."

The council also attacked the traffic impact. One of the key factors in the dismissal of the appeal was the impact on traffic patterns. I cannot envisage a lessening of that problem in 10 years. Although a new road across the site, linking the ring road and Otley road, will ease the pressure on the roundabout, the traffic-light junction is likely to cause more congestion on the ring road. There is a lot of wishful thinking about the park-and-ride facilities: it is hoped that they will stop people from driving into the city centre. It is said that the Harvey Nichols store will act as a city-centre magnet, encouraging people to go into the centre. On the other hand, they will supposedly be attracted to the John Lewis store outside the centre; is it conceivable that they will then travel further in on a bus, to do more shopping? In fact, people will not behave like that.

The supertram is also cited, but, at the current rate, it may not operate in my lifetime. If people are going to visit the store, they will travel by car, and if they are going to go on they will go round the ring road to Marks and Spencer: they will not go into the city centre.

The development will, however, draw from a huge area. Even John Lewis's planning proposals show that it aims to tap a huge arc of prosperous satellites north of the city, running quite a long way into North Yorkshire; and why should we imagine that the development will not appeal to the south of the city? The Ikea superstore is one of many huge developments in the south, and it draws many people—including me—from the north. Those who travel through the city will add to traffic flows and pollution. In 1986, the city council used all those arguments in opposing development on the site, but it is ignoring them now and claiming that traffic problems will be eased.

Local councils are supposed to take the Government's planning policy guidance into account in designing their development plans. Remarkably quickly, we have received a revised version of the last definitive guidance. Note 6 was put out for consultation in July last year—I believe that the consultation ended in October. When will it be implemented? It is clearly central to the current debate in Leeds. Has Leeds followed the guidance? It has not even followed its guidance to itself in many respects. In its own "Leeds Countryside Strategy" document, it describes the playing fields as part of a

"network of urban green corridors"—

[Dr. Keith Hampson]

the lungs of the city. It now ignores the evidence that it gave in 1986-87 and it has ignored its policy documents in other areas, but, more important, is it ignoring the Government's guidance, which it must heed?

The consultation document clearly reinforces the Government's determination to revive and create more vital town centres and to protect neighbourhood centres. Rather than harming town centres by putting large-scale out-of-town developments in place, the document is concerned with promoting strategies for improving town centres and the retail developments in them. It does not preclude out-of-town developments, but it spells out certain important criteria against which they should be assessed: for example, the

"impact on existing centres; their accessibility by a choice of means of transport; and their impact on the overall amount of car travel."

In other words, it is trying to reduce reliance on the private car.

The document's central aim is to sustain and enhance the viability of town centres and to

"support local and neighbourhood centres."

Leeds city council cannot show that the Bodington scheme matches any of the criteria. Evidence that the city gave in 1986-87 showed that town centres in my constituency, in Otley, which is nearby, in Holt Park, which is closer still to the development, in Headingley, on the other side of the ring road, in Horsforth, which is down the ring road, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), and in Moor Allerton, which is across in north-east Leeds, will be severely damaged. It is absurd.

Turnover could be diverted in Holt Park by about 42 per cent., in Headingley by 36 per cent., in Otley by 12 per cent. and in Horsforth by 38 per cent. Those towns are already struggling to maintain viable town centres. Many shops in the centre of Otley have closed; many more have been turned into charity shops. The Asda supermarket at Holt Park—the linchpin of the development of Holt Park—is a smaller, older supermarket, but Asda would invest much more money in it if there were no development on the ring road at Bodington. If Bodington were developed, it would have a terrible knock-on effect at Holt Park and the store would close.

There is no case, in terms of the situation that we faced in 1986-87 or the developments since, which should lead the city council to make such a horrendous U-turn. One really cannot trust Labour in Leeds. It proclaims how much it cares, but when it comes to the crunch, dogma prevails. It makes a song and dance of listening to residents in Labour wards, but ignores the strong feelings of residents in Conservative wards. Understandably, there is a great sense of outrage in my constituency.

12.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) for raising the issue of out-of-town retail parks. He described in graphic detail—given time, he could have added to the detail—the difficulties that some Labour planning authorities impose on local residents. He asked many questions and I shall answer as many as I can, but I shall have to write to him; otherwise I will have only about 30 seconds to answer each one, and some of the answers are more complicated than the questions.

I am aware—one cannot help but be aware—of the local concern and controversy about retail parks that are proposed for the north-west of Leeds, and I note the worries about the possible development of land at Bodington fields. As my hon. Friend is aware, there has been a history of interest in retail development of the area, and in 1989 proposals for a shopping and leisure development were turned down on the recommendation of one of the Secretary of State's inspectors. That in itself raises a question.

More recently, in 1993, Leeds city council made proposals in the draft Leeds unitary development plan. It proposed a range of policies for shopping and retail development in the city. Among those, I have identified locations where the council—I emphasise the word "council"—thinks that there is potential for major convenience goods retailing. One of the locations is West Park and the Westwood area of north-west Leeds. The council takes the view that there is a deficiency in facilities for selling convenience goods, which might be remedied by developing part of the Leeds university playing fields at Bodington Hall. On that basis, the council made a proposal in the unitary plan for such a development at Bodington fields.

As my hon. Friend knows, we attach considerable importance, for good reason, to settling local planning policy through preparing development plans, such as the Leeds unitary plan. That process allows for widespread consultation about the plan and its proposals for development on particular sites. It is an important opportunity for local residents to put their views. It allows the public to comment on the plan and to make formal objections, which are then considered by an independent inspector at a public local inquiry.

If the matter was straightforward and was moving with the grain of local residents, one would not expect much of a necessity for consultation. One would expect the unitary development plan to proceed, as it has in many areas, with simplicity and without taking too much time, but in this case some 19,000 objections were made to the Leeds UDP. Only one other council, which, I suspect, is notable for a similar attitude, managed to beat that record—Bradford. It is worth emphasising that the system works where the plan goes with the grain. Where it is imaginative, local residents will go along with it and understand, but in this case there were some 19,000 objections.

Some 200 or 300 of my hon. Friend's constituents have already taken advantage of their rights and objected to the proposal for Bodington fields. The public local inquiry into objections about the Leeds unitary plan has been under way for some months. I understand that the inquiry inspector will consider all objections to the city council's intentions for the retail development later this month. During the inquiry, the inspector will consider objections about a number of retail sites and consider options that have been suggested by constituents and, perhaps, by prospective developers. One such proposal might be at Woodside quarries in north-west Leeds, and there is controversy about that, too.

My hon. Friend asked about the reaction of the UDP inspector to the specific and minute details of the scheme submitted by John Lewis. As he is aware, the inspector deals only with broad issues; he does not approve anything. The John Lewis application is not before him. The inspector makes broad recommendations.

The inquiry inspector has a duty to look carefully at all the objections—all 19,000 of them in the case of the Leeds UDP. In due course—it will be some time away, because of the length of the inquiry into the Leeds plan—he will make recommendations to the council. The council must then decide the final form of the plan after considering the objections and recommendations. That is to ensure protection for the people of the area. That is why the process has taken so long in this case. The procedures then allow for another round of public consultation about any modifications that the council might propose, including a right of objection.

I hope that my hon. Friend will recognise that the plans provide a distinct safeguard to ensure that major decisions about development are not taken without a full hearing and an appreciation of all the points of view. Obviously, it would be wrong for me to predict the outcome of the inspector's consideration and the view that the council might eventually take, but our national guidance on retail policy will be a major consideration in any of the decisions.

The Government's key objectives for town centres and retail developments are to sustain and enhance the viability and vitality of town centres; to focus retail development in locations where the proximity of competing businesses facilitates competition from which all consumers can benefit; to ensure the availability of a wide range of shops, services and facilities to which people may have easy access; to maximise the opportunity for shoppers and other town centre users to use a means of transport other than the car; and to maintain an efficient and innovative retail sector. All those objectives must be taken into account in the Leeds unitary development plan and in the two cases that my hon. Friend mentioned.

As everyone is abundantly aware, there has been considerable concern about the development at Bodington fields. There is nothing to prevent a planning application being submitted and, as my hon. Friend says, such an application has been made. The matter might eventually require a decision by the Secretary of State either because the city council refers it to him or, in the event of refusal, because there is an appeal. As my hon. Friend is aware, for that reason I cannot specifically comment.

The city council will receive any planning application for a retail park in Leeds, and it will be expected to have regard to the current development plan and to the emergent plan, although there may be uncertainties about the planning status of the site. If its status is not firmly established in an adopted plan, which is a plan that has passed through all the stages of preparation, objection, inquiry—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. We must move on.

European Funding (South-West)

1 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and West Devon): I am grateful for this opportunity to discuss the problems that I and my colleagues see as caused by the Government because of their weak approach to European funding for projects in the south-west. I shall refer first to a report called "No Go South West 1996, Bureaucracy Run Riot—How Whitehall Blocks Britain's Euro Funds". That Liberal Democrat document was produced by Robin Teverson, a Member of the European Parliament. His earlier document called "No Go South West 1995" was warmly received by business men in the south-west. Mr. Bell, the managing director of Curnow Shipping, said:

'I thought 'No Go South West' was an accurate, succinct situation report. Since its earliest days I have been a member of SWEL's Euro sub-committee so ably run by Paul Davis . . . At one of our regular meetings, about two years ago, there was a trio from Government Office South West. At the end of the meeting I voiced the suspicion that 5(b) funds were never going to flow our way because the Treasury saw them as being added to the PSBR. The reaction was volcanic: the sky duly fell in on me: It was very obvious that I had touched a raw nerve.

It is sadly significant that Minister David Curry avoids any mention of the Treasury's attitude and the other three Departments beyond GOSW."

I shall quote another brief comment from Mike Boxall, the chief executive of the West Country development corporation. He is one of the ambassadors for that corporation as are many of my colleagues. He said:

"I believe your paper 'No Go South West' has provided a very useful contribution to resolving an unsatisfactory situation and I also believe that lessons learned from the experience of the last two years or so should be remembered for future programmes . . . we are still awaiting the Guidelines for this involvement by the Private Sector and you can imagine the frustrations this brings."

Alison Best, the senior policy adviser for the National Farmers Union, said:

"We share your disappointment that the Minister has failed to acknowledge the current problems of accessing European funding. According to our information only three projects have been accepted for submission to the next meeting of the EAGGF Working Group and there is a further eight or so which MAFF may regard as suitable for submission. There are at least 24 applications which we have been told will be delayed until the June meeting of the Working Group at the earliest . . . our suggestion here is obviously what are the facilitators supposed to be doing?"

I have many such comments, but a summary of the problem is that the Government simply do not care, despite the positive regional policy that is driven at European level and which has meant that Plymouth, Cornwall and Devon are in line for major funding for economic development. In the period 1994-96 Plymouth has been allocated £23 million of Euro-funding, and Cornwall has access to £170 million of projecting 5b funding earmarked for the south-west. Europe wants local and regional communities to decide for themselves how funds should be used, and it involves itself in administration and paperwork only for the largest projects.

Thanks to the Government, nearly two years into the programme, the south-west has seen very little hard cash. Of the £193 million of European money, only about £6 million has been received and 75 per cent.—three quarters—of projects that were approved by the working groups before November are still waiting for offer letters

[Miss Emma Nicholson]

because of delays by Government Departments. It takes an average of six months for Government offices to approve a scheme. That is wholly unsatisfactory, and it is the reason for the debate.

The paper chase is the key. Under this Government, Departments use 100 words where 10 would do. We have only to look at the IACS form from MAFF. Our version is the biggest, the most pedantic and the most time-consuming in the whole of Europe. But when it comes to applying for Euro-funding for the south-west, our Ministers seem to have made the largest effort of all. The application form is brevity itself, but unfortunately, after it has been filled in, it is downhill all the way.

Understaffed and perhaps unappreciated by the Government, the Government's regional office in the south-west tries hard, but it requires completed forms no less than four months before the date of the working group meeting. Anyone who applies now will get in for the June meeting—if he is lucky. If the date is missed by a day or two, he can forget it until October, by which time perhaps there will be a general election. Even if the form gets that far, staff shortages in the regional office mean that many forms are sent to Scotland for assessment by consultants.

Probably because of "No Go South West" and our pressure, two secondees have been employed at the south-west office to help with applications. However, that does not seem to help, because the applications are not getting through to the European Commissioner. At the last working group meeting, the commissioner was targeted as the person who had held up the meeting. However, one of the problems was that the Commissioner, Mr. Oreja, had not received the papers in time to look at them properly. He received them so late that he could not examine them thoroughly. He asked to hold up some projects for a week to look at them further, but the Department of the Environment said that that was a matter for national Government, and there was no way that he could delay matters for a week. The DoE said that, although the Government gave the Commissioner the papers very late.

Neither the UK nor the Commission currently recognises regional or local influence or responsibility for 5b, and that means that we could have sent the papers ourselves. That meeting took three hours longer than normal and people left it disillusioned and annoyed. Some new time limits were set at the meeting and were sorted out by the Commissioner. First, it was decided that as soon as a project has been approved at a working group meeting the project has to start within 12 months.

Secondly, as soon as a project has received a proper offer letter it must start within six months. But that falls, for the obvious reason that projects cannot hold on to EU money while millennium or national lottery funds are applied for. However, that sensible possibility lapses because some projects that have been approved are still waiting more than 12 months later for an offer letter. No time limits are set on the Government between working group approval and an offer letter. For example, the county's UK and overseas tourism marketing project was promised fast-track approval at the November working group meeting. The offer letter is still currently stuck in the Department of National Heritage, as are more than 55 letters. When David Curry wrote, he said that nearly £23 million had been approved.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I remind the hon. Lady that it is customary not to use a name in this House, but to refer to a constituency or to a ministerial title.

Miss Emma Nicholson: The Minister stated that nearly £23 million had been approved and more than 60 offer letters issued for European regional redevelopment funding alone. I am sorry to say that that was incorrect. When he wrote the letter, the £23 million represented the 192 projects that were awaiting offer letters. Indeed, 60 offer letters had been received from 192 projects, but 55 are still waiting for offer letters. The tourism budget is on hold until the end of 1996 as a result of the huge demand for the money. It is sad that the Government's incompetence is causing that astonishing shortage in funding.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): While in no way arguing that there are not delays—indeed there are, and we should streamline the procedures—I should point out to the hon. Lady that someone came to see me a fortnight ago about a delay in an application. When I looked into the matter, I found that the proposal had been submitted late. When I went back, I was told that those involved had met the deadline. Does she accept that not all the fault lies with the Government, as she is obviously trying to suggest?

Miss Nicholson: I am happy to accept that comment. I do not know what has happened in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but in my constituency—where I have problems with the Leader II project—everything that I said, alas, has been valid and accurate. I took the Leader II team from Holsworthy to see the Minister, but it made no difference at all.

The hon. Gentleman, whose work on the common fisheries policy is well known, might like to think about the money that is wasted by Whitehall on the fisheries investment programme, which should come back on track. Although Ministers were forced to take us back into the scheme to buy off a few Euro-rebels, it is sad that we still have not had money for any of those projects. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would be sad to know that the money is available, but not for those who need it. It is such a small, sensible and well-targeted programme, and he will agree that it could make all the difference to fishing ports in the south-west which are struggling against the onslaught of competition.

I cannot imagine why the Government would not fund the project—they are guilty of typical penny-pinching that would make Scrooge blanche. It is avarice, and the Government are putting the tidiness of their accounts before the survival of vibrant and energetic rural fishing communities. I believe that that is a very important point that the hon. Gentleman will respect and honour. I cannot comment on his constituency, but I know from my constituency's problems that his comments are not correct.

Once a form goes through the Government office for the south-west, it wends its way through Whitehall. The gap between the approval of a project and the receipt

of a letter could go into "Alice in Wonderland". Many Departments are involved. I have referred to the Department of Heritage, and there are cases in which three other Departments have been asked to comment. The result of such an interdepartmental spat will be that an application will go from Department to Department and—perhaps after about nine months, if one is lucky—an offer letter will be sent.

I have dealt with many of these funding issues, and I speak from the heart on behalf of my constituents. The misery is that by the time a letter is sent, the official start date for the project has gone. That is the real result of the Government's action. If a project is worthy of EU funding, it must be a real project and not make-believe. If those involved want a project to start, they either have to expect a delay—that is happening, tragically, in my constituency—or find some money to cover the appallingly long interim period.

The problem in my constituency and most other areas of the south-west—although west Devon and Cornwall are particularly affected—is that people cannot find that sort of cash anywhere, and that is why EU regional funding is critical for our future. We know that we need outside help—even if the Government do not—to overcome recent economic disadvantages. In many areas farming, agriculture and food production, processing and distribution are the primary economic engines. In my area, however, we have grade 3 or grade 4 land. One cannot make much money from culm measures, even if a fraction of the funding is provided by the Department of the Environment. The situation is tough—there are only two fields of grade 2 land in my entire constituency, for example—so the south-west will always require assistance.

What has happened to the European money that has been pledged to us—some £200 million for 1994 to 1999? Instead of funding hundreds of projects across the south-west, it is tucked away in the Government's bank accounts, earning a healthy rate of interest for the Chancellor. We believe that the Treasury has been sitting on at least £43 million-worth of European funds in transit from Brussels to Britain's most disadvantaged areas. By last autumn, a mere £6 million had reached the intended areas. When the remainder is finally wrested out of Whitehall—if we manage that—I am certain that it will not be inclusive of interest. In other words, the delays have not just inconvenienced the south-west, but short-changed us.

Every time Europe offers the south-west a hand up, the Government knock us down. When the south-west's fishing ports stood to benefit from the European structure investment programme, Ministers withdrew. When Robin Teverson, a Liberal Democrat Member of the European Parliament, successfully persuaded the Commission to include the Penzance to London railway line in plans for a high-speed network, he did so despite the opposition of Conservative Members of the European Parliament. Sadly, the Government have made it clear that they will continue to oppose the plan in the Council of Ministers. No wonder people in the south-west have lost all faith in the Government's ability or desire to help them.

Mr. Harris: The hon. Lady is going too far. She is now criticising the Government she wanted to join at the end of last year.

Miss Nicholson: Far from it. I can provide my former Conservative colleague with letters saying that I—as an ambassador for the south-west—supported that link. A number of former colleagues have plundered selected sentences from letters that I have written to constituents in the past four years. My two former Conservative colleagues from the south-west who are here today are honourable men, although some may not be. They are more than welcome to look through my entire filing cabinet at all my constituency letters. If they did, they would find that I have not short-changed my constituents, just as the hon. Member for St. Ives has not short-changed his constituents. I think it unlikely that the two Conservative Members who are here today would disagree with most of what I have said.

I am aware that it is imperative that I allow the Minister some time to reply, as I have put a number of questions to him. I despair, however, and I do not believe that the penny-pinching will be affected by the debate today. Good will, common sense and decisive action for the south-west are certainly too much to ask for from the Government.

When Robin Teverson sent his report to those consulted during its creation and to those affected by the delays, he received a sackful of replies, not one of which dismissed it as political propaganda. In fact, they all said that, if anything, the outlook was even darker than he had painted. All but one, that is. The response from the Minister for the Environment and Countryside stood out. From his vantage point, the outlook for the south-west was rosy, although I do not suppose that he has seen any of our recent water bills. Perhaps he did not listen at the meetings held in the past few years with the Prime Minister, which produced nothing. He found nothing to criticise, and proposed no remedial action at all.

All he has to do, it seems, is to sit back and wait for the smoothly oiled Whitehall machine to deliver bounty and prosperity across the south-west. I am sad to say that he must have a different south-west in mind. Perhaps he was thinking of the south-west of one of his addresses in Belgravia, where the part of London that he looks across is indeed part of the prosperous south-east. The south-west, alas, thanks to Government action, is missing £194 million of funding over the past two years. We could use that money.

1.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): The hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson) says that she is an ambassador for the south-west. If she really is an ambassador for the south-west, it is going to continue to sink. She has voiced a number of misconceptions, which I shall try to correct in the short time available.

The European programmes are a success and are combining well with our programmes such as the single regeneration budget, challenge fund, English partnerships and rural challenge. The hon. Lady has not shown a notable interest in European programmes until now; I certainly have had no correspondence with her. Her interest, if belated, is nonetheless welcome because it gives me an opportunity to correct misconceptions.

There has been little significant economic development in west Devon in recent years which has not benefited from a combination of funding, including European funding. The Pitts Cleave industrial estate at Tavistock

[Sir Paul Beresford]

and the West Devon business information project are examples of projects in the current 5b programme. I hope that the hon. Lady acknowledges the excellent Meadowlands leisure pool facility in Tavistock, which was aided by an earlier programme.

The Government have secured a very substantial increase in European funding for the south-west—more than £228 million of grant available from the structural funds up to 1999. With match funding, the total investment from the public and private sectors will be almost £460 million. The programmes include £170 million from the objective 5b rural development programme for Devon, Cornwall, the Isles of Scilly and west Somerset. It is by far the largest 5b programme in England, yet the hon. Lady says that it is one of the smallest.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall) *rose—*

Sir Paul Beresford: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will not give way, as I have very little time and I have a great deal to say and much to cover.

As I was saying, the programme includes £23 million for Plymouth, under objective 2, for areas of industrial decline; £8.9 million from the Leader II programme to help rural communities in Cornwall and Devon—almost half the total for England. This matter must be put in perspective. The hon. Lady is one-eyed in her view. As the saying goes, "There are none so blind as those who will not see." The programme also includes £13.4 million from the United Kingdom's Konver II programme for areas affected by defence restructuring, which has recently been approved. The whole of Devon and Cornwall, Wiltshire, Avon and parts of Somerset, Dorset and Gloucestershire are eligible—but the hon. Lady did not mention that. There is some £3.2 million from the PESCA programme for areas affected by restructuring of the fishing industry.

Those programmes often combine with other Government programmes where the south-west has also been successful—such as SRB challenge fund in which Devon and Cornwall have won some £34 million in the first two bidding rounds. Projects coming forward benefit in many cases from both European funding and SRB funding. The SRB often provides the match funding on which the hon. Lady touched.

Mr. Robert Hicks (South-East Cornwall): I appreciate that my hon. Friend is in a robust and boisterous mood, given New Zealand's victory, sadly, over England in the first game of the world cup. For the benefit of the House, will he differentiate between allocations—which I suspect he is talking about—and actual take-up? Most of us are worried about the low take-up in response to the very generous allocations from the various project funds.

Sir Paul Beresford: I shall try to touch on some of the points my hon. Friend raised. I note his reference to my ancestry. I guess that he is insinuating that I have failed the Tebbit test. I usually cheer for one side but bet on the other. It looks as though I am not out of money this time.

Delays cannot be laid at Government's door, although the hon. Lady made a good attempt to do so. The objective 2 and 5b programmes were due to start in January 1994. However, the Commission's approval was not forthcoming until December 1994—one year late. So, the true picture is that these programmes have been running for barely one year. That explains some of the difficulties mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Hicks).

In 1995, arrangements were set up for consulting local partners and inviting and appraising applications. Publicity and guidance were sent out and advice given to countless applicants on how to access the funds. The Plymouth objective 2 programme has largely been settled with about 75 per cent. of the money committed. In the objective 5b programme, more than £35 million has already been allocated,—rather more, in fact, than two years' worth of the total programme. Therefore, to a degree we have caught up on the delayed start.

Overall, more than 730 applications have been received—531 of those, 75 per cent., have been appraised and considered by local partnership working groups; 154 applications have been either rejected or withdrawn; 237 projects have received offers of grant totalling more than £36 million; and many more will shortly get offer letters. I note that today, to continue with the misconceptions, a letter has been received from Cornwall county council saying that 60 offer letters have been issued on which decisions have been made, and that there are 32 approvals outstanding. I am sorry about the counting—the correct figures are that 88 offer letters have been issued, with another 104 projects with the working group awaiting recommendations.

All that adds up to a remarkable achievement in one year, yet the hon. Lady apparently wishes to decry it as red tape. On the contrary, it demonstrates the considerable demand for the programmes, the effort organisations and individuals have put in to create worthwhile projects and the Government's commitment to the success of the programme. It also reflects the very hard work of our new Government office for the south-west in Plymouth. The money is getting through to the people on the ground. Almost £7.5 million of grant has already been paid.

Mr. Tyler *rose—*

Sir Paul Beresford: No, I am not giving way. I have only four minutes and I need to cover millions of pounds of project money.

Surprisingly, many projects are failing to come forward with claims, especially in the first quarter. That is not to say that there is no room for improvement, especially in the south-west. My hon. Friends have been making these points and following them up for some considerable time, in contrast to Liberal Democrat Members. In the south-west, the Government office has already published some excellent guidance and targets have been set for dealing with applications within four months.

Miss Emma Nicholson *rose—*

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Lady had better sit tight. She asked for figures and answers—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] No, I will not give way. The hon. Lady took more than her share of the time available. She asked for answers and I am trying to give them to her.

The Government office will keep applicants informed of progress and will inform them, within eight weeks, of any issues which need to be raised, in order to keep

matters moving forward. Additional guidance and seminars are planned, in particular about private sector involvement in applications. These developments reflect the commitment of the Government to ensuring the success of European funding programmes in the south-west.

The Leader II and Konver II programmes have also been crucially delayed awaiting the Commission's approval. Leader II was due to start in November 1994, when Leader I ended. The Commission's approval was not forthcoming until July 1995—we are talking not about weeks, but months—and this has placed a considerable strain on the on-going projects in west Cornwall and North Tamar, whose administration costs have had to be covered without European grant. I am pleased to say that grant towards these costs—some £68,000—will be paid by the end of this month.

Miss Emma Nicholson *rose—*

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Lady asked for answers, but she has given me little time to answer.

There has been a complaint that the money has been held by Whitehall. That is nonsense and it shows how little some of the Euro experts understand about the system of funding. Money is paid from the funds to national Government in advance of local expenditure on projects. As the Government are a net contributor of funds, on balance we lose by that system. There are no so-called delays of Euro-funds from the Treasury.

There was also a comment about the time that it takes for the Government to examine programmes. Surely the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon accepts that it is appropriate carefully to scrutinise funding and applications when utilising public money. We must receive value for money through those programmes and assess them before they are allowed to go forward. The systems that apply nationally for the appraisal of applications and the monitoring of projects are far tighter than for previous structural funds, and that is largely because the Government have pressed for more careful scrutiny. The money is working through the system, and the Government have exceeded themselves to ensure that the money reaches the people that it should go to in the south-west.

Blighted Homes

1.30 pm

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): I am glad to have this opportunity to raise the subject of the Department of Transport's discretionary purchase of blighted homes, and to see my hon. Friend the Minister in his place. I know that he has taken an intense interest in this subject. Today's debate is an extension of the debate which took place on 15 May last year on, broadly speaking, the same subject. Therefore, I need to spend only a little time outlining the background.

The Minister and the House will know that I have been much concerned with the development of the A27 in the Worthing area. We have had a public inquiry that lasted almost a year, the report of which has now been tabled. I expect that the Department will publish the report in the near future.

The effect of blight is almost entirely on the Government's preferred route and has little effect, if any—a matter of half a dozen houses or fewer—on the bypass route. Which route is selected is obviously a great concern because the choice will affect enormously the degree of blight. I hope that, in his reply, my hon. Friend will tell us when he expects the inspector's report to be produced and when the Secretary of State expects to make a decision on it. There has already been great concern about the length of time that it has taken to reach a decision; uncertainty is one of the major problems that my constituents face in this matter.

In relation to the choice of route, I shall say nothing more than that I hope to present a petition that contains more than 15,000 signatures of people who favour the bypass route rather than the Government's preferred route, which would have a serious effect on the town. I have no doubt at all that the bypass is the right option, and I shall do all that I can to ensure that it, rather than the other route, is selected. Meanwhile, many houses have been blighted, some of which have been purchased on a discretionary basis by the Department of Transport.

My hon. Friend the Minister will know only too well that, some time ago, the Department of Transport lost a court case on this matter. The case is now quite famous. One of the conclusions was that the criteria the Government used in exercising their discretion were not right. Consequently, a review of the various guidelines took place, and that was still taking place when we had last year's debate. The guidelines have of course been published subsequently, and they give me grave cause for concern.

The essential point is that section 62(2) of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 states that the highway authority may

"acquire by agreement land the enjoyment of which will in their opinion be seriously affected by the carrying out of work or the use"

of the highway. Essentially, the criteria which are used in determining that are at issue. The Government recognise that the criteria that they originally used were wrong. The way in which they handled the matter was backed up by a number of ombudsman reports, which I mentioned in the previous debate and which the Department has recognised showed a deficiency in the process.

It is extremely important that those decisions are taken at ministerial level. They seriously affect the lives of people, and not only in relation to the road and the noise.

[Sir Terence Higgins]

The decision must take into account, for example, medical conditions and the effect on job opportunities because people cannot move. Despite the assurances that I was given in the previous debate, I am concerned because my constituents have received letters from officials that say that they have decided one thing or another. This is a matter for ministerial discretion, and the responsibility should not be assumed by officials, even under the next steps agency arrangements, because they cannot take a sufficiently broad view.

The crucial point is that the Department is now prepared to include the decline of property values in the criteria it uses. It is absolutely clear that, if the value of property declines as a result of the building or proposed building of a road on a particular route—this may also be true in relation to railways—the fact that the value has declined shows that the enjoyment of the property is likely to be diminished. I should have thought that that was not open to serious dispute—the courts have taken the same view—but this is what has happened. Paragraph 7 of the guidelines states:

"We will not normally offer to buy your property unless we are of the opinion that it will be seriously affected by BOTH diminution in value AND noise arising during the construction period or during the first year following the opening of the road to traffic".

It contains an exception for medical reasons.

There is nothing in the legislation that requires both criteria to be met. It is clear that, if the value has declined, that would be a necessary and sufficient condition for discretion to be exercised. I take the view that it is unreasonable—which is an important aspect of it—if the Department does not act in that way, because the legislation says nothing whatever about also taking noise into account. In a sense, that is the crux of the matter. If one were merely to take the diminution in value into account, the discretion would have been exercised in a great many other cases. I shall return to this issue later.

I do not know whether it was as a result of this impending debate but, yesterday, I suddenly received no fewer than three responses from the Department about particular cases. My secretary, who is perhaps more cynical than I am, expressed some surprise at their timing. However, I must say that they have given me further cause for disquiet.

One response says that the individual cases are being reconsidered with all the evidence and that

"I am able to inform you that, based on the current information, we have formed the opinion that your enjoyment of your property will be seriously affected by the severe aggravation of an existing medical condition by physical factors caused by the construction of the Worthing-Lancing improvement.

However, these physical factors are not likely to arise for another two years when the construction of the scheme is expected to start".

In effect, the Department is saying that it will defer consideration of whether to exercise discretion to buy until nine months before the start of construction. My hon. Friend the Minister is nodding in the affirmative.

People are suffering from medical conditions, it is accepted that their property has been seriously affected, and yet they are now being told that they can re-apply later and that the Department may or may not then exercise its discretion. That creates a degree of uncertainty for people who are suffering from serious medical conditions, as the Department recognises, which is really quite intolerable. It is simply a device to improve the Treasury's cash flow, or it may, ultimately, not happen at all.

When individuals' lives are being seriously affected in this manner, such delay should not occur. Since I have not previously received many letters like those I have mentioned, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will carefully examine the issue. I do not think that one can procrastinate as the Department is now proposing.

I return to the question of diminishing value. The situation is developing in an interesting way. In many cases, my constituents have received replies that say that the Department recognises that the value of their property has diminished, but that the question of noise must also be taken into account. That is the Department's view, and it is not what is stated in the legislation. Some of the cases have been refused on the basis that the two criteria have not been met. I have had trouble having the diminishing value quantified but, fortunately, a couple of months ago, I received a letter which was sent to my constituent that recognised a reduction in value and quantified it. It said:

"We have carefully considered the valuation evidence submitted by the Agency's Valuer and have concluded that the diminution in value due solely to the road scheme is 16.7 per cent."

The letter then lists the unaffected market value as £150,000, the current market value as £125,000 and the reduction in value as £25,000.

Despite that, the Highways Agency is not proposing to purchase the property, even though my constituent has clearly suffered a loss of £25,000 as a result of the Government's road scheme. The application is being turned down on the grounds that noise must also be taken into account. That is not right, and bears out what I said previously. The building of roads and infrastructure—it is also true for railways—is, effectively, highway robbery. Roads are being built at the expense of people who happen to have the bad luck to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The cost should be borne by the community as a whole. People should be compensated or their property purchased to avoid suffering, which is no fault of their own, as a result of a Government decision over which they had no control.

I do not doubt that, over the Minister's head, is the shadow of a Treasury Minister. Although my own halo is a little out of date, it is still there, and I do not doubt that the sums involved are substantial. Across the country, we are probably talking about hundreds of millions—perhaps billions—of pounds and I can understand why my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer would be concerned about it. All that that sum reflects is the extent to which individuals are suffering as a result of present policy. I therefore argue strongly that we ought to change the policy and that at least one of the necessary and sufficient criteria ought to be reduction in value.

Another point, which I made in the previous debate, is that we are talking about gross cost to the Exchequer. Once the road has been built, the properties purchased by the Department can be re-sold. Although they will be worth less, they will certainly not be valueless. It is important to consider the long-term net cost rather than the gross cost.

Although I have described an important point of principle that affects not only my constituency but many parts of the country, I hope that the solution to it will be

simple. I hope that, in the light of the inspector's report, the Government will come down in favour of the bypass and at most have to purchase only about half a dozen houses. They could re-sell the houses that they previously bought and the area presently blighted could be reinstated. Much of the problem has arisen because the houses that have been bought—I am glad that they have been bought—have been occupied by unsuitable tenants, causing the whole area to fall in value and creating additional problems.

My hon. Friend the Minister is not unsympathetic to my view. I very much hope that rapid decisions on the cases will be made, especially the medical cases, because the uncertainty that I described cannot continue. A serious interdepartmental review of broad, longer-term policy is needed—perhaps considering the experience in France where one simply pays over the odds and far fewer problems of planning blight result. I hope that such a review would produce a sensible and just result, unlike what we have at the moment.

1.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Steve Norris): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) for raising the issue and for giving us a further opportunity to debate a subject, which, as he said, he raised on 17 May. I should like to express my personal appreciation of my right hon. Friend who, sadly, is due to retire at the end of this Parliament. I note that my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), who no doubt has an interest in these matters, is in his place. My right hon. Friend has been a distinguished Member for a number of years and has shown his customary assiduity, application and interest in the affairs of his constituents as vigorously as ever on this important issue. I pay genuine tribute to him. I hope that he will allow me to deal in very specific and rather legalistic terms with a number of the issues that he has raised.

Since the previous debate, there has been a review of the trunk road programme in England, as a result of which 77 schemes, of which the environmental impact was no longer considered to be acceptable in relation to the benefits, were removed from the programme. In those schemes, the route protection is being withdrawn and owners of property on or near the routes will no longer be affected by the prospect of road improvements.

Other important bypass and relief road proposals remain in the programme, including the proposal to improve the A27 between Worthing and Lancing. As my right hon. Friend said, the scheme has a long history, which I shall not go into again. The review of the programme confirmed its importance as a much-needed improvement to the only east-west trunk road route south of the M25.

Following consultation on four route options, a public inquiry, to which my right hon. Friend referred, ended, as he knows, on 24 August 1994. I can inform him that the inspector's report following that inquiry has been received by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport. It is inevitably a lengthy document. We will give it very careful consideration and make an announcement as soon as possible.

I know that my right hon. Friend will appreciate that I cannot comment on any of the issues involved in the report, whether they relate to the route or to the desirability of one or other option, while my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is taking a quasi-judicial decision on the matter. Nor of course can I make any prediction about the outcome. I note my right hon. Friend's concern that, whatever the outcome, there should be an early decision and I shall of course draw that to the attention of the officials involved in considering the report.

Sir Terence Higgins: What is the position on publication of the inspector's report?

Mr. Norris: I will have to write to my right hon. Friend about the report's content and the timing of its publication. I have no reason to believe that the report will eventually be treated in anything other than the normal way. Subject to whatever view my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport may take of the report, it will find its way into the public domain.

The announcement that I made on 19 July of new guidelines for use by the Highways Agency in considering applications for discretionary purchase of property seriously affected by trunk road schemes require, as my right hon. Friend said, the Court of Appeal judgment in what is now known as the Owen case of 30 June 1994 to be taken into account. The guidelines require the agency to consider diminution in value of a property as well as the predicted effects of noise and other physical factors when forming an opinion, as is required by the relevant legislation on whether enjoyment of the property will be affected by the construction or use of the road.

It is important to remind ourselves of the purpose of the discretionary purchase scheme. It is not the only opportunity for an individual to sell an affected property. The discretionary purchase scheme enables the Department to act as a buyer of last resort where the enjoyment of a property is or will be seriously affected by trunk road proposals, where the owner has a pressing need to move that is not connected to the road scheme and where hardship can result if the property cannot be sold except at a heavily discounted price.

Under the new guidelines, I shall also consider cases where the owner or another person who normally resides at the property has a medical condition that would be severely aggravated by the physical effects of construction work or use of the new road. My right hon. Friend referred to those three conditions, about which I wrote to him just the other day.

I must make it clear that the point of our treatment of medical conditions as my right hon. Friend described is that the effect of the scheme on the medical condition of the individuals concerned will not manifest itself until work starts. I hope that it is not inappropriate for me to endorse the comment made by my right hon. Friend, a former distinguished Treasury Minister himself, that that does indeed help Treasury cash flow. It would be an inappropriate use of public funds to acquire properties many years—in this case two years—before the likelihood of work commencing, where the rationale for a purchase under discretionary purchase rules is medical effect. That is why, in cases relating to medical condition, an offer to purchase is deferred, or owners are invited to reapply nearer the appropriate time.

I noted that my right hon. Friend said that that does—I shall not say might—cause further uncertainty in the minds of those who have been asked to re-apply. I shall

[Mr. Norris]

certainly reflect on that. I can confirm that it is not the purpose of the new guidelines to add to the perfectly understandable concern in such a situation; rather it is to recognise that, where the key to the request to purchase is a medical condition related to the onset of the scheme, the actual purchase should be broadly proximate to the start of works on the scheme.

The House may also be interested to know that, when revising the guidelines which are used for discretionary purchase in advance of construction work and which relate to the powers of section 246(2A) of the Highways Act 1980, we also considered the criteria for discretionary purchase during the course of construction or immediately after the new road is opened relating to other parts of section 246. Those criteria were relaxed and made more consistent with the guidelines applicable for discretionary purchase in advance of works and a number of owners whose properties are seriously affected by construction work or a newly opened road have benefited.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads promised in the debate on 17 May that all applications made for discretionary purchase under the relevant powers and rejected since the 1994 Court of Appeal judgment in the Owen case would be reconsidered. The majority of those cases have now been reconsidered under the new guidelines and owners informed of the result. Owners were given an opportunity to submit any relevant new information in support of their applications and new assessments have been made of predicted noise levels and physical effects. Information from professional valuers on diminution of value caused by scheme proposals has been obtained.

All that information has been taken into account in reaching new decisions on cases in accordance with the new guidelines. That has involved a great deal of work by the Highways Agency. I have, as my right hon. Friend was generous enough to say, taken a close personal interest in the many cases where the decision reached was borderline and where my right hon. Friend or other hon. Members may have made specific representations on behalf of their constituents.

I acknowledge the fact that, as my right hon. Friend said, some of the determinations will have been made by officials. That is where, ostensibly at least, the cases are not borderline and are relatively straightforward to determine, but I reiterate my outstanding offer that if I am asked to look again at any such decision by an hon. Member on behalf of a constituent, I shall most certainly undertake to do so. I appreciate that the thrust of my right hon. Friend's remarks is that these are important matters for people who are affected on whichever side of the guidelines they may eventually fall.

I should say that other owners, whose applications for discretionary purchase were rejected before June 1994, have also been given an opportunity, through advertisements in local newspapers, to apply to make fresh applications for consideration under the new guidelines. More than 50 cases are still being reconsidered and they will be dealt with as quickly as possible.

In connection with the A27 scheme, 48 applications have been considered or reconsidered under the new guidelines. In six cases, an offer to purchase has been made with immediate effect. A further five cases, in which owners or occupiers have a medical condition, have been accepted in principle under the provisions of the guidelines for purchase at a later date to which I have just referred. Thirty applications have been rejected and seven are still under consideration.

The properties that the agency has agreed, or provisionally agreed, to buy under the new guidelines add to the total of more than 120 properties on which offers to buy had already been made in connection with the A27 scheme. None of those properties would be required for the proposed route of the scheme. It is our policy to seek to limit the effects on the character of a locality affected by trunk road proposals which may be caused by widespread advance purchase of property. It is with that aim in mind that, in the new guidelines, we intend to target offers to purchase on those properties which are seriously affected by physical factors, including noise and diminution in value.

The Highways Agency will, as my right hon. Friend suggests, also seek to return as many properties as possible that have been purchased under the discretionary powers to private ownership at the earliest possible opportunity. However, necessarily, the resale of property must avoid destabilising the market in the locality.

Sir Terence Higgins: I understand that, but my hon. Friend has not answered the fundamental point, which is that the reduction in value in itself is sufficient to reflect a serious reduction in the enjoyment of the property. That brings out clearly the need for the guidelines to be further revised. If anything, the change tightens the criteria.

Mr. Norris: I am aware that some owners have been disappointed that their applications have not been successful and feel that the guidelines should have been drawn more generously to allow the Highways Agency to purchase an even greater number of properties, but with regard to my right hon. Friend's example of a constituent whom he claims has lost £25,000—if I quote him correctly—and whom he describes as having been the victim of highway robbery, I remind him that the powers under the Highways Act 1980, which allow discretion to purchase properties of which enjoyment will be seriously affected are in addition to, not a substitute for, the provisions of the Land Compensation Act 1973, which clearly give owners the right to claim compensation for loss in value one year after a road has opened.

There is no obligation on the Highways Agency to acquire property which is not required for a scheme, and the use of guidelines to ensure that cases are considered in a fair and consistent manner has been established since 1992. The important point is that those discretionary powers are to be applied in cases where the person concerned has no foreknowledge of the effect of the scheme; where the person concerned or a person residing in the relevant property can show serious effect in terms of their enjoyment of the property, as defined, and as qualified as my right hon. Friend said, by the judgment in the Owen case; and where the individual concerned has a pressing need to have the property acquired in advance of the compensation available under part I of the 1973 Act, which inevitably will be paid to any person who can show the loss that I have outlined a year after the scheme has opened. Discretionary purchase is not a substitute for the part I compensation, it simply provides for those exceptional circumstances.

I acknowledge that my right hon. Friend is understandably concerned at the effect of the application of the new guidelines, but I stress that there is no sense in which they affect part I of the Land Compensation Act 1973, which remains the bulwark on which those who may be refused compensation in these cases can none the less rely if they continue to experience deterioration in the value of their property a year after the scheme has opened. It is that series of criteria taken together that it is important to bear in mind in these cases.

The new guidelines comply in full with the judgment given in the Court of Appeal in 1994. In the case of Owen, a further judicial review in November 1995 confirmed that the Secretary of State had not acted perversely or irrationally in reaching the decision to reject Colonel Owen's application in accordance with the guidelines and Colonel Owen was refused leave to appeal that judgment on 12 February.

We will continue to consider applications in accordance with the two-stage process set out in the guidelines. Our intention remains to provide relief to owners whose enjoyment is seriously affected and who have a pressing need to sell in advance of entitlement to claim their statutory compensation.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Late Payment of Debts

1. **Ms Coffey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the impact on British firms of late payment by Government Departments. [13502]

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy (Mr. Richard Page): The Government recognise the problems that the late payment of invoices can cause, particularly for small businesses. It is important that the public sector leads by example and settles its bills on time. My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury is responsible for Government Departments' payment policies and has instructed them to abide by the Confederation of British Industry prompt payers code and to publicise their payment policies. The average figure for Departments' payment performance in 1994-95 showed an improvement over 1993-94. The Department of Trade and Industry's payment performance has improved, rising to 93 per cent. in 1995-96.

Ms Coffey: Does the Minister agree with the Chancellor of the Exchequer that late payments can make the difference between survival and failure for many small businesses, or does he agree with the Deputy Prime Minister who has boasted of his own late payment policy? Does the Minister not regard the Government's £230 million of late paid bills in 1994-95 as a total disgrace?

Mr. Page: The Government should set a good example, and no hon. Member knows more than I the importance of prompt payment of bills to small businesses. A few years ago, the Government started to publicise their payment policies and the situation has improved, but it must get better. For example, last year the Department of Trade and Industry paid 93 per cent. of its bills in 30 days—that is, 13 of every 14 invoices were paid on time. A recent survey conducted by a reputable organisation found that the average payment time by medium and large companies is 48 days. The Government are setting a good example and leading the way.

Sir John Cope: Is my hon. Friend aware that there is a great deal of support for the actions that he and the Government have taken over late payment which have led, for example, to the CBI code and to the company law statutory instrument obliging public limited companies to report their policy? Should not plcs be obliged to disclose in their annual reports what they have done during the past 12 months, as is the case for Government Departments?

Mr. Page: I note the comment that my right hon. Friend made about that statutory instrument, and it is currently being considered. However, no magic bullet can be fired which will automatically make the small business man or woman receive their money on time. I emphasise that there is a responsibility on every small business man or woman to undertake proper credit control policies, rather than to hand out goods and services and hope that they will receive the money.

Mrs. Roche: How can the Minister be so complacent when the Government are threatening the very survival of many small businesses to which they owe millions of pounds? The Forum of Private Business found that one in five business owner-managers is prevented from expanding because of late payment. Does the Minister agree that this makes a complete mockery of the Government's hope to make Britain the enterprise centre of Europe?

Mr. Page: No one in Government is complacent about the present payment policies. When I was appointed to my present post a few months ago, the first thing that I did was to hold a series of bilateral discussions with every Minister responsible for small businesses in every Department. Having spoken to them about their payment policies, I know that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury is working on a policy to improve standards so that the Government, who are already setting a good example, can make it even better.

Overseas Trade Services

2. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to assist the overseas trade services. [13503]

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Anthony Nelson): Through overseas trade services, my Department, together with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, provides the best-ever package of information, advice and practical assistance to all British companies wishing to explore new export opportunities.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Is my hon. Friend aware that companies such as BP in Azerbaijan and British American Tobacco in Uzbekistan have substantial exports to those countries? Does my hon. Friend agree that those large companies could act as pathfinders for smaller British companies to encourage our export efforts to those countries? For example, in Azerbaijan, the next big contract has just been let to an American hotel chain. Could we not have encouraged British companies to compete for that contract?

Mr. Nelson: My hon. Friend is right. Those are important contracts and the companies are important pioneers. I believe that they can pave the way for smaller companies to follow in their wake, but it is important to remember that many already do. Some 3,000 companies have participated in 200 missions and 8,000 exhibitors have taken part in trade fairs. They are following in the wake of the perhaps 20 or 30 companies which dominate our trade performance. They have to work together and I am sure that they do so.

Mr. MacShane: After tomorrow, can the Minister give a guarantee on overseas trade that no Minister will be signing any certificate which could send innocent British people to prison in order to promote the interests of MI6?

Mr. Nelson: Yes, I can give that assurance. That is the position that has obtained up to now and it will continue

in the future. I am the Minister responsible within the Department for export control of weapons. We take those responsibilities extremely seriously. We are not above learning from experience, but we intend to fulfil our national and international obligations under the law.

Mr. Elletson: Will my hon. Friend ensure that the overseas trade services continue to support British defence exporters? Is my hon. Friend aware of the particular importance of defence exports to the economy of Lancashire? Will he take this opportunity to condemn those Labour Members who spend their political lives undermining defence exports and defence jobs?

Mr. Nelson: I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. If we listened to Opposition Members, we would have closed down just about every export market that we have in the world, not just for defence equipment. The supply of legitimate defence equipment under article 51 of the United Nations convention to enable countries to defend themselves is wholly legitimate. It is in our national interest and it provides millions of jobs in constituencies represented by Opposition Members, although sometimes one would not think so.

Privatised Water Companies

3. **Mr. Davidson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will assess the current ability of the consumer organisations covering the privatised utilities to monitor the level of service given by the privatised water companies. [13505]

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor): In general, we are content with the existing consumer representation arrangements for the privatised utilities. For the water industry, the performance of the Ofwat customer service committees in monitoring levels of service is a matter for the Director General of Water Services.

Mr. Davidson: Does the Minister accept that, at a time when the number of complaints from consumers is ever rising, this is an area where adequate funding should be provided so as to ensure that the complaints can be dealt with adequately and so that there can be proper supervision of the privatised utilities?

Mr. Taylor: In England and Wales, new price limits for water have cut increases in charges. Water and sewerage companies promise further rebates to customers. The utilities now guarantee standards of service. However, I understand that there will always be some complaints and it is very much part of the Government's anxiety and ambition to ensure that the consumer protection arrangements are thorough and work effectively.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Is it not bizarre that Labour Members take every opportunity to attack the privatised utilities when their paymasters, the trade unions, invest their pension funds in those very utilities?

Mr. Taylor: Yes, it is a strange paradox that the trade union which sponsors the deputy leader of the Labour party is a heavy investor in the utilities. Since privatisation, the National Consumer Council has been there to put the customers' view. I understand that the Director General of Water Services and the customer service committees regard integration of the committees with Ofwat as a virtue, not a weakness.

Mr. Harvey: Does the Minister believe that the consumer organisations are able adequately to address regional differences between rates of charge for privatised utilities? Is he aware that the south-west already pays twice as much for its water as other regions, and that electricity and gas are heading the same way? How does he think that the consumer organisations can address the economic development consequences for the south-west?

Mr. Taylor: One of the virtues of privatisation is that prices have been falling. The hon. Gentleman must accept, as I do, that there are necessarily regional variations. That is why there is no reason for consumer representation for public utilities to follow any particular model. The structure needs to reflect the particular market.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that the privatisation of water has benefited the consumer through increased investment, better quality water and fewer drought orders than in 1976?

Mr. Taylor: I completely agree with my hon. Friend on every point, and especially on the fact that we are delivering some of the cleanest water in Europe.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: How can the Minister wash his hands of responsibility for the fact that complaints about water companies from customers have almost trebled?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: He can now afford to do so.

Mr. Griffiths: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that water is cheaper, he should speak to his constituents, because it certainly is not. Why have the Government hamstrung the consumer organisations by consistently cutting their funding? The amount for the National Consumer Council has been cut, money for the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux has been cut by £767,000, funding for the Gas Consumers Council has been cut by £369,000 and even the consumer safety unit in the Department of Trade and Industry has had a £595,000 cut.

Mr. Taylor: I do not know how many of those questions the hon. Gentleman expects me to answer—[HON. MEMBERS: "All of them."] I shall make a portmanteau of all the hon. Gentleman's generalisations about funding. I especially draw his attention to the fact that the Government grant for NACAB, one of the organisations that he mentioned, has gone up this year by £600,000. Those arrangements have enabled us to have the privatised utilities—*[Interruption.]* The Labour party is all too keen to say that Governments meddle in consumer arrangements. Governments should not meddle in those arrangements, and part of the virtue of privatisation is to get the Government and Ministers out of the utilities.

Manufacturing Industry

4. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next expects to meet the president of the Confederation of British Industry to discuss manufacturing industry. [13506]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): My right hon. Friend and other DTI Ministers regularly meet the Confederation of British Industry to discuss a range of issues.

Sir David Knox: When my right hon. Friend next meets the president of the CBI, will he, after congratulating him on the improvement in manufacturing output over the past three years, discuss with him the fact that manufacturing output has gone up by only 10 per cent. since 1973? What steps might be taken to ensure that it goes up much faster in the next 20-odd years?

Mr. Oppenheim: I note that my hon. Friend started with the figure in 1973. One reason why manufacturing output has not gone up very much since 1973 is that, between 1974 and 1979, in the heroic days of Labour's industrial strategy, manufacturing output fell. Under this Government, manufacturing output has increased sharply. Not only has it increased, but we now have quality, exportable manufactures—in stark contrast with the situation in the 1970s.

Mr. Sutcliffe: Is not manufacturing the key to the economic growth of this country? Since 1979, we have lost 2.7 million jobs, especially in communities such as mine. What do the Government intend to do to create a situation in which we can have more investment in manufacturing and in which manufacturing is seen as more important than the service sector? What do the Government intend to do to create jobs?

Mr. Oppenheim: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that manufacturing is a vital sector of our economy. He will therefore be pleased to note that, whereas in the 1960s and 1970s manufacturing productivity growth in Britain was bottom compared with that of the G7 major industrialised countries, since 1980 Britain's manufacturing productivity growth has been top among the major industrialised countries. That is why industries such as British Steel, which was the world's largest loss maker, is now the most profitable in Europe, why an industry such as British Leyland, which was the butt of music hall jokes, is now producing high quality, exportable cars, and why British Airways, whose passengers rated it below Aeroflot, is now the world's favourite airline.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my hon. Friend initiate a study by Department of Trade and Industry statisticians and suggest the same on the part of the CBI into the effect of European Union cohesion fund and European Union structural fund allocations to countries such as Spain, Portugal and Italy, which are able thereby, at the expense of the British taxpayer, to increase their manufacturing competitiveness and to cost Britain jobs?

Mr. Oppenheim: Despite cohesion funds, Britain still attracts 40 per cent. of Japanese and American inward investment into Europe. That has been a great success story and has underpinned the massive improvement in British manufacturing competitiveness since 1979.

Mrs. Beckett: Does the Minister not recognise that the continuing concern of the CBI and others about Britain's manufacturing strength has been reinforced by the recent sustained fall in output described in the City as an appalling performance? Incidentally, the Minister will, I am sure, recognise that what he told the House about the last Labour Government's record is not correct. *[Interruption.]* It is not correct—I have told him that before. He must check his figures.

The Government still consistently refuse to take the advice either of the CBI or of engineering employers—let alone of Labour Members—and to take action that would encourage manufacturing investment, which is now 20 per cent. below the 1989 level. Is that not one of the main reasons why, far from being the enterprise centre of Europe, the UK has dropped from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league?

Mr. Oppenheim: I can see that the right hon. Lady has nicely caught the spirit of St. Valentine's day. I shall not be so churlish and I wish her a happy Valentine's day.

My figures on the fall in manufacturing output under the last Labour Government are correct and I will send the right hon. Lady those figures so that she does not make the same mistake twice. *[Interruption.]* If she will be quiet for a minute and let me get a word in edgeways, I can tell her that investment has risen six times faster under this Government than under Labour. There is one big difference between investment now and investment in the 1970s: in those days, investment was directed by bureaucrats and politicians into low-grade, dossed-out, state-run industries, but investment nowadays is in high-grade, exportable manufactures.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my hon. Friend accept that manufacturing industry is the only genuine source of non-inflationary economic growth and that it is therefore essential that this country's manufacturing base is widened? Will he therefore not just talk to the CBI, which does not represent manufacturing industry in any adequate way, but spend as much if not more time talking to the Engineering Employers Federation, which does represent manufacturing industry, the United Kingdom Industry Group, which specifically represents manufacturing industry, and the Manufacturing and Construction Industries Alliance, which I formed with the support of Members of all parties in the House? Those are the organisations that are in touch with manufacturing industry, not the CBI.

Mr. Oppenheim: I thank my hon. Friend for his views. I agree with him about the importance of manufacturing industry. Although it is obviously not the sole generator of wealth in the economy, it is crucial. I agree also that it is important to speak to a range of organisations. Ministers in the DTI do that, and intend to continue doing so.

Balance of Trade

5. **Mr. Olner:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the trade deficit with non-EU countries in 1995. [13507]

Mr. Oppenheim: The trade deficit with non-EU countries in 1995 was £7.5 billion.

Mr. Olner: Does that figure not show that manufacturing industry has been grossly inadequately looked after during the Government's stewardship? Is the Minister aware that the United Kingdom's deficit in manufactured goods is almost the worst in the world? The Government should do something about that.

Mr. Oppenheim: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is aware that we also show a massive surplus on our invisible trade with non-EU countries. Those are important industries, not to be sneered at. If we factor them into the equation, the result is a massive surplus with non-EU countries.

Mr. Dunn: How would our trade with overseas countries be liable to be helped by the imposition of a minimum wage, which would cost jobs, and by the imposition of the social chapter, which would put the trade unions back in control?

Mr. Oppenheim: I entirely agree with the drift of my hon. Friend's point. The Opposition are very good at producing political escalator muzak—motherhood and apple pie, which sound good—but if they ever came to power we would have a tax on wages and jobs.

Mr. Sheerman: The Minister must know that we have had a deficit in manufactured products since 1983—let us get the record straight. It relates directly to the fact that, since 1979, there has been a 10 per cent. decline in investment in manufacturing industry. When the Minister talks to people, will he talk to them about long-term investment in our manufacturing sector—of the kind that has not taken place in recent years under the Conservative Government?

Mr. Oppenheim: I must take issue with the hon. Gentleman about one thing: there was only one year under the last Labour Government when our trade was in surplus—it was in deficit for all the other years. Secondly, the position of our manufacturing industry has been dramatically transformed. Our manufacturing productivity growth in the 1960s and 1970s was bottom of the league of major industrialised countries. Since 1980, we have been top of that league. That is reflected in the enhanced performance of our manufactured exports, which are now 90 per cent. higher in volume than in 1979.

Exports to Latin America

7. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what support his Department is giving to exporters to Latin America. [13509]

Mr. Nelson: Nine export promoters are helping UK companies win business in Latin American markets, 26 trade missions and eight trade fairs are planned this year, and my Department has launched a three-year export promotion campaign, "Link into Latin America".

Mr. Arnold: May I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on inventing the posts of trade promoters, and say that the work that they have done already is remarkably effective? One of the best ways in which Ministers can help British exports to Latin America is by continuing their growing practice of leading trade missions. I wish the Minister well for his forthcoming visit to Brazil, the powerhouse of Latin America, and to Chile.

When the Minister and his colleagues consider the transatlantic trade arrangements and the free trade area, will he bear in mind that the other side of the Atlantic does not consist solely of north America but also includes the powerful and growing economies of Latin America, which offer Britain such great opportunities? Will he do all he can to further Europe's transatlantic arrangements with the whole of America?

Mr. Nelson: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's sentiments. Latin America is increasingly recognised as a target and a priority market, although our performance there has not always matched expectations. I was down Mexico way myself last week, and I am off to Chile and Brazil next week, so I shall be doing as my hon. Friend suggests, taking with me business men and women from this country who are forging new markets with new products in Latin America. That is good. It is important to recognise, as my hon. Friend does, that the Americas are a big market. Mercosur and the North American Free Trade Agreement countries are increasingly making overtures to each other. Just as they regard the United Kingdom as the gateway to Europe, we must regard some of those countries as the gateway to NAFTA and Mercosur.

Mr. Dalyell: If the Minister can go down Mexico way, how about up the Orinoco? As the new Venezuelan ambassador has outlined the opportunities which exist in Venezuela, where we have less than 1 per cent. of the market—rather less than previously—could the three-year programme pay some attention to Venezuela?

Mr. Nelson: I take what the hon. Gentleman says seriously because he knows the country and the market. We have a market plan for Venezuela. He is right that it is an important market—it is, I believe, the 12th largest petroleum producer in the world—but it has serious economic issues to address. Inflation is running at between 70 and 90 per cent.—almost reminiscent of inflation rates under Labour Governments—it has had to devalue substantially, its exports are subject to great controls and it has stopped payments on, for example, the Scotch whisky industry, which is the biggest market in Latin America. There will be huge opportunities if it can get its economic act in order. If it can do that with the help of the International Monetary Fund later this year, the market will once again be open for business and British business men will be there in force.

UK-US Trade

8. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he is taking to promote trade with the United States of America; and if he will make a statement. [13510]

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian Lang): Overseas trade services, administered jointly by my Department and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office,

provide a package of support measures which help British businesses to compete in markets around the world, including the United States of America. A team of export promoters seconded to my Department from British industry also provide active assistance to British businesses.

My Department's "North America Now" campaign has for the past three years assisted British companies seeking to do business in the United States. The second phase of the campaign—to be launched in May—will continue the good work, focusing on opportunities for British businesses tackling the United States service sector.

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful for that full and detailed answer. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as well as concentrating on exports to Europe, with which we have a long trading tradition, it is important to maintain ties with North America? It is no coincidence that the biggest single investor in capital in the United Kingdom is the United States and the biggest single investor in the United States is the United Kingdom. That is due not only to the common language but to the common legal system that we enjoy. Does my right hon. Friend agree that trade with the United States, let alone that with France and Germany, would be greatly damaged if a Labour Government were ever elected, and that a national minimum wage would price our workers out of their jobs?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. British exports to the United States last year were valued at £18 billion, an increase of 6.7 per cent., which is a good measure of improved British competitiveness and perhaps one of the reasons why unemployment has fallen yet again in the past month by 29,300, taking the rate down to 7.9 per cent. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and I are keen to have increased trade liberalisation across the Atlantic between the United States and Canada and Britain in the context of World Trade Organisation trade liberalisation world wide.

Mr. Bell: The House should welcome the question asked by the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant). The last time we had such a question was in 1903 from Austen Chamberlain, who believed in imperial preference and split the Tory party. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman has the same hopes, but we shall watch his contribution in Lichfield with great interest.

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that tariffs between the United States and the European Union are down to 4 per cent. and that if we want to develop world trade it should be done through the financial services sector? My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) talked about the enterprise centre of Europe. Are not all the questions about American trade a smokescreen for competitive devaluations which regard the European Union as a single unit instead of getting down to the real question of a European Union in which we are at the centre of events?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is talking absolute nonsense. He is right to the extent that the improved tariff relationship between the United States and Europe, as a consequence of the recent completion of the Uruguay round, has increased the prospects for further trade liberalisation and enhanced the opportunities for trade across the Atlantic. With regard to the service sector, he will be pleased to learn that the United Kingdom is the top foreign supplier of services to the United States, valued in 1994 at no less than £20 billion. That puts us abreast of the European Union countries and Japan.

Sir Donald Thompson: Does my right hon. Friend recall what he was told the other day in my constituency by representatives of a carpet firm that is exporting to America and, indeed, all over the world—as is a local machine tool company? They told him that, increasingly, competition abroad comes not from foreign companies but from other British companies.

Mr. Lang: I well remember my very encouraging visit to my hon. Friend's constituency. I also remember the enthusiastic support for the Government's economic and financial policies that I encountered there, and the success stories of our many manufacturing exporters which are contributing to the record figures that we are now achieving in the United States.

Druridge Bay, Northumberland

9. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if land at Druridge bay, Northumberland, owned by Nuclear Electric, is to be released for sale. [13511]

Mr. Page: The land held by Nuclear Electric at Druridge bay is to be assigned to Magnox Electric, and will therefore be staying in the public sector.

Mr. Beith: Will the Minister convey to his right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy my appreciation of the fact that he decided not to release the land to Nuclear Electric's successor, British Energy? Does he recognise, however—given the 40,000-signature petition that we took to the Department—that local people want the land to be taken entirely out of the hands of the nuclear industry? I am sure that the Minister would not want the industry to remain nationalised indefinitely, but I think that he would want it to be made clear that that will not be the site of a nuclear power station.

Mr. Page: The right hon. Gentleman has been prominent in the campaign to retain the site in the public sector. I shall pass on his good wishes to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy. The settling of the terms on which Magnox Electric will hold Druridge bay will start shortly; those working on the site will be consulted, and I hope that a satisfactory solution will be achieved.

Mr. Atkins: Does my hon. Friend recognise that the nuclear industry plays a significant part in the operation of our economy—not least in Lancashire, where British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. employs a large number of people, and has been so successful that it is about to provide 100 new jobs in the Lancashire area? That demonstrates yet again that our policies work, unlike those of the Labour party.

Mr. Page: My right hon. Friend makes the point that privatisation will be valuable to the nuclear industry, just as it has been to many other industries. I confidently

expect that there will be more jobs and expansion, and that Nuclear Electric will provide a stimulus and competition for other power generators.

Mr. Battle: Does the Minister agree that the Government's proposals to privatise the nuclear industry are increasingly being exposed as a bad deal for the taxpayer? Is this not proving to be a closing-down sale that will cost the country billions? Moreover, it cannot be assumed that a Labour Government will pick up the tab for unknown nuclear liabilities if the assets are stripped. Is not nuclear privatisation likely to prove even more disastrous than the Government's botched attempts to privatise British Rail? It is clearly not in the public interest. Will the Government call it off?

Mr. Page: I can give a short answer to that question: certainly not. We will not call off the privatisation. As I have said, I expect it to raise substantial sums for the taxpayer, and it will free the industry to make its own decisions. As for the liabilities, I know that a segregated fund will be established to ensure that long-term decommissioning liabilities will not fall on the taxpayer by default.

Gas Consumers Council

10. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received as to how this year's Gas Consumers Council budget will affect its ability to represent the interests of consumers. [13512]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have received no such representations.

Mr. Gerrard: Is it not a fact that the Gas Consumers Council's budget is being cut at a time when the number of complaints is rising? Can the Minister explain why, since Ministers announced last May that they would work with British Gas to raise the company's performance to the highest level, it has managed to lose its charter mark, and complaints to the council have more than doubled?

Mr. Taylor: The Gas Consumers Council will not be inhibited by its budget, which for 1996-97 has been increased by more than inflation. Since privatisation, domestic gas prices have decreased by more than 23 per cent. and industrial gas prices by 40 per cent. Although the Gas Consumers Council is independent of the regulator, it keeps in close touch with the Office of Gas Supply, as it should.

Mr. Gallie: Does my hon. Friend agree that the largest cuts in the gas industry have been those for domestic gas consumers' bills since privatisation?

Mr. Taylor: I certainly do.

Balance of Trade

11. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the balance of payments deficit for the calendar years 1994 and 1995. [13513]

Mr. Oppenheim: In 1994, the balance of payments deficit was 0.3 per cent. of gross domestic product. In 1995, the deficit is forecast by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to be about 1 per cent. of GDP.

Mr. Williams: How can the Prime Minister claim that Britain has the strongest economy in Europe when our growth rate, at 1.8 per cent., is at eighth place in Europe and when our share of world trade, at 5.2 per cent., is the lowest this century? When we have had a devaluation of 20 or 25 per cent., why do we still have a balance of payments problem?

Mr. Oppenheim: The Prime Minister may be thinking of the fact that, whereas in the decades after the war our share of world trade slipped steadily, since the mid-1980s we have stabilised that share, when many developing countries have increased theirs. He might also be thinking of the fact that, since 1981, the volume of manufactured exports from Britain has grown faster than those from France, Germany or Japan.

Mr. Brooke: I express dismay and despair at Opposition Members' lack of understanding about why the United Kingdom's share of world trade in manufactures ceased to fall in the 1980s—for the first time since the war—and, indeed, began to rise. Does my hon. Friend endorse the research carried out by Owen and Wren Lewis recently, which showed that critical to that change is the strength of investment in United Kingdom manufacturing industry?

Mr. Oppenheim: Obviously it is a matter of not only the amount of investment but the quality of investment. What differentiates investment now compared with the 1970s is that in the 1970s a lot of investment was state inspired, state sponsored and state directed into enterprises that turned out to be uneconomic, such as building massive, unneeded capacity for British Steel. Investment now is market-directed and high quality and results in goods that we can sell abroad.

Mr. Hardy: Does the Minister deny that Britain's share of world trade is lower today than it has been throughout our history?

Mr. Oppenheim: No; in answer to an earlier question, I explained that, although Britain's share of world trade fell steadily in the decades after the war, since the mid-1980s it has stabilised. That is quite a performance when the share of other industrialised countries has fallen as a result of the increased share of developing countries.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: If the Labour party cannot recognise the hugely improved competitiveness of British industry, will my hon. Friend recognise the recent comments of the president of the German CBI, who said that, of all the countries in Europe, Britain was best placed to deal with the challenge of global competitiveness? Is that not proved by recent figures from the West Midlands development agency, which show that this country now attracts record investment? In particular, in the past year, the west midlands has seen no less than £1.25 billion-worth of investment, which has safeguarded or created no fewer than 10,000 jobs.

Mr. Oppenheim: The German gentleman to whom my hon. Friend alludes may have been aware of a recent survey

that showed that, whereas the manufacturing productivity gap with Germany widened sharply in the second half of the 1970s, since 1979 the competitiveness gap between Britain and Germany has narrowed by three quarters. That shows that the period when Britain really was in danger of becoming a low-wage, low-productivity, skivvy economy was not under the Conservative Government but in the days of Labour's heroic industrial strategy.

Mr. Hoon: As the Minister is so keen on making comparisons with the previous Labour Government, he should note that the previous Labour Government achieved a surplus in both 1977 and 1978, having turned around a deficit inherited from the Conservatives. Despite the Minister's selective use of statistics, is it not the case that, first, in 1995 the Conservatives presided over their 10th successive annual deficit in the balance of payments current account; secondly, the UK's trade balance in manufactured goods went into deficit in 1983 for the first time since the industrial revolution, and has stayed there; thirdly, the United Kingdom's share of world trade has fallen to its lowest point this century, from 7.7 per cent. in 1980 to 5.2 per cent.—[HON. MEMBERS: "Question."] I said, "Is it not the case?" That is because, notwithstanding the Minister's historical comparisons—I am tempted to say hysterical comparisons—the United Kingdom has today fallen to 21st place in the international investment league.

Mr. Oppenheim: I think what the hon. Gentleman means is that under the last Labour Government our trade was roughly in balance in one year and in surplus in another, but that the position was rapidly deteriorating by 1979. Under the last Labour Government, our performance consistently deteriorated in every aspect of manufacturing output and productivity. We inherited the problems of that Government and Britain's performance has markedly improved in trade, manufacturing output and productivity since then. That is what the Opposition do not like.

Mr. Mans: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a direct correlation between interference in industry by countries, particularly in Europe, and a reduction in the manufacturing base, whereas countries such as ours which do not interfere increase the manufacturing base? Does he further agree that the only way in which some European countries manage to prop up their exports is by subsidising their industries and that in the long term that can result only in the demise of those industries? Will he ensure that Britain continues to follow the policy of not subsidising industry?

Mr. Oppenheim: Needless to say, I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. As Opposition Members are keen on comparisons with the last Labour Government, I shall give them the example of Triumph Motorcycles. It was a world leader in the 1950s, but it was meddled with and interfered with and had appalling industrial relations in the 1970s. It went bankrupt and the Japanese took the market; but in the 1980s, under a Conservative Government, Triumph set up again and it is expanding jobs and output and exporting to Japan. That is symbolic of the difference between manufacturing then and manufacturing now.

12. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade with which European countries the UK has a surplus in both visible and invisible trade. [13515]

Mr. Oppenheim: In 1994, the latest year for which detailed information is available, the UK had an overall surplus, in visibles and invisibles, with the Republic of Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands.

Mr. Purchase: The Minister makes a brave attempt. According to the figures that I have seen, we have a surplus in both areas only with Ireland, which is, I think, 16th in the enlarged Community—all the countries of which, except us, enjoy the protection of the social chapter. Is it not surprising that the Minister claims that we are doing well whereas we are doing rather badly?

Mr. Oppenheim: I think that the hon. Gentleman's figures are a little out of date. As he is quite rightly concerned about our trade position, he will no doubt be delighted to know that our current account deficit with Europe is falling quite sharply. It is much lower than it was 10 years ago, and in the last year for which figures are available our exports were up by 11 per cent.—3 per cent. more than imports were up.

Mr. Butcher: Does my hon. Friend agree that the formation of a north Atlantic free trade area in which both tariff and non-tariff barriers were eliminated would be healthy for western Europe and the eastern seaboard of the United States, would boost the prospect of ports such as Glasgow, Liverpool, Bristol and Cork and would integrate western Europe in the global market and the enterprise culture? Should not that objective be pursued with great vigour by his Department? I draw his attention to the remarks of Commissioner Sir Leon Brittan, my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and officials at the American Department of Commerce which all seem to open the door to the President of the Board of Trade being the champion of this cause.

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If trade barriers produced industrial competitiveness, countries such as India and Brazil would be great industrial powers. It is the fact that those countries followed interventionist and protectionist policies from the end of the war until recently that has caused them great damage. I entirely agree that we need more free trade, not less, and I certainly agree that we must pursue every avenue for opening up trade with the United States.

I hope that my hon. Friend does not underestimate the difficulty caused by many of our fellow members in the EU constantly giving way to vested interests that are crying out for anti-dumping duties and trade barriers. These include occasionally the United Kingdom Commissioner—the former leader of the Labour party. Sadly, the same is true of the United States, which often speaks the language of free trade while practising just the opposite.

Mr. Clapham: Would not the use of regional selective assistance to support successful companies, such as Koyo in my constituency—whose application was turned down—assist the surplus in invisibles? Koyo came to Barnsley in 1992, and it now has a turnover of £25 million. The company wants RSA to double the size

of its factory, to increase the work force by 180 and to increase its turnover to £66 million. However, its application was turned down. Will the Minister review that decision and, in doing so, will he see a delegation from the company?

Mr. Oppenheim: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman welcomes the success of inward investment in Britain, and I take seriously his point about the company in his constituency. I understand that the matter is being looked at, and if the hon. Gentleman wants to bring a delegation to the Department of Trade and Industry, we will be glad to see them.

Mr. Marlow: What would be the impact on our balance of trade with our European partners if there was a single currency in central Europe, including Germany, France and, perhaps, Belgium and Luxembourg, while the pound sterling was maintained in the United Kingdom? In particular, what would the impact be on our invisible trade with Europe?

Mr. Oppenheim: The simple answer to a complicated question is that any country unwise enough to join a single currency before the time is right would almost undoubtedly suffer from a massive loss in competitiveness.

British Geological Survey

13. **Mr. Dafis:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the effect of the prior options review of the British Geological Survey on the progress of the geological survey of Wales. [13516]

Mr. Page: None. I expect the current review will report to me in July 1996.

Mr. Dafis: May I remind the Minister of the furore that erupted in Wales two years ago following the announcement that the BGS office for Wales in Aberystwyth was to be closed? May I remind the Minister that we were assured at the time that the so-called rationalisation would strengthen the ability of the BGS to carry on with its surveying work in Wales? In view of the fact that large areas of Wales do not have detailed geological maps, and in view of the importance of this information in such maps for economic development, the environment and planning, what guarantee can he now give that the assurances made at that time will be honoured?

Mr. Page: I, too, was disappointed that the Welsh authorities did not provide the £80,000 a year for five years to keep the Aberystwyth office operating. The purpose of the review of all public service research establishments is to see that we get the best science for the substantial resources put in by the taxpayer. Until the review reports back, however, there is little that I can say.

Manufacturing Output

14. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the average annual growth in manufacturing output since 1979. [13517]

Mr. Oppenheim: Since 1979, manufacturing output has grown at an average annual rate of 0.7 per cent.

Mr. Jones: Did not the Secretary of State recently admit that the Thatcher years were a complete and utter disaster for Britain's manufacturing industries? Is it not the case that Britain's manufacturing is not safe in Conservative hands?

Mr. Oppenheim: No, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Garnier: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the greatest successes of the Major years has been manufacturing industries in the east midlands, an area that both he and I represent? Will he also ignore all history lessons from Opposition Front Benchers, who clearly do not know the difference between Joseph and Austen Chamberlain?

Mr. Oppenheim: I think that the Opposition are misled in a variety of ways.

Gas Consumers Council

15. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the current effectiveness of the Gas Consumers Council's monitoring of the level of service given by the privatised utilities. [13518]

Mr. Page: I consider that the Gas Consumers Council is effective in monitoring the level of service given by British Gas.

Dr. Godman: As my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) pointed out earlier, last May Ministers promised to help British Gas to improve its service record. Why, then, has there been a doubling in the number of complaints to the Gas Consumers Council since that date? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there appears to be a "couldn't care less" attitude among senior British Gas managers to complaints from consumers? That is certainly the experience of many of my constituents. Surely that is not the right attitude to take, especially to the problems faced by our elderly constituents.

Mr. Page: I share the hon. Gentleman's disappointment that the number of complaints has risen by such a large amount. Having said that, I understand that British Gas management has responded positively and drafted in more staff and put in more telephone lines. I also understand that the rate of complaint in December was 36 per cent. lower than the rate at the start of 1995. Progress is being made.

Privatised Water Companies

16. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the ability of the consumer organisations covering the privatised utilities to monitor the level of service given by the privatised water companies. [13519]

Mr. John M. Taylor: In general, we are content with the existing consumer representation arrangements for the privatised utilities. As far as the water industry is concerned, the performance of the Office of Water

Services customer service committees in monitoring levels of service is a matter for the Director General of Water Services.

Mr. Campbell: The number of complaints has risen by 180 per cent. and £1 million has been cut from the national customer council. Why was Diana Scott sacked from the customer service committee in Yorkshire? Was it because she was outspoken?

Mr. Taylor: The fact is that privatisation has provided customers with independent customer service committees. Since privatisation, the national customer council has been in place to put the customer's view. It is put, it should be put and it is safeguarded.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Is my hon. Friend aware that my constituents have had privatised water for 15 or more years, originally through the Rickmansworth water company and now through Three Valleys Water, and that that privatised service has been highly successful? Is that not an example to other areas?

Mr. Taylor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. There is a considerable variety of experience and delivery, but the best is always a good example to the rest. It is exactly that sort of good practice that we wish to spread.

Saudi Arabia (Medical Supplies)

17. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures he is taking in relation to medical exports from Diagnostic Developments of Burscough, Lancashire, sent for export to Saudi Arabia and impounded by Customs and Excise at Heathrow. [13520]

Mr. Nelson: I understand from Customs and Excise that the consignment was shipped from the United Kingdom on 25 January.

Mr. Pickthall: I am grateful for that helpful reply. Does the Minister understand that the shipment in question consisted of an agent for the determination of haemoglobin in blood supplies? It was going to Saudi Arabia and was contained in 6,500 50cc bottles at 2 per cent. of potassium cyanide. The Department of Trade and Industry official determined that the cyanide was recoverable. Is that the sort of efficiency in helping our small exporters that satisfies the Department? Before the Minister toddles off to Latin America advocating exports, will he ensure that the delays and the loss of business to which I referred are not repeated?

Mr. Nelson: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we must be careful not to inhibit proper legitimate exports. However, as the House will be aware—especially this week—we must impose proper licences and controls on the export of hazardous goods. In the case in question—and certainly when Customs and Excise had first sight of the consignment at Heathrow—it was felt that potassium cyanide very much fell into that category. It was properly referred to my Department, which made a further technical assessment and validation of the end user. When that was cleared, the goods were also cleared for shipment. Sometimes that can take some time, but it is proper that the process should be gone through and that it should be done as expeditiously as possible—and my Department intends always so to do.

British Gas

18. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next plans to meet representatives of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux to discuss problems encountered with British Gas. [13522]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have no such plans.

Mr. McFall: At a time of record referrals to the Gas Consumers Council and to citizens advice bureaux, how can the Minister justify an overall cut to the CAB during the past two years? At a time of massive dissatisfaction with British Gas, is it not obscene that the charter mark is still on gas bills? Will the Minister take steps today to ensure that that charter mark is removed?

Mr. Taylor: Madam Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Tony Banks: It is Madam Speaker.

Mr. Taylor: Madam Speaker, I do apologise. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) was in the House during an earlier question about gas, but I am the first to concede that the number of complaints in relation to gas has increased. It is perfectly clear that British Gas must do better to retain its customer loyalty. The hon. Gentleman referred, in particular, to NACAB. This afternoon, I have been defending the customer safeguard arrangements. I must say that, in the context of NACAB, I announced a fortnight ago that its grant had been increased by £600,000 this year. As far as I could tell from my most recent visit to NACAB, the people there were very pleased about that.

Manufacturing Output

19. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current figure for manufacturing as a percentage of gross domestic product. [13524]

Mr. Lang: In 1994, manufacturing output was 21 per cent. of gross domestic product.

Mr. Sutcliffe: Is that not the nub of the problem? In 1979, manufacturing represented 30 per cent. of GDP, and it is now down to less than 21 per cent. Is that decline because of the waste of resources which could have created long-term investment? Hon. Members on both sides of the House agree that we must return to increased levels of investment in manufacturing. Is not the problem that we are net exporters of investment? The Government have not created an environment in which investment can take place, which would bring back manufacturing to where it needs to be—where it could create the jobs that we need to provide employment.

Mr. Oppenheim: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of manufacturing. However, he should be aware that the share of GDP taken

by manufacturing has fallen in every industrialised country, which, in absolute terms, does not mean that the manufacturing share has decreased. Service industries have done very well in this country, but manufacturing industry has also done well since 1980. Our manufacturing productivity growth has been at the top of the league of industrialised countries, and manufacturing output has increased since 1979. I repeat that that is in marked contrast to what happened under the previous Labour Government, when productivity was stagnant and output fell.

Mr. Bellingham: Will the Minister find time today to consider the food manufacturers in my constituency, including Campbell Soups and Master Foods, a division of Mars, which I visited on Monday? Those two companies have expanded and have played a part in reducing unemployment in my constituency, since the general election, by 32 per cent. Does he agree with me that had the Government signed up to the social chapter and brought in the panoply of regulations and red tape, as the Opposition want, that would not have happened?

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In the 1970s, international companies such as those he mentioned were falling over themselves to move production from England. General Motors and Ford were moving production out of England, and the Germans would not buy GM or Ford cars that were made in United Kingdom plants. The opposite is now true: GM and Ford are again exporting massive numbers of cars. The Japanese have come into the market in a very big way, and inward investment has been one of the great driving forces in the transformation of British manufacturing industry.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Is not the abysmal performance by manufacturing industry in this country due to the fact that we have not invested sufficiently, particularly in training? Is it not true that we have the lowest proportion of young people in full-time education of any industrialised country, apart from Turkey?

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Lady is absolutely right about the importance of education and human capital in competitiveness. She will no doubt be glad to hear that the proportion of young people who are in full-time education or training is two and a half times what it was in 1979. She will no doubt also be delighted to hear that, in the past year, manufacturing investment increased by 11.5 per cent., and that investment in machinery increased by 15.5 per cent.

Inward Investment

20. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures are being pursued to attract inward investment into the United Kingdom. [13525]

Mr. Lang: My Department's Invest in Britain Bureau runs a comprehensive programme for promoting the United Kingdom overseas, including company visits, advertising, mail shots, seminars and missions. Within the United Kingdom, the IBB is introducing a nationally co-ordinated aftercare programme for major inward investors already in this country—the international investor development programme. It is also, in conjunction with Government offices and regional agencies, strengthening regional aftercare arrangements where necessary to complement established initiatives that are already in place.

Mr. Jenkin: Is it not a fact that this country is naturally a global trading nation and that we naturally offer a warm welcome to any international company that wants to invest here? Is it not one of the greatest achievements of this Government that we have restored our reputation and standing as a global trading nation rather than as a nation mired in regulation and high taxation?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is remarkable that, with only around 1 per cent. of the world's population, we are the fifth largest trading nation. The massive advance in productivity growth and competitiveness that we have achieved in recent years has led us to break into new export markets, increase our exports to record levels and succeed in attracting more than 40 per cent. of the inward investment in the European Union from the United States and Japan.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May we have an assurance that when the Government publish their statistics on inward investment they will not include the £58.6 million spent by Campbell Soups on acquiring a plant in my constituency which the company announced 11 weeks later would close? Surely it would be an abuse of the statistics if that sum were to be included. Is not the lesson to be learned from the whole affair the fact that we must find a way to ensure that when foreign companies that do not have a shareholder base in the United Kingdom come here—Campbell Soups is 58 per cent. owned by one family in the United States—their actions can be checked? Otherwise, they will simply undermine the regional policies of successive Governments.

Mr. Lang: Let me point out to the hon. Gentleman that last year there were no fewer than 454 inward investment successes in the United Kingdom associated with more than 91,000 jobs. Although American companies in this country are some 4,000 in number and represent $100 billion-worth of investment, it should be borne in mind that the United Kingdom is one of the strongest outward investors in the world and, indeed, has higher investments in terms of value in the United States than the United States has here.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In Health questions yesterday I accused the Secretary of State of misleading the House. I unreservedly withdraw the term "misled" as unparliamentary, and I apologise to him and to you.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I will take no further points of order on that matter. The hon. Lady has done the right thing, and I am obliged to her.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I apologise for not being here when my question was called, but something important has occurred relating to Question 6, in which I declared an interest. Despite having checked the form and confirmed with the Table Office that it showed that an interest had been declared, the letter "R" has not appeared next to the question. As you will know, I have several times mentioned the fact that Opposition Members sponsored by trade unions are not declaring that interest, but perhaps they are doing so and the "R" is not being printed.

Madam Speaker: I do not think that that is the case. On this occasion, the printers regret that there was a lapse, but I take the view that it is always prudent for hon. Members to check the text of their questions when they first appear on the Order Paper. It is a courtesy that hon. Members should be here to ask their questions.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I have just noted that the *Official Report* covering the late-night Division on Monday on the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 records that two Labour Front-Bench spokesmen went through the No Lobby. I am concerned that it might be a mistake because, had they done so, they would be in breach of collective responsibility. They will have voted against the Maastricht treaty provisions and have no choice but to resign. Will you arrange for checks to be made to see whether the record is accurate?

Madam Speaker: It is none of the Speaker's business and, as far as I am concerned, the report is correct.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Newham general hospital last month issued a remarkable press release attacking the cuts that it was being forced to make as a result of reductions in Government funding. In that context, is it in order for the Secretary of State for Health to be claiming improvements in services at that hospital?

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order. It is a question and the hon. Gentleman must find an opportunity to raise it in debate.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will be aware that during Question Time, an hon. Lady, whom I will not name, crossed in front of—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I have informed the Whips on many occasions that Members should not enter the Chamber and cross the line of sight between a Minister and the Member whose question he is answering. Members who are sitting in the Chamber and know whose question the Minister is answering should be helpful to Members entering the Chamber by holding them back, as they could have on the occasion to which the hon. Member referred. I watched very carefully and, frankly, Members were not as helpful as they could have been.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In Health questions yesterday, the Secretary of State said that hospitals had opened extra beds. On checking, we found that they had not. How can we get the Secretary of State to explain that from the Dispatch Box?

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order. As I explained to the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms), such questions are for political argument in debate. The hon. Lady may care to table questions on the matter or raise it at some stage on the Adjournment.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) did not tell you the whole story when he raised his point of order. The House should be informed. The hour-and-a-half debate on convergence criteria was taken up for the most part by the Conservative Euro-sceptics; the ones who are always blathering about the Common Market, but do very little about it. It is true that when the House divided at the end of the debate, two Labour Front-Bench spokesmen went into the No Lobby faster than me. The Euro-rebels were nowhere near. That is no surprise because Tory Governments took us into the Common Market, got us into the Single European Act and took us through the Maastricht treaty that Labour voted against. We were consistent on Monday night.

Bull Bars (Prohibition)

3.36 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for the prohibition of the use on roads of motor vehicles fitted with bull bars; and for other related purposes.

A year ago there was a terrible accident on the M4, in which a coach crashed and nine people died. The House was shocked and we sought solutions. The Bill is concerned with not nine deaths but—probably—70 deaths, according to figures calculated by the Royal Automobile Club. Those deaths were as a result of not accidents but avoidable tragedies. People are killed because of the special nature of bull bars—rigid objects on the front of cars at the level of a child's head or vital organs, which concentrate and multiply the force of accidents

I am reminded of the way in which the stiletto heel syndrome surprised us in the early 1950s, when holes suddenly appeared in dance halls that had withstood the rigours of dancing for many years. It was discovered that seven-stone ladies pirouetting on stiletto heels became the weight of a fully grown elephant.

The same thing happens when the tiny circumference of a bull bar hits a child's head. Researchers in Germany have proved that if a bull bar on a vehicle travelling as slowly as 12 miles an hour hits a child, the child will certainly die.

Practically every authority—the Automobile Association, the RAC, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, the Pedestrians Association, the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Child Accident Prevention Trust—and anyone with an independent view has condemned bull bars. Some insurance organisations are refusing to insure vehicles with bull bars and others are loading the premiums. All the research scientists who have studied bull bars in Australia, New Zealand, Britain—the most prestigious of all—and Germany have all come out with the same cry of alarm, that bull bars and the solid fronts of vehicles have set the cause of safety back 20 years.

One of the main reasons why the accident rate has been reduced is that crumple zones that absorb the shock of an impact have been developed for cars. It is a myth to believe, as many seem to, that those sitting in cars fitted with bull bars are somehow better protected. They are not. They are, in fact, at greater risk because they themselves are subjected to the force of a collision. They are not cushioned from it by the crumple zone. The only research done on that was in Australia and it shows that if the bars deform in an accident, the driver and any pedestrian involved often suffer serious upper-body injuries.

Progress has been made in the past year. A lady whose name I cannot mention because it is forbidden under our Standing Orders has ordered the removal of bars from all the vehicles in the royal parks. Rather less prestigious but influential people such as Anneka Rice and Roger Cook, who set a bad example in their programmes, have vowed that they will never be filmed again with bull bars on their cars. Hon. Members have reacted splendidly. We can now say with pride that a year ago 20 vehicles in our car park were fitted with bull bars, but in the past six weeks we have become an entirely bull bar-free zone.

There are apologists for bull bars. The manufacturers we can understand. They are speaking on behalf of their products and on behalf of jobs. But they are in a market that is in an inevitable decline and they should diversify into products that increase rather than reduce safety.

Owners of vans often claim that they need such bars because the design of the front of the vehicle leaves them exposed. If that were so, such vehicles would be dangerous and should not be on the roads. However, van drivers have few accidents as a result of such design features. But even if they did, to destroy the crumple zone that absorbs the shock adds to their own dangers. It is not acceptable for drivers to reduce a perceived risk to themselves by increasing the risk to others.

Along with other members of the Select Committee on Transport, I met members of the European Commission yesterday. They were emphatic about their determination to provide a solution. Progress is being delayed because of objections from Finland and Sweden similar to those put forward in Australia. The reason is odd. Australia was worried about kangaroos and Finland and Sweden are worried about reindeer. They call them moose bars. Australia's solution was to have what is called, believe it or not, a shoo-roo—a sound device. The nordic areas need a shoo-moose. There are solutions. In country areas where bull bars are necessary, it is a simple matter to make them demountable.

Our job today is to propel the issue to the top of the agenda. We know how the country and the House react to avoidable tragedies. It is a matter of grief to us that a year ago when the House discussed the matter, all agreed—the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), who is on the Front Bench and every speaker—that bull bars are a fashion accessory, serve no practical purpose and are responsible for at least 70 deaths a year and many hundreds of casualties.

Tragically, nothing has happened since. We can see the issue better, not in terms of physics or statistics, but in terms of human tragedies. The worst tragedy that can affect any of us is the loss of a child. In Melksham, on the last day of term in July, Helen Bags was excited as she ran home from school, and she ran across a road and in front of a Land Rover. According to the doctors and the coroner who examined Helen, her death was attributable to the bull bar attached to the car. Her injuries were on her upper body and lungs. She lived for a number of days after the accident but, tragically, she died. The life of the 10-year-old was destroyed because someone chose to have a bull bar on his car.

Mrs. Ann Bags, Helen's mother—who has energetically campaigned against bull bars since her death—does not blame the driver of the car. However, she blames those of us in this place who have reacted rapidly to introduce legislation after other deaths, such as that of Leah Betts, and to incidents involving children who were attacked by dogs.

Hon. Members have had a great deal of time to consider this legislation. There are at least three ways in which the House can act and use existing legislation to institute a ban on bull bars. If we had acted last year, Helen Bags would still be alive. When one drives, one does not expect to be involved in a collision or to hit a child. However, it can happen to any of us at any time.

[Mr. Paul Flynn]

If a bull bar is fitted to a car, it is more likely that a trivial accident will become a serious accident, and that a serious accident will become a death. Bull bars change ordinary vehicles into child-killing machines. They serve no purpose—they are silly, macho, fashion accessories. People are being killed in the name of fashion.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Paul Flynn, Mr. Jon Owen Jones, Mr. Richard Spring, Ms Jean Corston, Mr. Michael Fabricant, Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, Mr. John Home Robertson, Mr. Nick Ainger, Mr. Andrew Miller and Mr. David Hanson.

Bull Bars (Prohibition)

Mr. Paul Flynn accordingly presented a Bill to provide for the prohibition of the use on roads of motor vehicles fitted with bull bars; and for other related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 29 March and to be printed. [Bill 60.]

Orders of the Day

Security Service Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 1

Powers of Police Complaints Authority

' .—(1) Nothing in this Act shall preclude or limit investigations by the Police Complaints Authority in respect of any actions undertaken by or on behalf of police officers in pursuit of activities authorised by this Act.

(2) It shall be the duty of the Police Complaints Authority to ensure that any complaint duly made to it by any person in respect of activities carried out in support of the police under the provisions of this Act by officers of the Security Service is forwarded for investigation by the Tribunal appointed under the Security Service Act 1989, which shall report to the Police Complaints Authority on the conclusions of any such investigation.'.—*[Mr. Beith.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.47 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I question whether we should proceed with this Bill and the new clauses and amendments today in the aftermath of Friday's terrible bombing. I do not want terrorists to imagine that there will be any let-up in the security and intelligence efforts directed against them; nor do I want the public to feel that there will be any transfer of resources to the detriment of the right against terrorism, upon which they depend for their protection. If there is any resource or manpower in the security service which could be effectively used to reduce the risk of further bombing being carried out, it must be used.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the situation has undoubtedly changed since Second Reading and the Committee stage, in which we both took part? At this stage we do not know whether the tragic bombing of last Friday is a one-off or whether terrorism will be renewed on a sustained basis. In those circumstances, would it not be better for this Bill to be delayed until we know whether the IRA intends to continue its terrorist campaign against this country?

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman anticipates what I was about to say, which is that that was the argument I put to the Prime Minister and the Minister of State in an exchange on the wireless yesterday. It is open to the Government to let the Bill proceed to the statute book, suitably amended, and not to bring it into practical effect. I suspect that that is what may happen if any of the resources are needed in the fight against terrorism.

There are still some problems with the Bill with which the new clause attempts to deal and, because of that, it would have been advantageous to proceed in that way. There is less of a rush to put on the statute book the facility to deal with organised crime if the resources may be needed to deal with terrorism in the mean time.

We are talking about relatively few people. It has been argued during discussions on the Bill that only about 15 people may be effectively transferred from security work to work against organised crime. Nobody should imagine

that we are talking about large numbers. However, it would have been advantageous in improving the Bill if we had not proceeded today and, at the same time, it would have given a clear signal to terrorists and the public that there will be no let-up in the efforts against terrorism. The Government came to a different conclusion, so it is right to try to ensure that the Bill is in the form that it should be. The new clause is directed precisely to that effect.

The new clause illustrates a number of respects in which the Bill does not relate properly to the existing work and structures of the police. The new clause relates to the police complaints machinery. The nature of the problem is illustrated when one realises that the National Criminal Intelligence Service, which is a police agency—although it is run by the Home Office by a chief constable seconded for the purpose—does not exist in statute. The Government have already had to resort to a formula to refer to the National Criminal Intelligence Service. They have had to incorporate an amendment which refers to "a chief constable", it being understood that that chief constable would be the head of the National Criminal Intelligence Service. It is one of the results of proceeding with the Bill without first sorting out the national structures and arrangements of the police service. It is one of the things that could have been done if progress on the Bill had been deferred.

In response to the intervention from the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), I must say that it would be unwise to assume that what happened on Friday was a one-off event. I am sure that all the security organisations—the police, the Army and the security services—are working and must work on the assumption that there are terrorists waiting to strike with further atrocities at any time. It is on that basis that we should all conduct our security arrangements.

On Second Reading we tabled a reasoned amendment which specified a number of respects in which we thought that the Bill was seriously deficient and should be put right. We argued that it must make express provision for the police to retain the lead in the fight against crime. We argued that the activities of the Security Service in that area should be subject to police authorisation and that there should be a new and uniform system of warrants to control interventions on property by either the Security Service or the police. We argued for clear arrangements for the national co-ordination of the police and Security Service and for clear arrangements for accountability and the consideration of complaints by the public. There were four points of criticism.

It is unusual to be able to say that two of those points were met in Committee. I recognise that the Government have responded to those criticisms and that the Bill has been improved significantly. However, two points of criticism remain and they both fall to be considered. One is the issue of warrants and the other is covered by the new clause, which is how the public can complain.

There is already an established machinery for complaints against the police. Not everybody is satisfied with it, but it is in extensive use and is provided for in statute. It is based on the existence of a Police Complaints Authority which supervises investigations carried out by police forces.

There is a different system for complaints against the Security Service, which involves a tribunal and a commissioner. There has been no attempt so far during discussions on the Bill to explain how those provisions can be matched up or how they will relate to each other.

Justice, the well-known human rights organisation run by eminent lawyers, said in its representations:

> "A complaint against the security service is dealt with by a closed tribunal hearing that gives no reasons for its decision and is statutorily exempt from judicial review proceedings. By contrast, a complaint against the police is dealt with by the Police Complaints Authority which results in a public report with reasons and may be subject to judicial review proceedings.
>
> As importantly, police officers may be sued for damages for illegal conduct and abuse of their powers. This form of judicial redress will not be available to victims of misconduct by security service officials."

How are we to match those two systems or ensure that the general public know to whom to complain when they find that some action by the Security Service, in pursuit of this legislation, results in damage or harm, whether through carelessness, abuse of power or excess of zeal?

The position is further complicated by the fact that the Security Service's main partner in dealing with organised crime—the body that will task it—is the National Criminal Intelligence Service. It is staffed by police officers, but a police officer, while at the National Criminal Intelligence Service, is not subject to Police Complaints Authority procedure. If a complaint is made as a result of an action taken by an officer who is working at the National Criminal Intelligence Service, he has to be sent back to the force from which he was seconded. Action can take place there and the Police Complaints Authority can become involved. The situation of NCIS is not entirely satisfactory and is complicated to manage.

What will happen if, in a joint operation against organised crime involving the police, NCIS and the Security Service, something goes wrong? A member of the public may be adversely affected, or believe that he has been adversely affected, and so make a complaint. Perhaps that person will go to the Police Complaints Authority. The authority will say, "Oh well, the individual concerned was not a police officer. He may have been a member of the Security Service, in which case you may have to make a complaint using the Security Service Tribunal and the Security Service Commissioner." But the member of the public may be completely unaware. He may just assume that the person concerned is a police officer and he will not know where to go.

That assumption is even more likely if the Security Service uses police cover to avoid identification of its personnel. It is in the nature of the Security Service that it cannot have its personnel readily identified because otherwise its ability to do a wide range of its important work would be fatally compromised. The Security Service might not be at all anxious for it to be known that one of the personnel involved in the operation is "one of theirs". That will not be apparent to the general public who will not, therefore, have obvious recourse to a proper complaints procedure.

The ultimate complication would be to have in one and the same operation, as is quite likely to happen, police officers from a local force, somebody who has been seconded to the National Criminal Intelligence Service and somebody from the Security Service. The complaint may land on the desk of the Police Complaints Authority,

[Mr. Beith]

which may say, "We have a complicated situation here. We shall have to pass on the complaint against the Security Service chap to the Security Service Tribunal. We will institute complaint procedures, involving the chief constable of the force concerned, in the case of the local police force officers. We shall have to get the head of NCIS to send its man back to his force, wherever that is, to get an investigation instigated there." At that stage, it may not even be clear which of the officers concerned is properly the subject of complaint. The whole mechanism will have to be cranked into action in all three directions even though only one of the officers involved may appropriately be the subject of investigation.

The system is extremely untidy and does not adequately protect the public. I do not think that I am disclosing anything to Ministers by saying that the Police Complaints Authority does not know quite how complaints will be handled and is far from comfortable with the proposed system.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): If Security Service officials, acting under the instructions of the chief constable, misbehave in some way, cannot a complaint be levelled against the chief constable, given that he is responsible for those officials?

Mr. Beith: Not in those circumstances. The Security Service officials will not act under the direction of a chief constable. They will act under the Director-General of the Security Service, carrying out a function that the National Criminal Intelligence Service has agreed can be carried out. It is hoped that under the proposed arrangements, NCIS will have alerted the chief constable of the area concerned, if it is feasible to do so and if it is not an operation that involves many force areas, with people moving about quickly. It will not, however, be directly under the direction of any chief constable of any region. That route to complaining and accountability will, as I understand the Bill, not be available.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): The right hon. Gentleman seems to suggest that Security Service personnel involved under the instruction of the police in these activities would act in similar ways to police officers. We were told by the Home Secretary and others in Committee that, in the battle against organised crime, those personnel would bring skills—in desk analysis, intelligence and all the rest of it—that were not widely available to the police. Does he envisage that a large number of Security Service personnel will be involved in what we might more properly describe as normal policing operations with regard to organised crime?

4 pm

Mr. Beith: No, but that does not mean that Security Service personnel will not be involved in situations that also involve police officers and that could give rise to a complaint. That could happen in a wide variety of circumstances. They include eavesdropping activity, in which both Security Service and police personnel were present, and similar activity undertaken as part of an inquiry agreed with the police but where the police were not present. There has been speculation in the press that, in some circumstances, the Security Service might seek to destabilise some criminal conspiracy. People familiar with police complaints procedure have suggested to me that that could easily generate complaints to the Police Complaints Authority which would turn out to be more appropriate to the Security Service tribunal. Is there some risk that the complaint will fall between the two and will not be adequately investigated?

Under the Bill, Security Service personnel will not arrest people or undertake such normal police operations, but many sorts of complaint can arise from the other level of work in which they would be involved—even analysis. An individual might wish to complain if information were being gathered and put together in a way that, because of its incompetence and carelessness, was seriously damaging to him. That could lead to questions at his place of work and many problems when the operation became known, even though it was a mistake—the individual had nothing to do with it. At no level can we preclude the possibility of a complaint being made. At some levels complaints are likely to take place.

We must get this matter right. The Bill does not deal with it properly. I hope that the Government will give some careful thought to how the issues can be resolved, not least so that the Police Complaints Authority and the Security Service Tribunal have some guidance on how to approach the matter. The Bill's provisions may initially involve a small number of people, but it introduces a significant change from a system in which policing activity is undertaken only by accountable police forces, with a structure of discipline and accountability and a well-known procedure for complaints.

Into that world, especially in relation to organised crime, will come a small element of an organisation that, because of the nature of much of its work in fighting terrorism and foreign intelligence, must operate in secret. Some public protections surround that organisation too, but they are not the same and they were not designed to cover the circumstances that arise in dealing with crime and with the greater contact with the public that such activities against crime could bring about.

We cannot put such a Bill on the statute book without ensuring that there is proper accountability and a proper procedure for the public's complaints to be dealt with in a fair and efficient way. So far, that has not been done.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I am sorry that I cannot agree with the suggestions of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). In proposing that the Bill should be set aside, he gave the reason why we supported the Bill in the first place. We believe that resources need to remain available for the fight against terrorism, but we all hope that peace will prevail.

Being able to move resources from terrorism to crime, and back again if circumstances so require, is just the way to create the necessary flexibility. We should certainly give out no signal that the resources to defeat terrorism will be moved away; nor should we give the slightest succour to those who hope that peace has ended by abandoning this Bill. We need to make sure that the lines between the usual work of MI5 and its work in support of the police are clearly drawn. Moving precipitately in either direction would be to risk the very dangers of which the right hon. Gentleman spoke.

We dealt with a number of serious issues in Committee, and it is fair to say that we made considerable progress there. There was agreement on the central role of the police in setting the tasks for the Security Service. Although a definition in law is difficult, we agreed that we were all in favour of using the Security Service to deal with serious and organised crime. The problem resembles that of the elephant: it is easy to recognise but difficult to define. Thirdly, we were very keen on putting systems in place to guarantee transparency and accountability.

It became clear in Committee that hon. Members shared a common will to make progress. In some debates, it was clear that we shared a common aspiration but experienced some difficulty in giving legislative form to the precise definitions that we wanted. Such flexibility led to the introduction of this piece of legislation in the first place. This place was shown at its best during our Committee debates; Members tried to come up with solutions, not problems. Sometimes the Opposition merely point out problems in Government legislation, and the Government content themselves with giving reasons why they will not accept our amendments. But this was an unusual case. We hope that some of the issues will be given further clarification today, on the record in *Hansard*; I am content to record the fact that our debates in Committee were healthy and positive.

With only minor modifications, the Minister accepted Labour's proposed mechanism to ensure that a chief officer of police sets the task, agrees the system and in effects acts as the guardian at the gate—an important step forward. So, too, is the understanding that the resources of the Security Service are to be used only in respect of what we would all recognise as serious, organised crime.

Another issue that we raised concerned accountability and how complaints should be dealt with. The Security Service has a separate system for dealing with complaints. It cannot by any stretch of the imagination be described as transparent in the way that the police complaints system can be. I hasten to add that I do not regard the police complaints system as wholly satisfactory. Like most constituency Members, I regard it with something of a jaundiced eye. Still, it is transparent and accountable, and this House is ultimately responsible for it.

I am not sure that the mechanism suggested in the new clause is the right one. In Committee, we suggested other ways of dealing with accountability procedures. They might be dealt with by the House at an appropriate stage, so that the Home Secretary and others concerned with these issues can learn from the experience, instead of having to judge everything in advance. It is certainly important to give members of the public who want a complaint investigated a way of having it investigated in a manner that is not obscure or closed to them.

I therefore hope that, in response to our debates, here and in Committee, the Minister will be willing to assure us that the Government intend to enable proper complaints to be properly investigated. I hope, too, that these matters will be kept under review, and that a means of keeping the House informed will be searched for and found.

Dr. Godman: I promise to be brief. Unfortunately, I did not receive an invitation to serve on the Committee.

Mr. Michael: We missed my hon. Friend.

Dr. Godman: I am sure that I was deeply missed, especially by the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Penrith and the Border (Mr. Maclean).

I have considerable sympathy for new clause 1. I have spoken to a couple of senior police officers about the need for assistance from MI5 in the pursuit of serious criminals. I regret to say that in the west of Scotland there are a few individuals who actively engage in trafficking arms to Northern Ireland. When I was a member of the review committee at Edinburgh prison at Saughton, I interviewed in a period of six months three men who were being assessed for parole and had been gaoled for running munitions to Northern Ireland. They had rightly received heavy sentences.

At a recent High Court hearing in Scotland, a prominent member of a loyalist paramilitary organisation, who will be known to some hon. Members, was rightly gaoled for 10 years for trafficking in arms. The Strathclyde police force job did an excellent job in tracking him and his henchmen down and bringing them to the High Court. The police officers to whom I have spoken would welcome any assistance from intelligence officers in tracking down criminals of that sort.

At the same time, how can innocent people make what they and perhaps their legal advisers believe to be legitimate complaints against harassment by intelligence officers, however laudable their objectives in tracking down criminals, especially of the sort that I have described? The rights of individuals who may, through mistaken identity, suffer harassment by intelligence officers are important. What redress do they have? What grievance procedure is there through which to pursue a legitimate complaint against such harassment? The Minister must come to the Dispatch Box and answer that question.

I am four square behind the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) in saying that, especially with the crimes to which I have referred, police should be assisted by intelligence officers where appropriate. However, such investigations must be always under the command of the appropriate chief constable.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): This has been a short but important debate. Let me make it clear from the outset that the bomb in London docklands was a cowardly and outrageous act, and that the search for peace in Northern Ireland must and will go on, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear.

The resumption of terrorist violence has implications for the Security Service, which will have to allocate its resources in the light of the demands that are placed upon it. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary made it clear on Second Reading that the Security Service's serious crime work would depend on resources being available for it. It is essential that the service retains the flexibility to respond to sudden demands in respect of any of its functions. The Government still believe that this measure should be enacted. There has been agreement that organised crime is a menace to society.

There has been agreement that the Security Service can bring valuable skills to bear in combating that menace, in support of the law enforcement agencies. The resources that the service will be able to devote to its new function

[Mr. David Maclean]

will depend on a variety of factors, but I think that it would be wrong for us to deny ourselves the option of using the service's capability against serious crime as and when it can make a contribution.

4.15 pm

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) spoke of the signal that could be given. We can certainly give a signal, as we have over the past few days, that no stone will be left unturned in the search for those responsible for last Friday's outrage. The Security Service will continue to do all that it can to bear down on terrorism. I would be worried about the signal that would be given if we did not proceed with the Bill, which has been programmed into the parliamentary calendar.

The IRA has already given a signal that it is afraid of the ballot box and of elections. The House of Commons works on the basis of the ballot box and elections. The Bill has received all-party support, has proceeded through Committee smoothly with all-party support and was scheduled to proceed through its remaining stages today. I fear that, if we abandoned it today because one bomb went off in London on Friday night, we would send a message that the IRA commanded the House's agenda, rather than elected Members of Parliament.

Mr. Winnick: Surely it would not be giving in to the IRA any more than we have in the past 25 years to say, in effect, that the intelligence and security services should always be willing to devote all their energies, as circumstances demand, to fighting terrorism. Such action would in no way conflict with the attempt to continue the peace process in Northern Ireland—far from it—but the fact remains that the position has changed somewhat since the period of the ceasefire. We do not know whether the IRA intends to continue a sustained campaign of murder and atrocities. In those circumstances, most people would think it sensible for all the energies of the Security Service to be used to fight terrorism.

Mr. Maclean: I thought that I had made it clear that the energies of the Security Service have been, are being and will continue to be used to combat terrorism. The hon. Gentleman seems to be labouring under a misapprehension. If the Bill would involve a huge transfer of resources from the Security Service into the handling of organised crime—resources that would then not be available to combat terrorism—I would agree with him, but that is not the case.

Mr. Winnick: I did not say that.

Mr. Maclean: That is how I interpreted the hon. Gentleman's remarks. I am not trying to put words into his mouth. Let me reassure him that it is perfectly safe for us to proceed with the Bill, on the basis that the Security Service has valuable resources. Although some of those resources could be used to fight organised crime, that would not deflect the Security Service from its leading role in combating terrorism.

I appreciate that new clause 1 stems from a desire for greater public accountability in the operation of the Security Service. That wish is understandable, but it would be a mistake to assume that, just because the Security Service will be acting in support of the police—as well as other law enforcement agencies—the same systems of accountability should apply to both bodies.

Sir Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): The Association of Chief Police Officers raised five key points in a paper which has, I believe, been circulated. I shall not go into the details, but will my right hon. Friend assure me that he has taken them into consideration?

Mr. Maclean: I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. I believe that he is referring to the five key principles that were the basis of the agreement between the police and other law enforcement agencies and the Security Service. We have stated publicly—and I believe that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has said it in the House—that those five key principles have been taken into account, and amendments that we made in Committee have ensured that they are incorporated in the Bill even more explicitly.

I consider the new clause misguided, because it attempts to graft part of the accountability arrangements for police officers on to members of the Security Service. The Police Complaints Authority can investigate only complaints against police officers; the Security Service Tribunal can investigate only complaints against members of the Security Service. Those procedures work very well in their separate contexts. The procedures of the tribunal are carefully tailored to provide rigorous, independent oversight without compromising the service's operational effectiveness by revealing sensitive information, or, indeed, by revealing whether the service has been involved, where that is not necessary.

Any person—this will be of interest to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman)—can complain to the tribunal about anything that he or she believes the Security Service has done to that person or to his or her property. That person can be an individual or an organisation, and a complaint about a person's property may include the place where he or she resides or works. Any complaint that is not trivial or vexatious will be examined. For complaints relating to action against property, the tribunal will involve the commissioner. The tribunal and commissioner have full powers to call on any official documents or information that they may need. All members of the tribunal are senior members of the legal profession. That is an important safeguard and it should not be taken lightly.

Dr. Godman *rose—*

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South) *rose—*

Mr. Maclean: I give way first to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the Minister for showing his characteristic courtesy to me. He knows that my experience of tribunals relates to social security and medical tribunals. If there is a right of appeal against the tribunal's decision, how many cases were upheld in recent times?

Mr. Maclean: There is no right of appeal against the tribunal's decision. It was set up to be the final court of appeal in investigating these matters. The number of cases is on record, and I shall need to refresh my memory of it.

I now give way to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin).

Mr. Mullin: Further to the point that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), will the Minister remind the House, so that we may know how seriously we should take the tribunal, how many complaints the tribunal upheld?

Mr. Maclean: The tribunal has not upheld any complaints of abuse by the Security Service. That is testimony to the fact that the Security Service has behaved properly, and the tribunal has not found any cause for complaint. It seems that the hon. Gentleman and I reach different conclusions from that fact. He obviously thinks that there is some cause to see something sinister or to suspect. It is a cause of pride that the machinery has worked well.

What of operations when the Security Service is acting in support of the police? It is not a new development for the service to be working closely with law enforcement agencies. That already happens under the service's existing functions, particularly in relation to counter-terrorism, counter-proliferation and counter-espionage. There is no reason, therefore, why new disciplinary procedures should be introduced for the service's new function. It would not be sensible for members of the service to be subject to different disciplinary procedures for work under different functions when the distinction between, for example, terrorism and organised crime may be extremely blurred. Furthermore, if a different procedure came into play in relation to a particular function, that could be exploited to reveal information about the basis for the service's inquiries into a particular target.

It may help hon. Members if we consider what will happen in practice. If a potential complainant suspects the involvement of the Security Service, he or she can complain direct to the tribunal. That is the same as now and the procedure is straightforward. I assume that it is more likely that the complainant will not know where to direct his or her complaint. In those circumstances, the complainant is most likely to go to the police. If the complaint consists of an alleged criminal offence, the police are the appropriate point of contact. Members of the Security Service are subject to the law, and if a criminal offence has been committed, the police will investigate.

I accept that it is difficult to think of a scenario in which the Security Service will be so up front that a complaint is likely, but if, say, misconduct occurs during surveillance—for example, assault—the police will record a complaint relating to the conduct of the operation and will then investigate. As I said, members of the Security Service are not above the law.

Every police force in the country has been sent a leaflet explaining the role of the tribunal and has been provided with forms to submit complaints. The tribunal intends to revise its leaflet to take account of the present Bill and to reissue it to every force.

Mr. Beith: I thank the Minister for making that clear. He is dealing with precisely the situation that worries me. If somebody complains to a police force and is unaware that the Security Service is involved and it becomes clear to the police that it was a Security Service matter, will the police tell the complainant that the Security Service is involved and direct him to the tribunal? What will the police response be and how will the complainant know what is happening to his complaint?

Mr. Maclean: As I understand the present position, the police will investigate. If the matter does not concern a police officer, the police will inform the person that there is no case to answer in the context of any of their people and will give the complainant the leaflet that I described, pointing him in the direction of other sources to which he can make a complaint.

Mr. Beith: This is a crucial issue. Does that mean that the police will disclose to the complainant, although they might not wish to do it, that the Security Service was involved in the operation? When they tell the complainant that a police officer was not involved, will they give him any idea at all of the person to whom he should complain?

Mr. Maclean: I understand that that would not be the usual procedure. It is difficult to deal with individual circumstances and hypothetical cases. In all operations, it is important to protect the integrity of the Security Service, but at the same time the police have a duty to use the complaints machinery. The solution that has been adopted of the Security Service designing new information leaflets for every police force in the country, one of which will be given to a complainant who has drawn a blank against a police officer, should be sufficient to ensure that nobody comes up against a brick wall. Currently, people have a right to complain to the Security Service Tribunal and they can complain to the Police Complaints Authority. Those two separate avenues will continue. Whether in the context of terrorism at the moment or of organised crime operations in future, any person with a complaint will still have the same two avenues.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I am following the right hon. Gentleman's argument with care. I understand, as I think does the House, that it would not be consistent with practice for the name of a Security Service officer to be given to a complainant. I should like this to be clear. Is the Minister saying that, if there was a joint operation in the unusual circumstances that he describes and the police were satisfied that a complaint did not relate to their officers, information would be given to the complainant in the form of the leaflet, which palpably draws the attention of the complainant to the fact that the complaint, if it is to be directed at anybody, is to be directed at members, albeit unnamed, of the Security Service? That must be the implication of giving a complainant the leaflet that the Minister describes.

Mr. Maclean: The leaflet not only contains information on the Security Service Tribunal but deals with the tribunals that were established under the Interception of Communications Act 1985 and the Intelligence Services Act 1994. The complainant is given a comprehensive list of alternative avenues for possible complaint. The end result is that a complainant is not left without someone to complain to. He may not be happy with the outcome, just as some people are not happy with the Police Complaints Authority procedure or with

[Mr. Maclean]

Security Service Tribunal procedures. Nevertheless, the aggrieved complainant will not fall through a net because of a joint operation.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Does the Minister regard the police as having a duty to hand over the forms without explanation, or is there simply a possibility of them doing that? As he rightly says, such action would lead the complainant to a likely conclusion.

Mr. Maclean: I would regard that as a duty. If someone comes to the police with a complaint, they have a duty to investigate it unless it is totally frivolous or vexatious. If mechanisms such as the Security Service Tribunal and others have been set up, the police have a duty to pass on the relevant information to the complainant.

Mr. Corbett: This is a serious matter, and the Minister is taking it seriously. The new clause envisages that other agencies apart from the Security Service could be involved. What happens when a complainant thinks that the Security Service was involved in an incident, but finds out that it was in fact Customs and Excise? Will there be a leaflet listing that service as one of the options? Such a situation could arise in drugs cases, for example.

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point, and I shall certainly consider that possibility. The police may find it helpful to ensure that any complainant who is not their direct responsibility has sufficient information on all possible avenues. It may be that Customs and Excise is already producing a leaflet, but I shall certainly look into that. I see no harm in taking on board the hon. Gentleman's suggestion—if that has not already been done—as it fits in with the principle that I described. If the police are unable to go further because it was not one of their officers, they can issue sufficient leaflets to point complainants in the appropriate direction.

4.30 pm

The process that I have described is not dissimilar to the standard procedure for complaints against police officers. Complaints must be submitted in the first instance to the local police force. If it is the responsibility of the chief officer to investigate the complaint, he must decide with reference to statutory guidelines whether the complaint should be referred to the Police Complaints Authority for supervision of the investigation. Only then does the PCA become involved.

To sum up, the PCA and the Security Service Tribunal have extremely important roles to play, but they carry out their roles in different ways that are appropriate to the organisations that they oversee. The accountability arrangements for the Security Service inevitably have to take some account of the organisation's need for secrecy, while ensuring that members of the public are protected. Similarly, the unique powers granted to police officers require appropriate controls to ensure that they are not abused. I believe that the present methods for dealing with complaints are sufficient, and I do not believe that we should confuse the two by attempting to amalgamate them. While I listened carefully to what the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed said, I am afraid that I was not convinced by it.

Mr. Beith: I am sorry that the Minister does not think that the new clause would be a good way of dealing with the problem, and I would submit that it does not do as he suggested. The new clause does not provide an alternative system of discipline, nor does it amalgamate the two procedures. It simply asserts that the existing procedures of the Police Complaints Authority are unaffected in so far as they relate to anything done by police officers under the Bill. I take it that he confirmed in his reply that that was the case, and that he feels that that part of the new clause may be unnecessary.

The new clause goes on to provide a mechanism by which the PCA would pass on complaints to be dealt with by the Security Service mechanisms if a matter turned out to involve a Security Service officer. A report would be produced so that the complainant could see that the complaint had been attended to. The new clause does not make it clear what the body then has to tell the complainant, and that leads us into a difficulty to which I shall come.

The Minister focused precisely on a situation about which I am more than a little concerned. The complainant, having assumed that the police were responsible—accidentally, or because of carelessness or excessive zeal—for disrupting his home, causing his suitability for employment to be put into question or physically interfering with him in some way during an operation makes a complaint to the police machinery. He may suspect that there has been Security Service involvement or he may not; but it turns out that Security Service personnel were involved, and the police reply to him that no police officer was found in the investigation to have been involved in what went wrong. "Here is a leaflet," they will say, "which may be of assistance to you."

It is the practice not to identify the involvement of the Security Service in an operation in order to protect its activities. I understand that, and that makes me somewhat sympathetic to what the Minister is saying. But, perversely, that is precisely the effect achieved. When a complainant receives a leaflet, he will wonder why it has been sent to him. If no police officer was involved, his complaint must be sent to the Security Service Tribunal.

The only answer to this problem—as suggested by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett)—is for the Minister to ensure that not just one leaflet is sent, but several. There will be a selection of leaflets on the Security Service machinery, Customs and Excise—which, incidentally, does not have any machinery for complaints against its officers—the Inland Revenue, the General Synod of the Church of England, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and just about anybody else. The complainant will be told, "Sift through these and you may find that it is worth exploring one of those avenues, but we are not in a position to tell you which one."

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): I hope that we will not involve such sinister organisations as the Church of England.

I invite the right hon. Gentleman to speculate on the role of an intelligence officer who participates in a surveillance operation with a colleague who is a police

officer. It is a golden recipe for muddle and confusion. Those two officers, who will be conducting a joint operation, will be subject to quite different codes of discipline. One is fairly overt, with the police officer being subject to the police complaints procedure, but the other protects the intelligence officer with a great panoply of secrecy, with the tribunal and the commissioner as the very last resort.

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that that is a recipe for great mischief? Would it not be better for both officers to be subject to precisely the same discipline while part of a police joint operation? Should they not both be subject to the police complaints procedure?

Mr. Beith: I would have preferred just that solution. Indeed, the position described by the hon. Gentleman is dealt with not only in this new clause, but in amendment No. 1, which deals with the different warranting procedures that should apply in an eavesdropping operation. We will deal with that amendment later. The hon. Gentleman implied a transfer of personnel, which is not the route chosen by the Government in the Bill. In principle, I would have preferred that, although it removes the ability to switch resources between the various activities in which the Security Service is involved.

There is a dilemma. If we are not careful, we will create a situation in which anyone will be able to find out whether the Security Service has been involved in an operation against him—simply by submitting a complaint and waiting for the appropriate leaflets to arrive. That may be a slow process and the complainant may not find out what he wants to know for 12 months or so—but when he gets the leaflets, he will know.

The complainant will receive information and he will be invited to consider whether he wishes to use the complaints machinery of any of several organisations. I do not think that that is a good solution. It would have been better to give the Police Complaints Authority some responsibility for satisfying itself on that point. After all, it could inquire whether the Security Service was involved, pursue the complaint and then go back to the complainant—as it would with any genuine complaint—and say that not only did no police officer act improperly but that it was satisfied that no officer of any other agency was involved. The complainant would not then need to go elsewhere, because the PCA would have been able to establish that fact and relay it to the complainant, without providing an easy route by which a complainant could find out whether the Security Service was involved.

I do not think that some aspects of this matter have been sufficiently thought through. I do not have total confidence in the form that I have chosen, although, having listened to the debate, I genuinely believe that it is better than the leaflet procedure. I invite the Minister to consider it further before the Bill gets to the other place. Perhaps there could be further discussion with the PCA and the Security Service Tribunal and commissioner to find a way to ensure that there is no hole into which matters could fall and that the whole thing does not simply become a device through which a damaging disclosure could occur.

At the same time, the public need to be sure that they will not be led a dance and that, if there is a proper complaint, it will be directed to wherever it can best be properly investigated. At the end of the day, the public need to be satisfied that, in so far as the complaints bodies are effective, the complaint has been examined and found to be either justified or not justified. We are not yet at that point. I wonder if the Minister can tell me—perhaps in an intervention—whether he is prepared to examine the implications of that. It is an important issue, and I will happily give way to him if he is prepared to deal with it. We have not yet reached a satisfactory conclusion.

Mr. Maclean: I may not have described a solution in such a manner that the right hon. Gentleman has been convinced, but I cannot see any alternative to it. It may be that those in the other place will find refinements to add to it, but we shall have to consider those when we see the proposed amendments. The only solution that the right hon. Gentleman suggested, which he himself then rejected, would mean transferring resources to the police service and giving Security Service personnel the offices and duties of a constable so that they would be subject to the police complaints machinery. That would entail the loss of the current tremendous flexibility. That is the only alternative of which I can think; we have rejected it, as has the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Beith: That alternative was suggested by the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason), or it was implicit in the criticism that he made, and I have considered it. However, there are other arguments against taking that course. I have suggested to the Minister—formally in the new clause and less formally in what I have been telling him—that permitting the Police Complaints Authority to have a role in ensuring that a complaint is processed right the way through will ensure that the involvement of Security Service personnel will not serve as a route by which members of the public are simply fobbed off and not provided with the certainty that their complaints are being dealt with.

That would ensure that members of the public were not left in the position in which a hint was dropped to them that it might be worth complaining to the Security Service or some other, unspecified body, and the public would at least have some assurance that there was a body with the power and capacity to check whether that really was the case and to direct the complaint appropriately.

I do not think that the Minister has responded satisfactorily to my argument. That matter remains a serious problem in the Bill, and I shall therefore press the new clause.

Mr. Allason: I invite my right hon. Friend the Minister to examine one loophole in the existing arrangement. If there is a joint operation and an individual makes a complaint to the Security Service Tribunal, it is possible that, under the current legislation, had that individual been the subject of a Security Service file that existed before December 1989, neither the tribunal nor the commissioner could investigate the complaint.

There could, therefore, be circumstances in which an individual feels that he has a legitimate complaint and the complaint cannot be directed to the police complaints procedure. The complaint should properly be directed towards the Security Service commissioner or the tribunal, but, because that person had become the subject of a Security Service file before the passage of the Security Service Act 1989, the Security Service Tribunal would of course decline to conduct an investigation.

[Mr. Allason]

The loophole has consistently been in operation. Many people can put different interpretations on the fact that the tribunal and the commissioner have not upheld a single complaint since 1989 and have not disclosed the number of complaints which have been made to them, but I am concerned that the loophole will disadvantage a great many people.

The potential for muddle between both disciplines in a joint operation is considerable. I should remind the House of the events that took place in Northern Ireland when there was precisely such an overlap. It occurred at the beginning of the Stalker affair, when there was a Security Service surveillance operation on a barn in which some suspects were shot dead by the RUC. The House will recall that John Stalker was invited to investigate the matter and it was discovered that, in a clandestine surveillance operation, the Security Service had taped all the events that took place on the day of the shooting, including conversations between the RUC officers involved.

Thereafter, the tapes of those recordings went missing. John Stalker became very aggravated about what took place and Colin Sampson subsequently conducted an inquiry and recommended that two security officers should be prosecuted for perverting the course of justice. The House will also recall that, quite properly, the decision was taken that it was not in the public interest to proceed with those prosecutions.

The reason why I cite that case is that it is a classic example of overlap and confusion between two services and two disciplines in separate organisations, operating in extremely difficult circumstances. Indeed, one can scarcely imagine more difficult circumstances. We may be able to debate such issues in a calm and relaxed atmosphere, but while attempting to execute a warrant for the interference of property, adrenalin runs very high.

I find the idea of both officers being subject to totally different disciplines so full of loopholes that I am sure as eggs is eggs that conflict will occur sooner or later and create precisely the problems eventually discovered by John Stalker and Colin Sampson, which were certainly to John Stalker's cost.

4.45 pm

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the Minister for his response to my question. If the proposed leaflet was discussed in Committee, did his officials discuss it with Scottish chief constables?

I am concerned that, while investigating cases such as those I mentioned, about traffic in arms between Scotland and Northern Ireland, an intelligence officer may make inquiries of the employers of suspected persons. In a case of mistaken identity, an innocent employee's job prospects may suffer severely, although I pray to heaven that such cases are very rare. A person could face losing his employment, especially if the case were publicised as much as the recent gaoling of the loyalist paramilitary.

I am not being facetious when I suggest that it might be an idea to give Members copies of leaflets. I am sure that all Members have heard constituents in their surgeries—or advice bureaux or whatever they are called these days—complaining about the local police. In the west of Scotland, an employee who is confronted by an irate employer who has been questioned about an employee's suspected involvement in gun running to Belfast and elsewhere might face dismissal. In those circumstances, the first person he might approach for help would be his local Member of Parliament.

Those are my questions to the Minister. Was the leaflet discussed in Committee? Has it been discussed with chief constables north of the border and, if so, what was their reaction to it? What is likely to happen to those persons whose employers are approached in the cases that I have used by way of illustration?

Mr. Michael: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is an important issue and it has been an interesting short debate. However, it is clear that there are no simple easy answers to the problem. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) accepted that his solution does not do the job, so the House is left without a solution.

The Minister accepted, as we do, that the public should have a simple means of raising an issue that gives rise to concern—one in which they feel they have been threatened, intimidated or otherwise wronged. The means of reaching such an accommodation should be simple. However, there are the reservations to which the Minister rightly referred. We do not want to open the books or destroy the confidentiality of the work of the Security Service.

The idea that every form of discipline should be the same is patently ludicrous. Many professions operate under different types of discipline. That applies even to professions such as barristers and solicitors, which laymen might regard as the same. In my experience, teachers and youth workers work under a different structure of accountability and discipline, but that does not stop them working effectively together.

Perhaps closer and more germane to the issue is what happens when customs and police work together. Obviously, we want them to work together effectively and obviously we want a system that will deal with complaints. At some point, we may come to the question of accountability and complaints in relation to the customs. The House should consider that matter, because the situation is not perfect.

The Security Service has a problem with regard to transparency and accountability in its ordinary work. That is what the tribunal is about. It is not perfect, but it is a means of trying to address complaints. That becomes all the more important when, as a result of the Bill, the Security Service is drawn into joint working with the police and other law enforcement agencies.

The Minister has acknowledged, as we have in Committee and again today, that there is a problem that needs to be addressed. I do not think that there is an instant solution. I hope that in concluding the debate the Minister will agree that this important issue should be kept under scrutiny and that we should seek the best possible way to deal with it.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Surely the difficulty for people such as me is that, by introducing the Security Service into what are traditionally criminal matters, you are importing into our system of policing the apparatus and special legal arrangements, which are

unique in a democracy, of the security services. That is what causes anxiety here. The appeal system or review should be a policing matter, not under the security services.

Mr. Michael: I am sure that neither you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, nor I are importing this into legislation. It is the Government who seek to do so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) said earlier that matters such as trafficking in weapons and the impact of that on his constituency and other parts of Scotland cannot be divided into crime on the one hand and terrorism on the other. We all want such things to be tackled, because they cause problems in our society.

The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) might learn something from reading our debates in Committee, because we were trying then, as now, to tease out the precise definitions that could be put in legislation and Ministers' precise understandings so that both the intention of Parliament and the legislation were clear. That is what we have been endeavouring to achieve during the past few weeks.

These complaints are being made over-complex. Such a complexity currently exists because the Security Service is beginning to assist the police service. I am concerned that unsolved business may exist. In the future, this must be examined in the light of practice and experience. It should not be dismissed—it is a serious matter—but it should not delay the legislation. If the Minister agrees with us on the area of concern to which we should apply our minds in the future, the intention of Parliament will be clear.

Mr. Maclean: I agree with the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael). In the past hour, hon. Members have agonised over hypothetical cases—which we expect to be few and far between—where, for some reason, the Security Service will be involved in a joint operation, will be behind the front line of intelligence gathering and analysis, and will come in contact with a member of the public, and then there is a complaint.

As the hon. Gentleman said, we are currently in that scenario because of the help that the Security Service is giving the Metropolitan police in leading the fight against terrorism in Britain. At the present time, it is possible that members of the public will come up against a member of the Security Service when they think that they are dealing with a police complaint. Those twin tracks exist at the moment. I know that hon. Members would like the Security Service Tribunal machinery to be different, but that is the way it is, and that is what was agreed by the House. There are no plans to change that, nor should we change it just because we are now dealing with organised crime.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) was not a member of the Committee. I am certain that, if he had been a member, every matter relating to Scotland would have been raised, and we could have discussed his honourable career as a red cap. There is no equivalent to the Police Complaints Authority in Scotland—there is different machinery—but the initiating stages are the same: an individual makes a complaint to the local police force and it is the duty of the chief constable to investigate it. That will apply equally in Scotland and in England. We shall ensure that the leaflets have valid currency in Scotland. I shall draw the Security Service's attention to the points that the hon. Gentleman made, but I see no reason for them to be any different to take account of Scotland.

I am not sure whether my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) was correct. The tribunal's remit extends to any inquiries by the Security Service that have been initiated since November 1989—when the tribunal came into being—and any inquiries that were initiated before November 1989 where no decision had been taken to discontinue them in the intervening period. Any investigation by the service that ceased before the tribunal came into being is outside the tribunal's remit—although, in exceptional circumstances, it can pass a complaint to the commissioner. So that I do not delay the proceedings, I shall write a detailed letter to my hon. Friends and place it in the Library.

Mr. Allason *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot make a second contribution. On Report, only the mover of an amendment or a new clause and the Minister responsible may speak twice. All other hon. Members must collect their thoughts and make only one contribution.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 31, Noes 267.

Division No. 54] **[4.58 pm**

AYES

Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Chidgey, David
Corbyn, Jeremy
Dafis, Cynog
Godman, Dr Norman A
Harvey, Nick
Hinchliffe, David
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McCartney, Robert
Maclennan, Robert
Maddock, Diana
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Rendel, David
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Dafydd
Winnick, David

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alex Carlile and
Mr. Archy Kirkwood.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*

Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgld)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wiltshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Derek Conway and
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 5

INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEE AND THE PREVENTION AND DETECTION OF SERIOUS CRIME

'.At the end of section 10 of the Intelligence Services Act 1994 (The Intelligence and Security Committee) there shall be added—

"(8) The power of the Prime Minister referred to in subsection (7) above shall not apply to any matter in the report of the Committee that relates directly to the function of the Security Service as established in section 1(4) of the Security Service Act 1989.".'.—*[Mr. Straw.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Straw: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I do not doubt that the new clause is technically defective. In any event, we tabled it not to secure a vote, but as a vehicle for debate. It raises the issue of the accountability of the Security Service to the Intelligence and Security Committee and then to the House. In the debate on new clause 1, there was discussion about whether the Bill ought to proceed, given the appalling outrage committed by the IRA when it let off its terrorist bomb last Friday. On that issue, I agree entirely with my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth

(Mr. Michael) and the Minister of State: it would be wholly wrong for us to suspend the passage of the Bill as a response to that terrorist outrage.

Part of the public's reaction to that bomb reveals their ambivalence towards the work of the Security Service. In the aftermath of the bomb outrage, some of the newspapers raised the legitimate question of how much the Security Service knew about the possibility of a terrorist bombing. I do not expect the Home Secretary to give an answer to that question; I am making a separate point. Implicit in that question is a demand by the public that the Security Service should be ever vigilant. The public also recognise that, for that vigilance to be maintained, the Security Service has to work secretively and confidentially. There was a demand from both sides of the House, as well as from newspapers of different persuasions, for greater intelligence-gathering and more surveillance to prevent terrorist outrages. That is one instinct of the public.

At the same time, precisely because of the inherently secretive nature of the work of the security services—their work can be of no other nature—there is a natural anxiety that the power that we invest in them should not be abused. The occasions on which it has been abused have been few. The arrangements discussed when we debated the Security Service Act 1989, which have been put in place in recent years, ensure that the possibility of abuse is far smaller than it was before.

Mr. Allason: I remind the hon. Gentleman that, on Second Reading, the Minister said that there was excess capacity in the Security Service and that that was part of the reason why the Bill had been introduced. The hon. Gentleman is now demanding extra vigilance and asking for more officers to be deployed in the task of counter-terrorism. Does he think it appropriate that, within a few days of a bomb going off at Canary wharf, the public are told that the Security Service has excess capacity? Surely the events of the past few days demonstrate that, if there are people in Thames house who are twiddling their thumbs, there is an obvious job for them to do.

Mr. Straw: I cannot recall every last word that the Secretary of State uttered on Second Reading on 10 January. I do not recall his using the phrase "excess capacity"—

Mr. Allason: It was the Minister of State.

5.15 pm

Mr. Straw: I do not recall the Minister of State using the phrase. The record will prove which of our recollections is correct. In any event, there is no argument between us on the next point. As a result not only of the ceasefire—temporary as it has turned out—by the Provisional IRA, but of more profound, long-term changes that have occurred in eastern Europe, it seemed that there might be some resources within the Security Service that could be available for the pursuit of organised crime and in support of the police and other law enforcement agencies.

The Bill is, of course, founded on the fact that, contingent on the work of the Provisional IRA, in the medium term there is the prospect of stability in Northern Ireland and thus a serious judgment can be made about winding down some of the anti-terrorist work of the Security Service. Palpably, that judgment cannot be made today. If the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) reads the debates of 10 January, he will see that Ministers and Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen made the point that we did not know whether the ceasefire was temporary or permanent. It was always anticipated that the attitude of the Provisional IRA would be crucial.

In the debate on new clause 1, my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) spoke about three prisoners who are in Edinburgh prison for running arms and with whom he has had dealings. It was not clear from what he said whether the men had been convicted of a terrorist offence; they had certainly been convicted of a weapons offence. As my hon. Friend implied, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth made clear, in the real world, the dividing line between organised crime and terrorism is difficult to define. We have supported the principle behind the Bill. If there is—this is the phrase used by the hon. Member for Torbay, not mine—excess capacity in the Security Service, it is sensible for it to be deployed in the pursuit of organised crime.

Time is short, given that there is another debate on a separate issue that has to be taken before 10 pm. The Second Reading debate reflected concern across the Chamber that, as the Security Service is to move into a new area of activity, there should be robust arrangements for its accountability. We were assisted in that debate by the report of the Intelligence and Security Committee, which was important in flagging up some of the issues.

We have tabled the new clause to provide an opportunity for the Secretary of State to recognise that it is important that, as the Security Service moves into a new area, the public should be reassured that the service is working as Ministers and Parliament intend. I hope that the Intelligence and Security Committee will produce an early report, once the new work is under way, in which it will discuss its views about how the work has been undertaken.

The new clause also concerns the power of the Prime Minister essentially to censor parts of a report that is produced by the Committee and intended for the eyes of Members of Parliament. All of us understand that there has to be some such mechanism when a scrutiny Committee deals with the work of the intelligence and security services, but I should be glad if the Secretary of State would give an assurance that, although it may sometimes be necessary for operational details that have somehow crept into the draft of the Committee's report to be excised from the public record, Ministers or the Prime Minister do not intend that the Committee's views and judgments about the Security Service's overall work should be the subject of amendment or deletion by Prime Minister.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I regret that Scottish business made it impossible for me to participate, as I might have wished, in the Committee that considered the Bill. Hon. Members who did not go through the heat of the day in Committee have an obligation to be succinct, so I should simply like to ask the Home Secretary the following.

It is not clear to me—perhaps it should be—what the arrangements would be, if the Security Service were used to combat organised crime, in relation to its personnel

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

appearing in court. It is unfair to ask the Secretary of State whether there are any differences between Scotland and England, but perhaps he could ask his Scottish Office colleagues to write to me if any differences exist in the procedures of Scottish courts.

There is a problem, with which I am sure he is all too familiar, of people operating for the service being unable, by the very nature of their role in the service, to be cross-examined in court, as would happen to other witnesses. I leave it at that.

Mr. Winnick: It would be strange if, when debating the Bill, we did not refer, as we have for obvious reasons, to the tragedy that occurred last Friday. I do not recall precisely what the Home Secretary said on Second Reading about MI5's position as a result of the lack—fortunately—of terrorist activity since the ceasefire started, but clearly the position is different now. The House does not know whether there will be more terrorist attacks. We are in the dark, and that is all the more reason why the Security Service should be using all its skills and resources—I am sure that it is—to analyse intelligence and, as far as possible, to give the necessary warnings to the Government about the possibility of future terrorist attacks. That is bound to be MI5's main role.

New clause 5, also, touches on a subject that is sensitive for Parliament. We are dealing with accountability which, inevitably, we discussed on Second Reading and in Committee. I have long taken the view that, for all the Security Service's importance and sensitivity, we should try as far as possible, as happens in other western democracies, to make its work accountable to parliamentary scrutiny. That does not of course include on-going operations—no one suggests that, certainly not me—but there should be a degree of accountability.

To the people who say that some progress has been made by setting up the Intelligence and Security Committee that reports to the Prime Minister, I would say that it is progress, but limited. The situation is different from that in which I and other hon. Members raised the subject in the early 1980s. The Committee consists of parliamentarians who are able to consider various aspects of the intelligence service. It would be wrong of me—however much I believe that parliamentary scrutiny to be limited—simply to write it off. When the Bill was before us, I accepted that it was a form of progress and that it was better than nothing. I said that before the Minister of State was involved.

The Intelligence and Security Committee is not in any sense a Select Committee. It does not report directly to Parliament. It reports only to the Prime Minister, who decides whether certain parts of its report should be deleted before being presented to Parliament. The Committee meets not in a parliamentary building, but in the Cabinet Office. It is officered not by any of the Clerks, but by an official from the Cabinet Office. Undoubtedly, a difference therefore exists between the accountability that we have under the Select Committee system and that under this Committee.

I apologise for missing the first few minutes of the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). We are saying that the added powers that the Bill gives to MI5—those on crime prevention—should be subject to the same parliamentary scrutiny as the police's work.

As I reminded the Committee that considered the Bill, when I served on the Select Committee on Home Affairs from 1979 to 1983, I suggested, and the Conservative majority agreed, which was surprising, that the Select Committee should consider the special branch's work. There was uproar at the time. People outside the Committee, including the then Home Secretary, said that we were undermining the Security Service, which worked closely with special branch, but lo and behold, we considered special branch's work, heard evidence from the police, the Home Secretary and some critics and published a majority-minority report. Special branch continues and, to the best of my knowledge, the Security Service was in no way undermined.

That illustrates the panic that occurs when it is suggested that the work of, for example, special branch or the Security Service should be subject to some degree of parliamentary scrutiny. The accusation is immediately made that we are all against the Security Service and that we are trying to undermine it in every conceivable way. That is nonsense. The Select Committee's consideration of special branch's work illustrates and proves my point.

Labour's proposal makes sense. If we cannot obtain the parliamentary scrutiny that we want of the intelligence and security services—obviously, we will not obtain it now—why not allow the appropriate Select Committee, which outside Scotland would presumably be the Select Committee on Home Affairs, to consider at least the added powers given to MI5 to deal with ordinary crime? After all, it would be a contradiction if the police's work were subject to parliamentary scrutiny by a Select Committee—no Conservative Member, whether on the Front or Back Benches, argues against that, and no one is likely to do so today—and that added aspect of MI5's work, not relating to the main thrust of its work, were not. That is a far more sensible way of going about matters. As the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) said so eloquently, we in Britain seem to be obsessed with secrecy, which does not help the Security Service.

Mr. Beith: Am I misunderstanding the new clause or am I right in thinking that it does not have the effect that the hon. Gentleman describes—of giving Select Committees the opportunity to consider the Security Service's work in this area? Is not its effect rather to preclude the Prime Minister from excluding from the published Intelligence and Security Committee report any item that he thinks would be prejudicial to the Security Service's continued effective operation?

Mr. Winnick: Technically, the right hon. Gentleman is right. I have extended the argument. I suggest simply that, after implementing the new clause—I hope that I am in order. I am just concluding my remarks, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I simply suggest that we set up the appropriate Committee to do precisely what I have described. The new clause goes some way towards that. The Prime Minister would not be in a position to delete any relevant references, but that would not apply to the rest of the work undertaken by MI5.

In Committee, I suggested that the appropriate parliamentary Committee should be able to look at the additional work undertaken by MI5 as a result of the Bill. In the past, I and others have put forward arguments that have been dismissed out of hand. Nevertheless, a

parliamentary Committee with limited powers was eventually set up, and I am sure that the time will come when what I am now urging will be realised—it is just a question of when.

This country has an unfortunate obsession with secrecy—unlike other western democracies that are no less serious about wanting to combat terrorism. The United States, Canada and other countries loathe terrorism just as much as we do, but they adopt a far more mature approach to the work of their security and intelligence services.

5.30 pm

Mr. Allason: New clause 5 assumes a degree of external independence and oversight of the work of the security and intelligence services. Looking at the record to date, I cannot say that I am hugely encouraged. The report directly relevant to this Bill was delayed for six weeks so that it could be published on precisely the same day as the Bill was published—the beginning of the Christmas recess. There was therefore only very limited time for right hon. and hon. Members to examine both documents. If the Committee was truly exercising its independence, perhaps it should have published its document when it was ready, instead of deliberately delaying it so as to be able to publish it on the same day as the Bill.

It is important that there be external scrutiny, because we have heard the Minister of State say today that the objective of the Bill is to allow the Security Service to operate far behind the front line. The "analytical skills" that are apparently to be deployed by the Security Service are, to my mind, a euphemism for running agents. The Security Service has a limited number of powers, skills and technologies. I submit that running agents and handling agents are not far behind the front line: they are right to the fore. This is precisely the interface between the public and the clandestine world which causes so many problems.

Anyone who doubts that there have been problems should take a look at the problem that the Government face tomorrow afternoon. A Security Service informant was supplying information to a handler who may or may not have asked the right questions. That is how the Matrix Churchill affair arose in the first place.

If there is to be agent handling—one of the prime functions of the Security Service and apparently one of its successes—there will have to be external scrutiny of it if the Committee is to have any meaning at all. The Littlejohn brothers believed that they could rob banks because they had the telephone number of a case officer who would get them out of trouble if they were arrested. They went to prison, and rightly so.

Stephen Ward believed that he would be let off the criminal charge that he faced because he had been an agent of the Security Service. Instead, he was left to dangle, and committed suicide. The biggest marijuana dealer in the world managed to wriggle off a charge in this country because he claimed that he had been in touch with the secret intelligence service to supply information about the Provisional IRA.

My point is that the most sensitive and difficult area of Security Service operations is to be found in the very human environment of the relationship between an agent and his handler. This area has created considerable problems in the past. If Paul Henderson is anything to go by, it looks to me as though there may be one or two problems in the future, too. If agent handling is one of the principal occupations and skills of the Security Service, euphemistically referred to as an analytical skill, I repeat: it is not far behind the front line.

I therefore urge the House not just to agree to the new clause but to ensure that the external body which—uniquely—this House has taken the trouble to create, so as to arrange for parliamentary oversight of the Security Service, is encouraged to exercise a little independence, not to mention the proper powers that this House has, again uniquely, conferred on it.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I begin by responding to the references to last Friday night's tragedy and its relationship to the provisions before the House. The House was at its most impressive on Monday when, in a spirit of unity, it expressed its outrage at Friday's events. Since then, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) have suggested that the Bill should be delayed or not proceeded with as a result of what happened on Friday night.

In common with the Minister of State and the Labour spokesman, I believe that that would be the worst possible signal we could give the Provisional IRA. We have said all along that the work of the Security Service against organised crime would depend on the competing demands and resources of the service. Clearly the service will need to reappraise its position in the light of Friday's bomb, but that is no reason to deny ourselves the opportunity to use its capability against the menace of organised crime, as circumstances permit.

The recollection by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) of what was said on this matter on Second Reading is seriously mistaken. Neither I nor the Minister of State said that there was excess capacity in the Security Service. Indeed, in answer to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), I stated:

"if it proves to be the case that some spare resources are available in the Security Service, we should avail ourselves of its particular skills and expertise in the fight against organised crime, which is one of the greatest threats we face."

Towards the end of my speech I added:

"Initially, the number of officers that the service will be able to deploy in pursuit of the new function will be small. The resources that it will be able to devote to that area of its work in future will depend on external circumstances and on the competing demands on its resources. In particular, much will depend on the continuance of the ceasefires in Northern Ireland."—[*Official Report*, 10 January 1996; Vol.269, c.218-25.]

In his wind-up speech, my right hon. Friend made similar observations, but not in the sense wrongly recollected by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay.

I can assure the House that there will be no question of insufficient resources being devoted to the battle against terrorism because of the new function that this legislation will confer on the Security Service. Every effort is being made by the police, with the support of the Security Service and others, to bring to justice those responsible for last Friday night's outrage, and to seek to prevent any

[Mr. Michael Howard]

repetition. It is important to be crystal clear about that. Dealing with the terrorist threat must, and will, remain the top priority of the service.

Mr. Winnick: There may be disagreement about whether, as a result of Friday's tragedy, MI5's resources should be utilised as they presumably are now, before the Bill has become law, but does the Home Secretary accept that those of us who have expressed reservations have not the slightest desire to give in to the IRA and are not panicking because of the IRA attack? We do not know what will happen or whether there will be renewed terrorist threats. Prior to this measure, it was generally assumed that MI5, over the past 25 years, with other security services, had been directing most of its energies to fighting terrorism. I hope that he will not misunderstand the position.

Mr. Howard: I have not sought, and do not seek, to impugn the motives of those who have expressed that view—neither the hon. Gentleman's motives nor those of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed. I differ in my assessment of the nature of the signal that would be sent. It would be the wrong signal, a dangerous one and not that which the House would wish to send.

I have some sympathy with the new clause moved by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and especially with the desire that lies behind it that as much information as possible should be made available to Parliament and to the public. The Government have pursued a policy of much greater openness in regard to the work of the intelligence agencies. Avowing their existence and putting them on a statutory footing was an example of that, as was the creation of the very committed Intelligence and Security Committee to which the new clause refers.

Mr. Dalyell: On the question of openness, could I go back to the question that I asked earlier, or is the Home Secretary is coming to that?

Mr. Howard *indicated assent.*

Mr. Dalyell: If he is coming to it, I shall wait.

Mr. Howard: The Committee reports to the Prime Minister. It is then for the Prime Minister, after consultation with the Committee, to decide whether there are any parts of an ISC report that should, for reasons of sensitivity, not be laid before Parliament. As a matter of policy, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will always seek to publish as much as possible of any ISC report and only withhold information that is genuinely sensitive.

We would certainly expect that it would almost always be possible to publish in full any ISC report, or part of an ISC report, dealing with the new function that the Bill confers on the Security Service. We recognise, as do the movers of the new clause, that such work could be less sensitive than other areas of the work of the service. It follows from what I have said that I can without any difficulty give the hon. Member for Blackburn the assurance that he sought that the sense of any recommendations of the Committee and any observations contained in its report would, of course, be taken extremely seriously.

Nevertheless, it is possible that, in carrying out its function of examining the expenditure, administration and policy of the Security Service in relation to its new function, the ISC may want to deal with sensitive information. It may want to report to the Prime Minister on the implications for the other functions of the service arising from its work against serious crime. It may want to comment on issues of policy arising from on-going investigations or completed cases that had become sub judice. It would be wrong to place the Committee in the position where it was required either to leave important points out of its annual report or to run the risk of putting sensitive information into the public domain.

5.45 pm

The force of those reasons was recognised in the decision of Parliament not to qualify the exactly analogous power given to the Prime Minister in respect of ISC reports on the role of the Secret Intelligence Service and GCHQ in relation to serious crime. It is equally important that the Prime Minister should retain the discretion, after consultation with the ISC, not to publish parts of its reports that deal with the serious crime work of the Security Service.

Before I sit down, I shall deal briefly with the question raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), remote though it is from the subject matter of the new clause. He asked about the circumstances in which evidence is given by members of the Security Service in court. As he rightly surmised, I would be foolish to trespass into the province of the practices of the Scottish courts.

In England and Wales, it is not the case, as the hon. Gentleman suggested, that members of the Security Service are immune from cross-examination; their evidence is subject to it. It has been the practice for them to give evidence in such a way that the identity of the officer is not disclosed. It is given from behind a screen or something like that. But members of the Security Service are not the only people in sensitive occupations for whom similar arrangements have been made. Those arrangements are made by decision of the court on the basis of the particular circumstances of the case. I expect that to continue. I hope that that answers the hon. Gentleman's question, at least in respect of England and Wales.

Mr. Dalyell: Does that answer coincide with the advice that the Home Secretary has had from senior police officers? Without trespassing on the Scottish situation, there is unease about the matter among senior members of the Scottish police.

Mr. Howard: I do not want to follow the hon. Gentleman along that line. I have acted on the basis of close consultation with the police service generally. I do not believe that his point is a matter of continuing concern.

Mr. Beith: Perhaps for the purposes of shorthand, the Home Secretary used words such as "sensitive" to describe the things that the Prime Minister might seek to exclude from the Intelligence and Security Committee report before it came before Parliament. He did not use the words of the Intelligence Services Act 1994, which refers to a matter which

"would be prejudicial to the continued discharge of the functions"

of the service. I hope that he will put that point on record, because it is not intended that that power should allow the Prime Minister to exclude matters that are merely inconvenient or embarrassing.

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister always acts in accordance with the language of statute, and will do so in the context of this statute as in all others.

I hope that the hon. Member for Blackburn will accept that the power to withhold from publication part of an ISC report would never be used lightly but that it is important to retain it for all elements of the work of the Security Service because all of them may involve sensitive operations and methods or information prejudicial to its operations.

Mr. Allason: May I take my right hon. and learned Friend back to my mistaken use of the words "excess capacity" for which he rightly corrected me? I refer him to the *Official Report* of 10 January, when my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), was asked what was the catalyst for the legislation. He replied:

"The answer is that we have identified that in the Security Service there are some skills, especially analytical skills, and it has some resources and, God willing, if Northern Ireland continues in its present course, it may have some capacity to contribute to the battle. I simply say to the House, if there are those skills, if there is that capacity, we should all be pretty daft to look that gift horse in the mouth."—[*Official Report*, 10 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. 300.]

It seems to me that my shorthand of "excess capacity" reflects precisely what my right hon. Friend the Minister of State said, and that that remains the catalyst for the legislation.

Mr. Howard: I am afraid that my hon. Friend and I will have to differ on that. He has been good enough to read from *Hansard* the precise words of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State. It will be possible for everyone to make an easy and straightforward comparison between those words and the characterisation of them that my hon. Friend gave earlier. I am perfectly satisfied that there is a wide gap between the characterisation that he previously gave and the words used by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State on Second Reading.

In the light of everything that I have said, I hope that the hon. Member for Blackburn will feel able to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful for the assurances that the Home Secretary has given. In the light of what he has said, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 6

REVIEW OF PACE

'. Six months after this Act has come into force, the Secretary of State shall consult with the Director-General of the Security Service, the person designated under subsection (3B) of section (2) of the Security Service Act 1989 and the chief officers of police forces and other law enforcement agencies as to whether the activities of the Security Service in pursuance of the prevention and detection of serious crime indicate that any changes are required to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.'.—*[Mr. Michael.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Michael: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

New clause 6 is important: it concerns the application of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 in the new circumstances created by the Bill. It suggests that, six months after the Act has come into force, the Home Secretary should consult the Director-General of the Security Service and the person designated under the Security Service Act 1989—the chief constable, who is deemed to be, as it were, the guardian at the gate, along with the police and other law enforcement agencies. That is a new development following the Committee stage. After that consultation, attention should be paid to whether any amendments to PACE are needed to cope with the new operations of the Security Service.

It may be found at that stage that there is no need to change PACE, and that its operation should apply to the activities of the Security Service in support of the police and other law enforcement agencies. It would, of course, be ideal if the Act that is designed to regulate such matters were found to be appropriate. There has, however, been considerable concern that the Security Service might operate outside the requirements of the law in relation to criminal evidence in supporting the police and other law enforcement agencies, crossing boundaries in a way that the House would consider inappropriate. The new clause is intended to ensure that the issue is aired, and that, under PACE, the correct rules for dealing with the collection of evidence and presenting it to a court is observed by the police when supported by the Security Service, as they are by the police alone.

In recent years, serious attention has been paid to the way in which PACE operates. None of us want the powers of the police and other law enforcement agencies to be misused, or abused. I hope that the Minister, when he responds to what I expect to be a short debate—this is a narrow issue, although it is important—will agree that the existing standards should be observed, that they should not be changed as a result of the alterations proposed in the Bill and that the public should be able to have confidence in the rules according to which evidence is collected and put before a court.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) on raising the issue of PACE. Under sections 10 to 14, certain records are either excluded from seizure or subject to restriction. Under section 10, for instance,

"items subject to legal privilege"

cannot be seized unless they are

"held with the intention of furthering a criminal purpose".

Sections 11 to 14 restrict the seizure of health and journalistic records by requiring a warrant to be signed by a circuit judge, and—prior to agreement to the issuing of such a warrant—the application of certain rigid tests relating to, for example, the importance of the material to the investigation of a serious arrestable offence.

Those requirements relate to three fundamental freedoms, which should not be subject to undue interference by the security services. Those freedoms are the right to seek legal advice from a lawyer in confidence, the support of a free press by means of the protection of journalistic material and the expectation that one's medical condition will remain confidential. When

[Mr. Harry Cohen]

Parliament discussed the issue back in 1984, it clearly thought that it would be intolerable for someone to discuss his defence with a lawyer, only for the police to barge in and seize the details of the discussion. Similarly, Parliament took the view that procedures relating to the seizure of health and journalistic records should be subject to close scrutiny by a judge.

Under the Bill, that could be bypassed by the security services; it could also be bypassed by the police, who could get the security services to do the job for them. As the Bill stands, a warrant relating to support of the prevention and detection of serious crime could be signed by the Home Secretary; such a warrant would then authorise interference with property and computers in a lawyer's office or a doctor's surgery, or on a newspaper editor's desk.

Mr. David Ashby (North-West Leicestershire): I am sorry that I have only just entered the Chamber: I have been involved with the Home Affairs Select Committee.

Is the hon. Gentleman aware that Customs and Excise, who have exactly the same powers, are not subject to PACE, but have become so on the basis of a code? Section 78 of PACE gives the courts wide powers to exclude evidence, which they do if it does not conform with PACE. In practice, no problems will be created.

Mr. Cohen: I think that there is a potential for problems, but I sympathise with what the hon. Gentleman said about Customs and Excise. I think that the PACE rules governing evidence should apply to them as well as to the police.

Under the Bill, there is a danger that two routes will be taken. Either the police will meet the tests of PACE, or, if they can get the security services to do the job for them, they will bypass those standards. It is possible that the police and the security services will exercise undue powers on lawyers, doctors and journalists, interfering with their professional and confidential relationships with clients—or sources, in the case of journalists.

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth has raised the issue. It deserves proper answers from the Minister of State.

Mr. Maclean: Having heard what the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) had to say, I realise that there is no difference of substance or principle between us.

Relevant aspects of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act are already kept under regular review, and it is entirely proper for the legislation to be kept up to date to ensure that it remains relevant and workable without our rushing in to make hasty and ill-considered changes. That takes place without the impetus of a compulsion to review the legislation every six months or two years. Only recently, for example, the codes of practice governing a variety of police procedures have been updated.

Let us briefly consider what is relevant. PACE regulates police powers. Members of the Security Service will not have police powers; their role will be to support and assist the police, not to replace them. We should not adapt the requirements of PACE wholesale to suit the convenience of the Security Service. PACE also covers criminal evidence, and that will clearly be relevant to the Security Service. Indeed, it is already relevant: the Security Service already has experience of working with other law enforcement agencies or prosecutors in respect of its other functions. That has resulted in some important and successful prosecutions in a counter-terrorism context.

Aspects of PACE will be relevant to the Security Service's new function. Members of the service are certainly subject to the law, and I assure the House that the position will be kept under review. I am sure that the Directors-General of the Security Service and the National Criminal Intelligence Service will want to ensure that the Security Service's support for the law enforcement agencies is effective; that was certainly the Government's wish and the wish of the Committee, and I think that it was the wish of hon. Members on both sides of the House. Equally, we must ensure that there are effective systems of accountability.

I can assure the House that, if any obstacles or anomalies emerge—whether within days, months or years of the changes taking place—that threaten operational effectiveness or accountability, we shall consider what needs to be done. This will be an on-going process and we shall keep it under constant review. It is not one that occurs after an arbitrary period has elapsed. For that reason, I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's amendment, but I can see no real difference of principle between us.

6 pm

Mr. Michael: With the leave of the House, the Minister made an important statement and made explicit something that we had understood which came out of our discussions in Committee—namely, that, in its activities, the Security Service will not have or use the powers of the police. I am pleased that that has been placed on the record, and it is quite clearly the intention of the House.

I am pleased that the Minister gave an undertaking to keep under review the matter of the Director General of the Security Service and the designated chief police officer. If in the fullness of time the public express concern about their joint activities, I am sure that the Home Affairs Select Committee will consider whether it needs to consider the matter and undertake its responsibilities on behalf of the House.

For the time being, in the light of the Minister's assurance that the matter will be kept under review in the way the House wishes, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1

FUNCTIONS OF SECURITY SERVICE

Mr. Cohen: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 1, line 9, at end insert

'; except that the Service shall not so act with regard to any industrial relations dispute unless that dispute involves any offence for which a person who has attained the age of twenty-one and has no previous convictions could reasonably be expected to be sentenced to imprisonment for a term of three years or more.'

I intend, through the amendment, to keep the Security Service out of industrial disputes, except, as in all walks of life, where serious crime has occurred. In the vast number of industrial disputes, there is no serious crime, so there is no case for Security Service involvement.

Under the proposed legislation, warrants will be signed by Ministers to allow Security Service involvement in investigating serious crime, which is defined as an offence that carries a sentence of three years or more when committed by someone without a previous conviction. That approach should also be applied to the Security Service's role in industrial relations. Currently, it can just claim that it is countering subversion and thus can become involved in industrial disputes. That is wrong. There would be cases in which the Security Service could become involved. Serious personal assaults and serious Luddism would be covered by the three-year serious crime rule, although I see no reason why the police could not handle such cases, as they have in the past.

The Security Service should not be involved in industrial disputes, which it regards as subversion. MI5 has no justifiable role in mainstream industrial relations and disputes. It wastes a lot of time on industrial disputes. It defines subversion as action

"intended to overthrow or undermine parliamentary democracy by political, industrial, or violent means."

It says that its role is to investigate

"infiltration within, for example, a legitimate protest group."

That gives it carte blanche to infiltrate and act against any legitimate organisation, such as a trade union. Counter-subversion can include undermining, smearing and hounding what it perceives to be political opponents, and manipulating the media for that purpose.

I repeat that the Security Service should be kept out of industrial disputes. There are not many industrial disputes at the moment, but let us look at what could be considered an industrial dispute. The nurses are aggrieved over their rotten 2 per cent. pay award from the Government. Should the Security Service be involved in that dispute? I do not think that teachers will be involved in an industrial dispute, but they are concerned about their pay and the Government's cuts in education funding. The Security Service should not have a role there. The car workers at Ford have to settle a pay dispute at the moment which could break the Government's inflation policy, but, again, the Security Service should not be involved. Civil servants at the Department of Social Security are concerned about their conditions of employment, which the Government seek to worsen—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The amendment is fairly tightly drawn. It specifically says "industrial relations dispute". It is not about a catalogue of potential or past disputes.

Mr. Cohen: I take your point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but if they became industrial disputes, under the clause in the proposed legislation that deals with subversion, MI5 could become involved, and that would be a great waste of time and money.

MI5 is also biased. It is always against the workers in industrial disputes, regardless of the merits or justice of the case. They are seen as upsetting the status quo, and the establishment's position, including that of the employer, is what MI5 thinks has to be fought for. It has a long record of being anti-labour.

During the cold war, the whole labour movement was seen as subversive. That was ridiculous. There were, of course, communist and Soviet sympathisers in the trade union movement, but they were always a minority in numbers and influence. Even they were not motivated to overthrow the state by revolution or general strike. Their motivation was to improve conditions for their fellow working men and women. That was and remains an acceptable and laudable motivation.

Many within the trade union movement opposed them and had different ideas about how best to help their fellow workers and trade union members. That certainly was not the motivation of MI5. If those few sympathisers, which were the justification for MI5's involvement, were so influential, why was there only one general strike in 1926, one of the leaders of which was the old right winger, Ernest Bevin? That strike was certainly not organised with the aim of overthrowing the state, and there were no subsequent general strikes.

I cannot think of a single strike that aimed to overthrow the state, and it is a deliberate lie peddled by the Government and MI5 to justify the latter's role. They pretend not to understand that industrial disputes are limited to the aims of the workers involved, that, invariably, they are about pay, jobs and conditions of work, and that a trade union cannot enforce a course of action that its members do not want and will not support.

Industrial action is unsustainable without the support of the members of the trade union. Workers who take industrial action do so for their own vested interests, and their motivations are limited to that. I do not believe that it is for the state to take sides against them in such a dispute. The cold war has now ended, so who do the Government think that trade unions are trying to subvert? That is an interesting question and the Minister should respond to it. I suspect that, if he does, he will be striking at the heart of the legitimate democratic process, but it will be hard to find a reasonable answer. I do not think that the state should interfere.

Conservatives continually tell us that they believe in free markets and the free play of forces in society and the economy. Those forces include capital and labour. Why do that philosophy and approach not apply in industrial relations? Why is MI5 authorised to intervene against the worker? Why is it on the side of the employer? That free play of forces is part of the democratic political process. Industrial action in support of pay and jobs is as legitimate as the role of the bosses in a democracy. MI5 should not interfere. It is a worker's fundamental right to withdraw his labour if he is unfairly treated or picked upon by an employer. Doing that in combination with workmates is the only economic clout that workers have. They do not engage in it lightly, because it also clouts them economically.

It could be argued that MI5 has a role on behalf of the state because the state is an employer, but I reject that argument. The state should have the same tools as any other employer, no more and no less. It should not have access to a secret army that could attack or undermine trade unionists in its employ. The state and its workers pursue different aims. Workers aim for wages, jobs and conditions of work, and the state pursues political policies. Employment laws can be used for the state's purposes and using a secret force to crush opposition by its workers would be over the edge for a decent democratic Government. It is the same tool as that used by a dictator who will not allow any opposition and will intimidate and go beyond the law to enforce his will. Using MI5 in industrial disputes strikes at the heart of democracy.

Mr. Winnick: Does my hon. Friend agree that democracies, fortunately, have survived despite all the industrial disputes that have occurred, while dictatorships, such as that in the former Soviet Union for which I am not in mourning, and fascist, military, communist and other dictatorships have collapsed despite all their efforts to stop people demonstrating, engaging in industrial disputes and being denied the rights that my hon. Friend mentions?

Mr. Cohen: That is a good point, and it shows that the industrial relations process and industrial disputes are an organic part of a free and democratic society.

A major example of MI5's role in industrial relations was to be found in the miners' strike of 1984-85. The miners had purely industrial aims, which were to save their jobs, their mines and their communities. They were not out to overthrow the Government of the day. In hindsight, their aims are more clearly seen. The state attacked them out of revenge for previous industrial disputes that the miners had won. Defeating the miners was the great Tory obsession which led to that dispute. But the obsession was that of a political party and not that of the nation.

When Baroness Thatcher referred to the miners as the enemy within, she meant that they were the political enemy of the Conservative party, not of the state. The miners were part of the state, which the Government and all political parties are supposed to represent. But billions of pounds were spent on defeating them, and MI5 played a significant and active role in that.

That has been clearly catalogued in Seamus Milne's book "The Enemy Within—MI5, Maxwell and the Scargill Affair". I shall give some examples from that. The *Daily Mirror* and "The Cook Report" campaign of disinformation on Central Television said that the miners' leader used Libyan hardship donations to pay off his mortgage and that Soviet miners' donations were used by him for personal purposes. That was disinformation and downright lies by MI5.

Informers and agents provocateurs were planted. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) spoke in the House about the role of Richard Windsor, the NUM chief executive. The purpose was to destabilise and sabotage the union and Windsor was at the centre of a series of damaging controversies at the NUM. He was filmed with Libyans and made false accusations of corruption against the union leaders. According to Milne, the operations of the agents provocateurs against striking miners included action at the Polkemmet colliery in Scotland, which was flooded and lost during the dispute, raising local tension.

There was mass surveillance and phone tapping and bugging. The County hotel at Bloomsbury where Mick McGahey, the miners' leader stayed, was bugged and so was the North Sea fish restaurant, Leigh street, London near the NUM's headquarters where the left wingers on the executive met to discuss tactics.

Throughout the strike the security services leased the building opposite the NUM headquarters at St. James's house, Sheffield, and every NUM branch and lodge secretary had his phone monitored. Road blocks and restrictions on the freedom of movement were co-ordinated with the police. Miners' car number records were specifically made available from DVLC records and monitored on computer. Electronic surveillance networks were set up to track the movement of miners' funds and the activities of union officials. In addition, a breakaway miners' union was assisted.

6.15 pm

According to Milne, in 1970 one man and one assistant were based in MI5 monitoring the trade unions—and that was during the cold war. By the early 1980s, MI5's industrial unit had 12 desk officers backed by a small army of handlers, agents, informers and technical and secretarial staff. Hundreds of trade union officials and activists were signed up in the 1970s. Labour correspondents and broadcasters were also targeted.

What is the point of continuing this subversive activity at great cost to interfere with the trade unions in pursuit of their legitimate activities? The cold war has ended. When they take industrial action, trade unions are limited in their aims and aspirations. Are the nurses to be regarded as subversive if they go on strike? Let us limit MI5's role to terrorism and serious crime, and get it out of industrial relations and industrial disputes.

Mr. Dalyell: I strongly support the amendment that has been moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen). As far as I know, Seamus Milne's book has never been rebutted; nor has he, on anything that was in that book, been taken to a court of law. In those circumstances, the presumption must be that what he wrote was accurate. If it is, it is a disgrace to the British state.

My support for my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton is born of personal experience of the miners' strike. During that strike, I went to Polkemmet pit in my constituency every Monday morning at 4.30. My hon. Friend mentioned that pit, which at the time was the second biggest of the Scottish pits and the supplier of coking coal to Ravenscraig. At that time, it was deemed to have a regular market for the foreseeable future.

Doubtless, relationships were different in Yorkshire, where officers came in from the Metropolitan police, but relations between the Scottish police and the miners were generally good, partly because many of the police officers came from mining families. In those circumstances, those of us with public responsibilities were able to play our part in maintaining a civilised relationship with a view to protecting the pit.

I shall never forget the morning when it became clear that six picket breakers were operating. The late Superintendent Donald MacKinnon, an equable highlander, was incandescent with anger. He was not angry with me and he came up to me and said, "What on earth has Stella Whitehouse to do with this?" A lot of people knew Stella Rimington by her maiden name—she had been a student at Edinburgh university—which was Whitehouse. She worked for the security services, and I do not know to this day what on earth Stella Whitehouse or Rimington had to do with the miners' strike.

It was not her business to get involved and to create industrial mayhem, and that question has never been answered. I am quite convinced that the head of MI5, as she was to become, took a prominent part—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is not relating his remarks to the amendment. He must do so, rather than just make assertions across the Floor of the House.

Mr. Dalyell: It relates to the security services intervening in an industrial dispute.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman made one short reference to that, and proceeded to make

extensive allegations about something that occurred years ago. In particular, he has made allegations in relation to an individual. While it is perfectly proper to make allusions to individuals, it is not appropriate to make such remarks across the Floor of the House.

Mr. Dalyell: I have said this before across the Floor of the House. The role of the security services in industrial situations is highly relevant. The incident to which I referred occurred back in 1984, and the lady in question is about to retire. But the problem is not over, and I will tell the Minister why. We read month after month in one form or another—I do not know with what truth—that David Hart is advising the Government. I do not know what a man like that is doing at the heart of the British Government. My hon. Friends should not be under any illusions—this problem goes on and on, and my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton is quite right to raise it.

Mr. Michael: I shall be brief, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister would be wise to accept the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) that these matters run deep not only among many people in industry, but among many people in the police, and that constitutes the root of the concerns that the police expressed to many Members as we approached the Bill.

The matter has been dealt with by recognising problems and ensuring that the House decides on the right way to deal with them. For that reason, it will help everyone if we learn from the past and if the Minister gives us confidence in the arrangements that he is seeking to establish in the Bill. It will be extremely helpful if, in response to the amendment, he tells the House that it is the strong intention of the Government that the resources of MI5 should be devoted to the fight against terrorism and, under the powers in the Bill, to helping the police in the fight again serious and organised crime. Those resources should not be used in the field of industrial relations. There is a widespread belief that power was misused during the 1980s, and the Minister will show wisdom if he provides clarity in the intentions of the Government in relation to the legislation. I invite him to do so.

Mr. Maclean: I shall attempt to rise to the hon. Gentleman's challenge to show wisdom, and I shall not rake over the coals of the other matters that have been mentioned in this short debate. The best and simplest way for me to respond would be to remind the House of my remarks in Committee. All the relevant parties, including the police and the Security Service, envisage the same role for the Security Service as the man on the Clapham omnibus would expect—that it should act against those crimes where its special skills and expertise can most effectively be employed, meaning organised crime.

Industrial disputes do not constitute organised crime—I do not think they do, and that is obviously the view of the Opposition. The man on the Clapham omnibus would not consider industrial disputes to be organised crime. There is no question of the security services becoming involved in cases that are not thought to involve serious crime. Nor can the Security Service be a political football. As I am sure the hon. Member for Leyton is aware, the Security Service Act 1989 places a specific duty on the Director-General of the Security Service to ensure that the service takes no action to further the interests of any political party.

Mr. Winnick: Do we understand from the Minister's remarks that, whatever happened in the past—my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow made an important reference to what occurred in the 1980s—the security services will under no circumstances be involved in industrial disputes in the future? That is an important question that relates to the amendment. I understand that the Minister gave that assurance. So that I do not misunderstand him, I would be glad if he would confirm that that is the position.

Mr. Maclean: I am not sure that I can put it any better than I have just done. We had a discussion in Committee on what was meant by "organised and serious crime". At one point, we had a discussion—I can assure the House that it was relevant—about large grey elephants. We agreed that although we would all know an elephant if we saw it, we might not be able to describe it. "Organised crime" is not a unique or specialist definition. Although the Bill talks about "serious crime", we meant "organised crime" to be the sort of concept that the man on the Clapham omnibus would understand.

Whatever organised crime may be—whether it involves drugs or gun-running, which is highly organised—it is my view that industrial disputes cannot and do not construe organised crime. I would not therefore envisage the Security Service working against the nurses or the other groups to which Opposition Members referred on the basis of "organised crime".

Mr. Winnick: The amendment states:

"the Service shall not so act with regard to any industrial relations dispute".

Is the Minister assuring us that the Security Service will not intervene in industrial disputes? That is all I am asking.

Mr. Maclean: I am not sure whether I can go as wide as the hon. Gentleman is suggesting. The Bill deals with the Security Service's attempts to deal with organised crime. I have said to the House and in Committee that I cannot see circumstances in which the Security Service—bearing in mind that it would be tasked by the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the police—would become involved in an industrial dispute, as we commonly understand it, as that would not be regarded as organised crime, as we commonly understand it. On that basis, I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance.

Mr. Cohen: I thought that the Minister was generous in taking account of my sentiments—and, I think, those of the House—in his statement. But when my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) questioned him, he became a little less clear. I appreciate his point that the security services would not be involved in industrial disputes in relation to organised crime, but they still have a massive opportunity for intervention in relation to subversion, which can be whatever they describe it as. They have interpreted that in the wrong way in the past.

The F2 section of the service was set up purely for industrial relations purposes. If the service was genuinely moving away from involvement in industrial disputes, the

[Mr. Cohen]

Minister should have commented on the reorganisation or, perhaps, abolition of that section. We did not hear that, however, and those points must be clarified.

Mr. Michael: There is a tendency in difficult discussions on legislation such as this to enter into philosophical discussions. We know that, in the past, there have been occasions when the service entered into areas that the Government or Parliament had not intended. Is not the most simple message that could come from the debate the one that my hon. Friend sought to put across in tabling the amendment—that it is not the intention of Parliament that the Security Service, as a result of the legislation, should enter into industrial relations disputes?

Mr. Cohen: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who makes a relevant point. I hope that that message will go out clearly from this House to the Security Service—

Mr. Winnick: My hon. Friend mentioned, in relation to industrial disputes, F2 within MI5. Will he bear it in mind that among those who were targeted was our hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) who, with Patricia Hewitt, took her case to the European Court and won? It is important to note that people who were hardly revolutionaries—indeed, anti-revolutionaries—were targeted.

6.30 pm

Mr. Cohen: That point is well made by my hon. Friend. As hon. Members have said, there will continue to be an issue if MI5 is perceived to be involved in industrial disputes, as it was in the 1980s.

I am prepared to withdraw the amendment so that the House can move on to consider other important parts of the Bill. I hope that we will not have to return to this issue. If we do, I assure the House that I will take it up—I hope with my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) at the Government Dispatch Box. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Michael: I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 1, line 17, at end insert—

'(2A) After subsection (3) of section 2 of that Act there shall be added—

"(3ZA) The arrangements referred to in subsection (2)(c) above shall specify that any request for support made by a law enforcement agency or a police force shall be subject to the approval of the person designated in accordance with subsection (3B) below who shall be responsible for agreeing to the specific arrangements of any operation or operators resulting from each individual request, which shall include arrangements as to the accountability of the persons and, bodies involved.".'.

This is a straightforward amendment, which would ensure that any request for support from MI5 made by a law enforcement agency—whether a police force or other agency—will be subject to the approval of the chief constable designate.

For those hon. Members who did not take part in our discussions in Committee, I need to highlight some progress that we made, that is, making clear the responsibility of an individual, to be designated by the Home Secretary, for agreeing arrangements with the head of the Security Service. That is an important arrangement because it makes explicit the responsibility of an individual, involved in the police side of the exercise and on behalf of law enforcement agencies, to agree arrangements to bring in the Security Service in support of the fight against organised and serious crime.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): I am following my hon. Friend's remarks with interest. He will have received, as I have, a letter from the much-respected chief constable of Gwent, who seeks an assurance that the principles described by my hon. Friend are laid down in the Bill. Is my hon. Friend satisfied that the Bill meets the points raised by the chief constable?

Mr. Michael: That is precisely what we have been drawing out in Committee. It is difficult to get all the principles we want written into the Bill. It is important that, wherever possible, the important elements should be in the Bill. Where there is any doubt, there should be absolute clarity about what the House intends. That is why it is right to raise the important issues to which my hon. Friend referred and which were raised also by the Intelligence and Security Committee and a variety of chief constables and others. These matters must be absolutely clear. It has been an important search for agreement on the principles that underlie the involvement of MI5 in supporting the police and other law enforcement agencies in the fight against organised crime.

I use those phrases carefully because that is what we are seeking to do, although some of those words do not actually appear in the Bill. The reason for that is that we agreed with the Government's objective to have a simple piece of legislation that would not constantly be chewed over in the courts, with lawyers dancing on the point of a pinhead. I am pleased to see the Home Secretary nodding his agreement with that description of the profession to which he belongs.

We want clarity so that we can ensure that the public are protected, that the police are clear about their responsibilities and that there is no interference from the Security Service in the role of the police.

Mr. Rowlands: The point made to us is that there needs to be transparency. I ask my hon. Friend—and perhaps the Minister will also answer—whether the Bill is transparent about responsibilities and about the role of MI5 and its relationship with the police.

Mr. Michael: Yes, I believe that it is now. The mechanism that we put forward, which was debated in Committee and then agreed in a slightly different form, means that the chief constable designated by the Home Secretary will be the guardian at the gate. That is an important change.

It was also clear in our debates that we were considering Security Service involvement in the fight against organised and serious crime. Although only the phrase "serious crime" appears in the Bill, the Government's and Parliament's intention for how that power should be used was made absolutely clear.

There was also agreement on the five principles set out during proceedings of the Intelligence and Security Committee: that the primacy of responsibility for

countering organised crime should lie and remain with the law enforcement agencies; that in respect of intelligence work the Security Service should work through the NCIS and the existing co-ordinating groups—and in relation to that the Home Secretary has agreed that the chief constable who acts as Director-General of the NCIS should be the chief constable designate; that the work of the Security Service should be in support of the law enforcement agencies, not self-tasking—that horrible word that the police tend to use; that the skills and the full range of abilities of the Security Service should be drawn on, but only in support of the police; and finally—an important point that I mention in passing—that the Security Service should bear the cost of its own contribution. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) would not want me to leave that out, and neither would the chief constable of Gwent.

The amendment takes the agreement and understanding which we reached in Committee, and which we put clearly on the record, a little further. It is that, in making arrangements, the chief constable

"shall be responsible for agreeing to the specific arrangements of any operation or operators resulting from each individual request, which shall include arrangements as to the accountability of the persons and, bodies involved."

It is the search for transparency and accountability, on which there is no difference across the Floor, on which we understandably want to push Ministers a little further, to gain greater clarity than there was at earlier stages of the Bill.

I ask the Minister to agree to the amendment or at least to confirm that the way that I described the relationship is the Government's intention—and therefore that of the House—of how it should work.

Mr. Maclean: I certainly agree with the description given by the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), which largely encompasses the way we expect the arrangements to work. In fact, the way in which the hon. Gentleman answered the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) means that I can scrap a couple of pages of my notes, as the hon. Gentleman made some of my speech for me.

There has been general agreement in the House about the principles underlying the Bill. Such disagreement and debate as there has been, both on Second Reading and in Committee, has been on how best to give effect to the principles. We must produce legislation that will strike a proper balance between the right amount of control and accountability over the work of the Security Service in pursuit of its new function and ensuring that it is able to operate effectively, with the risk of spurious legal challenge minimised.

The way that the Government have sought to strike that balance is by the provision in the Bill placing a new duty on the director-general to ensure that there are arrangements for co-ordinating the activities of the Security Service with those of the law enforcement agencies that it will be supporting. As a result of an amendment that the Government introduced in Committee, those co-ordination arrangements have to be agreed with a designated person. It has been made clear by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary that he intends to designate the Director-General of the NCIS. That requirement for agreed arrangements will ensure that the Security Service will not be able to act independently. However, it is important that we should understand what those arrangements are designed to do and, therefore, how we envisage the role of the Director-General of the NCIS.

In moving the amendment to which I have just referred, I paraphrased a part of the report to the Home Secretary that was prepared by the interdepartmental and inter-agency working group, which was set up to consider a role for the Security Service in supporting the law enforcement agencies in their work against organised crime. I should like to repeat some of what I said on that occasion.

The Security Service's contribution will be delivered through existing structures. That means co-ordination through the NCIS and membership of the relevant groups. The Security Service will accept tasking on organised crime from the NCIS and relevant co-ordinating groups. Those arrangements should not replace or prejudice existing bilateral arrangements between the security services and other agencies, such as Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, the Secret Intelligence Service and Government communications headquarters, Cheltenham.

The point is that although the NCIS clearly has a pivotal role, it is possible that the overarching arrangements will allow for sub-arrangements between the Security Service and other law enforcement agencies. A good example of that may be Customs and Excise, with which the Security Service will want to work closely on international drug trafficking. The Director-General of the NCIS will clearly want and need to be aware of the broad spheres in which the service is supporting Customs and Excise. The scheme for tasking, to which I referred, will ensure that.

However, the Director-General of the NCIS may not need to be aware of every operational detail that flows from the arrangement with Customs and Excise. Indeed, I suggest that the role that the amendment envisages for the Director-General of the NCIS would be very time-consuming and would take him and his staff into spheres where the Security Service already enjoys effective bilateral arrangements with other bodies.

Mr. Beith: When we discussed in Committee whether it would always be possible for individual chief constables to be told that an operation was taking place, the Minister argued that that would be difficult—especially when people were moving quickly around the country—when reliance was placed on the head of the NCIS to be the route by which chief constables would, in some cases, be made aware that something was happening in their area. If the Director-General of the NCIS does not know what is happening, because it has all been delegated to Customs and Excise and the Security Service, he will not be in a position to alert chief constables.

Mr. Maclean: The right hon. Gentleman is reading too much into my remarks, and he is perhaps inadvertently exaggerating the position. I said that I expected the NCIS to be the funnel—the route of communication—between the chief constables and individual forces, at the bottom end, which would pass tasking requests up through the NCIS, to be agreed with the Security Service. The NCIS would then, of course, be the funnel of communication back to the chief constables. I picked on the odd case. We

[Mr. Maclean]

suggested that it would be in rare circumstances, such as the surveillance of a vehicle that was passing through different police areas, that it might not be appropriate instantly to inform the chief constable.

While the amendment of the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth seeks to put more clarity into the situation, I am afraid that it would be unnecessarily prescriptive to expect the Director-General of the NCIS to have the sort of detail that the amendment envisages when, for example, Customs and Excise is operating perfectly correctly with the Security Service under the overarching arrangements of the Director-General of the NCIS. In those cases, the director-general may not want to have the control that the amendment envisages.

Mr. Dalyell: The combination of the Minister's mention of rare circumstances and his mention of Customs and Excise requires me to ask him to forgive my curiosity. On Saturday night, there was a detailed description of Sir Brian Unwin's astonishment when he was called by the Cabinet Secretary to a meeting, with other permanent secretaries, on the unmentionable subject—I should be ruled out of order if I went into Scott. However, that combination raises the question of the relationship between Customs and Excise and the security services, because, when asked, the Cabinet Secretary is reported to have said, "It is perfectly normal for Customs and Excise to be consulted." When Sir Brian Unwin was asked, he said, "It is the first time that I have ever been summoned to a meeting by a Cabinet Secretary." Could some light be shed on the fascinating subject of what that relationship is?

Mr. Maclean: Certainly not by me, but no doubt someone will write a book about it one day. It may be an interesting subject, but it is irrelevant to the point that has been made in the debate. The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth has moved a reasonable amendment, which seeks to provide greater detail. I have pointed out that it would be slightly dangerous to go into that detail.

Mr. Rowlands: In Committee, the Minister made the key statement that the NCIS

"will inform the chief constables that NCIS has been tasked".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 1 February 1996; c. 67.]

and that it would act as a gateway. That could be a formal procedure, or it could be a process by which chief constables were not only informed but involved. Does the Minister mean that the NCIS will inform in the real sense or that that will be only a matter of courtesy?

6.45 pm

Mr. Maclean: I mean, in the real sense. The hon. Gentleman should bear it in mind that the requests come from the police service in the first place. It is going to the NCIS. If the NCIS should determine through its machinery that there is a tasking requirement that involves the Security Service, in general it is inconceivable that the chief constables who made the request for assistance in the first place will not be properly informed that the service is operating. However, I built in the caveat that there might be some circumstances in which it would be logistically impossible or not sensible to inform chief constables that the Security Service was, for example, passing through their area.

I respect the intentions of the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth. It seeks more clarity. The only danger is that it is slightly more detailed and would allow lawyers to dance on a pinhead. The hon. Gentleman said that that was also his fear. For those reasons, I cannot accept the amendment.

Mr. Michael: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply. He has helped the House by expressing the Government's level of clarity in relation to what is intended by the Bill.

The point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) is very important. The discussion about what information should be available to chief constables was assisted by the Minister saying that, when there was a surveillance operation that went up a motorway through several police areas, one would obviously not expect information to be provided to each chief constable whose area was involved in the operation. However, one would expect that in the normal course of events chief constables would be aware of the operations in their areas. The intention is that the chief constable designate would agree such an arrangement with the head of the intelligence service. Therefore, I think that the House's intentions are clear.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) put his finger on an issue to which the House needs to return, because it goes outside the scope of the Bill. The issue is the expanding role of officers of Customs and Excise, which has recently expanded without the scrutiny of the House.

Mr. Dalyell: I must be extremely scrupulous about the facts on that issue. I was referring to a reconstruction that may or may not be factual, as put forward by Channel 4 on Saturday night. I do not know that Sir Brian Unwin said any such thing. The point is that he is purported and reported to have said it. If he did say it, it raises extremely interesting questions—does it not, Home Secretary?

Mr. Michael: I was not referring to reconstructions on television or anywhere else. I was referring to the accountability, intentions and expansion of Customs and Excise, which is an issue that came out of our discussions in Committee. At an appropriate time, I believe that the House should pay attention to that issue.

As for the amendment, it is clear, as I understand it—I am certain that the Minister will tell me if I am wrong—that our intentions in moving it are shared by him and that they reflect the intentions of the House. In the light of that, my intention is not to seek to write it into the Bill, but that the debate should have helped to clarify the House's intentions. In the light of the Minister's encouraging and helpful response to the points that we raised, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 4

SHORT TITLE AND COMMENCEMENT

Mr. Beith: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 2, leave out lines 23 and 24 and insert—

'(2) Subject to subsection (3) below, this Act shall come into force on such day or days as the Secretary of State may appoint by order made by statutory instrument, and different orders may appoint different days for different sections of this Act.

(3) No order under subsection (2) above shall be made in respect of section 2 above unless the Secretary of State is satisfied that any power to be extended to, or obligation to be placed upon, the Security Service by that section is a power or obligation (as the case may be) which also extends to or is placed upon police forces.'.

Amendment No. 1 relates to one of the two remaining problems with the Bill which I said have not yet been solved and it is causes particular anxiety to serving police officers. It is the fact that the Security Service will be able to use the warrant powers that it has under section 5 of the Intelligence Services Act 1994 in relation to its new function of assisting the police in the pursuit of organised crime. Police officers do not have such powers, and more than one chief constable has told me that he is very unhappy about the Security Service being given powers in relation to organised crime that the police do not have.

The paradox is that, at least when the Security Service uses its powers to carry out its existing function, some safeguards are operative. If the police act in a similar way, as they have felt obliged to do over the years, they have neither proper legal powers nor a system to safeguard the public to ensure that the powers are not abused.

The problem arises primarily in relation to eavesdropping on, or interference with, property which officers need to enter to carry out their operation. Of course, it does not arise with the interception of telephones. Indeed, in a way, the system of telephone interception is a better model because, although the system has its critics, there is a parallel system operating for the police and the Security Service. However, the absence of a privacy law in this country means that various types of eavesdropping—those that do not involve entering a property—may not be illegal at all. In other words, anyone—not just the Security Service or the police—could eavesdrop for any purpose. That is a very unsatisfactory state of affairs which needs to be attended to some other time.

The Bill will directly affect the use of the power to enter property for the purpose of eavesdropping. Under the Bill, the Security Service could do that when working on organised crime, as it already can for other purposes under the Intelligence Services Act 1994. If the police and the Security Service were involved in a joint operation, it could happen that the police officers could not take that action whereas the Security Service could.

However, there is a further twist to the problem. The police do in fact carry out such activities and it is well known that they have done so for many years. They do it by getting authorisation from a chief constable or from a senior officer in the force acting on his behalf. It would be open to the Security Service to say that the police system is much simpler because the police do not have to go to the Home Secretary for a warrant but can proceed quietly with the agreement of a chief constable.

The Security Service might ask why it does not proceed on the police system. The safeguards included in the Bill would then not operate at all. That is one reason why the Bill is unsatisfactory, but the primary reason is that we are giving to the Security Service, for the purpose of its work on organised crime, a power that is accepted as necessary in some circumstances but that we are not giving to the police. From the police's point of view, that is profoundly unsatisfactory, for various reasons.

First, police officers engaged in such activities are on the very borders of the law and lay themselves open to charges of criminal or civil trespass. They can only hope that their chief constable will protect them because he has given them the authority to act in that way. Protecting them, however, simply means giving evidence in their defence or as to their good character. It does not alter the fact that they lay themselves open to criminal or civil proceedings while acting in a way in which the Security Service could have acted for the benefit of the public because it feared that some major organised criminal activity was taking place.

Secondly, when the police carry out such functions, the public are not safeguarded as they are by the Security Service warrants granted by the Home Secretary. It is my understanding that, in cases of telephone interception, the Home Secretary examines the warrants personally and that they are carefully scrutinised.

We must have a system that the police can use, that has legal authority and that safeguards the public. It is logical that the same system should be operated by the police and the Security Service when they are dealing with organised crime.

The root of the problem that we confront in the Bill is that we are dealing with the Security Service aspect before we have introduced important measures that are needed to help the police. While I argued, in the context of the recent bombing, that it would be possible to defer the Bill while further work was done, I was also thinking that I should have been happier had the Government introduced ahead of the Bill the measures that the police feel are needed.

I suspect that more could be achieved by ensuring that the national structure of the police was in order, that the NCIS was on a proper legal footing, that the Scottish Criminal Intelligence Office's relations with the NCIS were on a proper legal footing and that the warrant system was such that the police could use it properly and freely. If we had done that before introducing the Bill, we might have done more to support the police. Of course, it would also have then been much easier to slot the Bill into place.

The amendment seeks to solve the problem by deferring the bringing into effect of the Security Service's ability to use its new powers against organised crime until action has been taken to ensure that the police have parallel powers to deal with organised crime. If it is not accepted, we shall be doing the police and the public a disservice.

There can be no doubt that working on organised crime is liable to bring the Security Service into contact and possible conflict with an innocent member of the public to a much greater extent than hitherto. We ought therefore to ensure that the appropriate safeguards are in place. The Security Service has a system of safeguards, but trying to operate it alongside the system of dubious legality within which the police now carry out some surveillance operations is profoundly unsatisfactory.

In a spirit of support for the police, I ask the Home Secretary to recognise that he will not be helping the police if he continues to deny them a proper legal power to deal with organised crime and that he will make the situation more difficult and complicated if he sets the Security Service to work in this sphere in this way while the police do not have the same power.

Mr. Allason: Amendment No. 1 highlights an interesting loophole in the current cover given to intelligence officers and police officers. Interference with

[Mr. Allason]

property is, of course, an extremely serious matter, because it is one of our principles that an Englishman's home is his castle. It is fair to say that interference with property is a right that was exercised with dubious legality before the Security Services Act 1989. Certainly, it happened on very few occasions.

I remember being told by a Security Service officer how he was involved in the search of John Vassall's flat in Dolphin square shortly before an arrest was made. It involved getting clearance from the permanent under-secretary, and the Director-General of the Security Service was biting his fingernails down to the quick, hoping that his personnel were in and out of the flat as quickly as possible without coming into contact with any members of the public.

That particular vignette illustrates how seriously the Security Service took its role on that occasion. It was a right that it exercised apparently under the royal prerogative—a very unsatisfactory state of affairs—but it did so rarely. Nowadays, of course, interference with property is a euphemism for planting bugs. That does not involve a warrant under the Interception of Communications Act 1985, or any other telephone warrant. Although only half of any telephone conversation is heard in this instance, it is an extremely useful tool for surveillance and is widely used. However, as the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said, it becomes a very grey area when the police are involved.

Hitherto, the chief constable has been talked into issuing an interference order and has given the appropriate sanction. None of that has ever been challenged in law, but it is right that the procedure should be examined in more detail. Certainly, Security Service personnel were deeply unhappy prior to the 1989 Act. When asked what they would say if they were arrested and taken to a police station on a charge of burgling a house, they took the view that telling the charge sergeant that they had the protection of the royal prerogative would not get them very far.

The matter must be examined, especially given the new kinds of interception that are so common. Indeed, only a short time ago, a private telephone conversation was intercepted and no police action was taken even though it was clearly a most appalling invasion of privacy—albeit concerning a member of the royal family.

The matter cries out for legislation. The House owes the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed a debt of gratitude for highlighting such an important issue. The police are not happy about the state of affairs; technology has overtaken legislation.

While on the point of whether powers granted to the Security Service exceed those granted to the police, I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister for a second time whether he can clarify Home Office guidelines on the use of informants. On Second Reading, I said that there are very strict rules on the use of informants and that special branch has been governed by them since a inquiry was conducted in the late 1970s. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that, on joint police and Security Service operations, the Security Service will be subject to precisely the same Home Office guidelines as the police?

7 pm

Mr. Cohen: The amendment refers to the day the Act comes into force. I do not think that it should come into force until all those who should properly be consulted have been consulted. Has the Data Protection Registrar been consulted? *Computing* reported as recently as 18 January that the registrar's office had not been consulted and the article said that the magazine

"would press for the security services to be subject to the same data protection rules as the police."

If the Data Protection Registrar has been consulted, what was the response?

Mr. Howard: The amendment relates to the arrangements for authorising intrusive surveillance operations by the police. At present, those operations must be personally authorised by the chief officer of police in accordance with Home Office guidelines. There is no evidence that the system is being abused, and I believe that it has served us well. The Government accept, however, that it needs to be brought up to date. On Second Reading, I was happy to say that a statutory system would be preferable. That was a recommendation of the Home Affairs Select Committee, and I do not dispute it.

To that end, we are discussing the options with the Association of Chief Police Officers and other interested parties. It is not straightforward; many complex issues must be resolved before we are in a position to present robust and workable proposals that do not inhibit the operation and effectiveness of the police. I can assure the House that the matter is being given urgent attention. We will bring forward proposals at the earliest opportunity, but we want to get it right.

The amendment does nothing to prevent chief officers from continuing to authorise such operations under the present administrative arrangements. It would merely prevent the Security Service from applying for property warrants in respect of its new serious crime function.

The amendment strikes me as being a very strange solution to a problem, which may affect police operations, since it seeks to deny the Security Service the right to a power equivalent to that possessed by the police when that power has a firm statutory basis, when it requires the personal authorisation of the Secretary of State, and when the exericise of it is scrutinised by an independent commissioner.

Mr. Beith: I hope that the Home Secretary will recognise that the narrow nature of the amendment is a direct result of the title of the Bill. If he had titled the Bill so that amendments on the police use of surveillance powers could have been tabled, the amendment would have covered the matter much more effectively.

Mr. Howard: That may be, but the fact remains that to say that we should not allow the Security Service to operate in a different way under the supervision of the holder of my office in the way I have just described is an extraordinary approach to a problem which the right hon. Gentleman has identified, which I acknowledge exists, and which affects the operations conducted by the police.

Throughout debates on the Bill, we have had cause to return to the key principles that will govern the involvement of the Security Service in work against serious crime. There has been a welcome consensus

among hon. Members that those key principles represent a very sensible basis on which to proceed. I should like to return to one of those principles. The Security Service should be able to draw on its full range of skills, capabilities and expertise. The amendment is directly counter to that agreed principle, because it would deny the Security Service the ability to use all its skills and capabilities.

Property warrants are used to authorise very intrusive actions, and clearly there must be rigorous controls on their use. We have those controls in place and they have worked very effectively in other functions of the Security Service. I do not accept any insinuation that the Security Service and the police will conspire to take advantage of the temporary differences between their respective safeguards. I would not expect chief constables to authorise intrusive surveillance operations for which a ministerial warrant could be obtained; nor would I expect the Security Service to flout the safeguards that surround its work.

We will bring forward proposals on new arrangements for the police as soon as we are ready to do so. To suggest that in the meantime we should all be deprived of the full extent of the contribution of the Security Service to the fight against serious organised crime seems gratuitously damaging and entirely unnecessary.

My right hon. Friend the Minister will write to my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) in response to the point that he raised, setting out the different guidelines that the Security Service has for its agents and those under which the police operate. On the point raised by the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), my understanding is that consultations have taken place with the Data Protection Registrar.

It is perhaps characteristic of the Liberal Democrat party to advance half-baked solutions to a range of problems. The amendment is only quarter-baked, and I invite the House to reject it.

Mr. Straw: This important issue was raised on Second Reading, and I welcome the assurance that the Secretary of State gave that it will be examined in detail. Although I make no criticism of the way in which the matters have been dealt with up to now, the Secretary of State will be aware, and it is widely understood, that some chief constables are anxious about the new circumstances.

The amendment does not seem to be the most felicitously worded amendment that has ever been before the House. I welcome what the Secretary of State has said, so I certainly do not put on record our support for the amendment.

Mr. Beith: If anything was gratuitous, it was the Home Secretary's attempt to launch a political attack on an issue that the Intelligence and Security Committee felt should be resolved in the Bill: warranting powers for the Security Service that the police do not have. The Home Secretary knows perfectly well that the Bill was drafted in such a way as to preclude inclusion of, or a debate on, an amendment that would have conferred that proper balance of powers. The only way in which we could secure a debate on the Floor of the House on that important principle, which was made clear in the Intelligence and Security Committee's report, was to table an amendment that was in order. One of the Home Secretary's colleagues, the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason), pointed out that it was desirable that the House should have such a debate. The debate has focused attention on an issue that remains a problem.

I am glad that the Home Secretary acknowledged that the problem exists, indicated that he was looking for a way to resolve it in discussion with ACPO, does not wish the Security Service to be precluded from using its powers, which, as I have conceded, are the subject of useful safeguards, and recognises that the amendment does not stop chief officers continuing to act in the way they are now doing, whether or not that is legal.

It would have been open to the Home Secretary all along to resolve the problem before dealing with the rest of the Bill. If the Home Secretary's or the Prime Minister's speech at party conference had included such resounding words as, "We will give the police the powers that they need to crack down on organised crime," there would still have been the same almost automatic cheer from the delegates at the conference, and a piece of legislation designed to serve that purpose would have appeared in the legislative timetable. It would have been a simple matter for the Home Secretary to adjust his speech accordingly. I am sure that he could have secured the agreement of the Leader of the House. We are dealing with a serious problem which senior police officers also regard as serious. In that respect, the Home Secretary has let down the police.

Mr. Howard: The right hon. Gentleman cannot get away with that. It may have been a simple matter to adjust my speech, but it would have been far from simple to adjust the legislation. The police, contrary to the impression given by the right hon. Gentleman, understand that. We are in discussion with the Association of Chief Police Officers. The police understand and recognise the importance of taking care over this matter, not rushing it, and getting it right. That is why they entirely understand the position that we have reached in relation to the timing of the legislation. Therefore, I invite the hon. Gentleman to withdraw any suggestion that the police are thirsting for the inclusion of powers in this legislation. On the contrary, they understand the need to take care and get it right.

Mr. Beith: We should get all the legislation right, including this Bill. In Committee, I quoted a chief constable who expressed his strong reservations about powers being given to the Security Service in the context of organised crime that were not being given to the police. That is on the record of the Committee's proceedings and the Home Secretary can read it.

As hon. Members on both sides of the House have said during the passage of the Bill, in some respects the process has been taken in the wrong order. That is why we are in our present position. That underlines the urgency of dealing with the need for appropriate police powers in this area. No amendment to the Bill could achieve that, and I therefore beg to ask leave to withdraw this one.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Michael: I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 2, line 24, at end add—

'(3) Section 1 of the Act shall be repealed twenty four months after the Act has come into force in accordance with subsection (2) above unless the body known at the time of this Act receiving Royal

[Mr. Michael]

Assent as the National Criminal Intelligence Service is within that period established upon a statutory basis and the person appointed as chief officer of that body is or was a chief constable who has been designated by the Secretary of State in accordance with subsection (3B) of section 2 of the Security Service Act 1989.'.

The amendment seeks to provide a proper legislative framework for the National Criminal Intelligence Service. It follows my earlier suggestion that a chief constable should be designated by the Home Secretary to be the guardian at the gate; to be the individual who agrees the arrangements under which the assistance of the Security Service can be given to the police in the fight against organised crime. The Home Secretary has promised to designate the chief constable who heads the NCIS as that individual and we support that.

On Second Reading, the Home Secretary promised to put the NCIS on a proper statutory basis. We welcome that announcement, too. The amendment simply seeks a time scale for it to be brought to fruition. It would be sensible for the Home Secretary to set as a target the next Parliament, if not this one.

If the Government bring forward proposals expeditiously to put the NCIS on a statutory basis, they will have the Opposition's co-operation in the same atmosphere of maturity and sensible discussion as has characterised debate on this Bill. Both sides of the House should be able to co-operate with such an arrangement, so there is no reason for a long delay.

We hope that the Minister will either accept the amendment or set a target for achieving proper incorporation of the NCIS into statute during the course of next year.

7.15 pm

Mr. Maclean: I have considerable sympathy with the intention behind the amendment, but it would be unwise to pursue it. Throughout the Bill's passage, we have stressed that the involvement of the Security Service is part of a wider co-ordinated package of measures for tackling organised crime. I confirm that putting the NCIS on a clearer statutory footing is a fundamental part of the wider package. The Government have made a clear commitment to act on this, in parallel with the creation of a national crime squad to supplement the work being done by the existing regional crime squads.

I can assure the House and the hon. Gentleman that the Government want to legislate on those matters as soon as possible. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said on Second Reading, we hope to be in a position to introduce such legislation in the next Session, but these are complex matters, and many important questions are still to be resolved. We are currently engaged in discussions with ACPO and others on these points. It is important that the timing of that legislation should be determined by an agreement on the way forward and not by an artificially imposed deadline.

The amendment also seeks to reinforce the fact that the person to be designated by the Home Secretary for the purpose of agreeing co-ordination arrangements will be the Director-General of the NCIS. That is also something on which the Government have given a clear commitment. In Committee, I said that it is our firm intention to designate the director-general, emphasising the pivotal co-ordinating role that the NCIS is to play. I am happy to restate that commitment for the benefit of the House.

The amendment seeks to give statutory form to two clear commitments from the Government. Naturally, therefore, I would not demur from the underlying principles, but I would suggest that the amendment is unnecessary and would not enhance the Bill.

Mr. Beith: The Minister, perhaps for the purposes of shorthand, left a little unclear the situation with regard to Scotland. The Scottish Criminal Intelligence Office will continue to have a crucial role in Scotland and the NCIS will have to act as the funnel—if I may use the Minister's expression—through which co-ordination takes place, but all that needs to be part of the statutory basis on which the NCIS is set up.

The NCIS has no formal role in Northern Ireland at present, so it rests on some sort of liaison arrangement between its head and the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, unless some new arrangement is devised in statute. It is upon that somewhat shaky framework that some of the linkages in the Bill have to rest. The Minister must be aware of the concern.

Having said that, it would be churlish of me not to thank the Minister for the helpful way in which he has responded to many amendments and for the way in which he has managed to exclude partisan considerations in a way that the Home Secretary was not able to do.

Mr. Michael: The right hon. Gentleman manages to confuse rather than clarify the important issue that we have been trying to debate in the Chamber tonight.

I am pleased that the Minister has expressed the hope and intention of legislating next year, and I hope that he will keep to that. If, as has been our experience in the past few weeks, the Minister continues to listen to the Opposition as well as to ACPO, he will be able to achieve legislation in the coming Session without difficulty. In view of that, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

7.18 pm

Mr. Howard: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Consideration of the Bill has been marked by overwhelming support for the principles that lie behind it. Almost without exception, everyone has recognised that it is sensible to bring the particular skills and expertise that the Security Service possesses into the battle against organised crime in support of the law enforcement agencies.

The House needs no reminding of the menace that organised crime presents, and it is essential that we deploy all the resources that are available to combat it. I am grateful for the positive attitude that has been demonstrated on the Opposition and for their constructive support for the Bill.

When I opened the Second Reading debate, I set out the principles by which the involvement of the Security Service against serious and organised crime would be governed. No one has disputed those principles, but some concern was expressed that the original form of the Bill did not make them as explicit as it might. Accordingly,

the Government brought forward two important amendments in Committee—both of which enjoyed all-party support, for which I am grateful.

The first of the amendments, to clause 1(1), makes it explicit that the work of the Security Service in preventing and detecting serious crime will be carried out in support of the activities of the law enforcement agencies. There was never any doubt in our minds that primacy had to remain with the law enforcement agencies, because they have the leading role in the fight against serious crime. That has been made clear in the Bill.

The second amendment relates to the provision dealing with co-ordination arrangements. The Bill has now been amended to make it clear that the co-ordination arrangements will need to be agreed between the Director-General of the Security Service and a designated person who holds, or who has held, the office of chief officer of police. I intended to designate the Director-General of the National Criminal Intelligence Service for this purpose.

We hope to introduce legislation shortly to put the NCIS on a more clearly defined statutory footing and to enable us to enshrine in statute that the designated person should be the Director-General of the NCIS. In making this amendment, we are giving effect to one of the key principles that underlie the Bill—that the contribution of the Security Service will be co-ordinated through the NCIS and existing structures and that it will not operate independently.

This is a better Bill as a result of the amendments that were made to it in Committee. The primacy of the law enforcement agencies is now firmly enshrined in it. Beyond that, the provision relating to co-ordination arrangements, while not hampering the operational effectiveness of the Security Service, means that the director-general will not be able to settle on arrangements that do not meet the requirements of the agencies that the Security Service will support. We believe that we have substantially met the concerns that were expressed at an earlier stage by the Association of Chief Police Officers.

The Bill has enjoyed all-party support, and I hope that that will continue as it makes its way through another place. I look forward to being able to bring it into force as soon as practicable. Once enacted, the Bill will be an important tool in the fight against organised crime, which is a menace to society. It is vital that we bring all the available resources to bear against it.

The skills and experience of the Security Service have an important role to play when it comes to taking on drug traffickers, racketeers and money launderers. We must never forget that such criminals, though they may be far removed from their victims, cause human misery and suffering on a vast scale. They may be callous about the effects of their crimes but, when we see the effects in our constituencies, there can be no doubt that we must attach the highest priority to combating this evil menace.

The Bill represents the first element in a package of strong and effective measures against organised crime. By bringing it forward now, we are demonstrating that we are not prepared to delay in concentrating as much as effort as possible against those responsible for serious and organised crime.

I commend the Bill to the House.

7.22 pm

Mr. Straw: On Second Reading, I said that the Labour party supports both the purpose and the principle of the Bill, and I am glad to reiterate that support tonight. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for what he said about the constructive attitude that has been shown towards the Bill. In particular, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) and to other of my hon. Friends who served on the Standing Committee for their support of the Bill.

I thank the Secretary of State and the Minister of State for their approach to the two amendments that my hon. Friend moved in Committee. Their amendments related to the Security Service's support of the police, who will continue to have a lead role, and to the arrangements for the tasking of the Security Service in this new and important area of work.

The Secretary of State referred to the dangers of organised crime. Sadly, all hon. Members have constituents who are addicted to hard drugs. The people who peddle those drugs in our constituencies are often only small-time drug dealers, but behind them lie highly organised criminal gangs. We have not yet reached the situation—I pray that we never will—where organised crime is a threat to our national security, but we do not have to look to Latin America or to Africa to see what can happen if organised crime goes unchecked. We need only look to a fellow member state of the European Union—to Italy—to see what can happen if organised crime is allowed to go unchecked.

Organised crime is a cancer that threatens the stability of society as well as the security of the nation. The Bill represents an important development in the fight against organised crime. I hope that we have reflected people's anxieties about the work of the security and intelligence services. Striking the balance right between allowing their work to continue effectively and ensuring proper civil liberties is always difficult. The Bill—although not perfect—has managed to achieve that balance. The Labour party also commends the Bill to the House.

7.25 pm

Mr. Beith: On Second Reading, the Liberal Democrats expressed support for the purpose of the Bill but expressed reservations on a number of key points—echoing reservations that had been expressed by the Intelligence and Security Committee, strongly supported by chief constables and police officers. Unusually, two of the crucial reservations were met in Committee, and I agree that the Bill has been substantially improved as a result.

Of the remainder of the reservations, one rests heavily—it is a tenuous thread—on the ability of the Government to bring forward legislation in the next Session to achieve the legal status of the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the provision of warranting powers for the police for interventions on property. The Government have made their intentions clear, and there appears to be no disagreement, in principle, on those points. It remains to be seen whether the Government will deliver that legislation.

I remain dissatisfied with the way in which complaints by the public are dealt with. It will be necessary for the other place to examine further that point during its consideration of the Bill. We are not talking about a major

[Mr. Beith]

project. Although the Home Secretary got a little excited in his Third Reading speech, throughout most of the Bill, Ministers have made it clear that any transfer of resources involved at this stage is likely to be small, and that there will be no transfer if it is to the detriment of the battle against terrorism, particularly in the light of the IRA's renewed activities on the mainland.

The Bill is potentially helpful to the police in cracking down on some of the most sinister and dangerous organised crime, perpetrated by a limited number of gangs. We hope that that help can be brought to bear effectively, because it would be misleading to suggest to the public that this is a brave new world, or to create fears that the Security Service will be unleashed in a massive and intrusive involvement in every aspect of people's lives. The purpose of the debates on the Bill has been to get some of those details and safeguards right. My party is pleased that significant progress was made, although some matters remain unresolved.

7.27 pm

Mr. Allason: No one can doubt the determination of every hon. Member to fight crime. We must welcome the Bill if it does anything to decrease crime on our streets, to remove the drug dealers and to deal with the money launderers. However, I have some reservations about the proposition that 20 or 30 Security Service officers—who have probably never given evidence in court and who have no knowledge or experience of collecting evidence for presentation in court—will have the analytical skills that can be deployed against professional criminals.

It was clear from the Second Reading debate that, in some ways, the Security Service has run out of things to do—or certainly thought it had prior to the events of last week. It is unpalatable that the catalyst for this exercise has not been a long and carefully thought out strategy against organised crime, but an examination of the Security Service to see whether its surveillance techniques, personnel and other clandestine skills can be deployed against professional criminals. The truth is that, at the end of the cold war and during the Provisional IRA ceasefire, there was seen to be a capacity available for deployment elsewhere. I doubt whether the Bill will do a great deal of good in the fight against organised crime, but I am certainly aware of everybody's determination to fight crime.

Perhaps the nettle that has not been grasped is the real one—whether the other intelligence agencies that already play a role in countering international drug smuggling and money laundering should not better adopt the role. In 1945, there was a proposal and a firm intention to integrate the Secret Intelligence Service and the Security Service. That is why the building in Horseferry road, now the Department of the Environment, was originally built. There was to be a single integrated service, because it was believed that there was no geographical distinction in terms of counter-intelligence.

The Secret Intelligence Service has for many years been carrying out a great deal of extremely good work in countering international drug smugglers. Its work has been unacknowledged but it is a past master, recognised by the Drug Enforcement Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Central Intelligence Agency as being in command of a great deal of knowledge relating to money laundering, particularly in the Caribbean. I want to pay tribute to those officers who have risked their lives overseas by making inquiries, delving into bank accounts and liaising with local forces in order to deal with that menace.

Although I wish the Bill well, I have considerable doubts about whether 20 or 30 officers will do the slightest bit of good. I urge the Intelligence and Security Committee to take a long hard look at the role of the Secret Intelligence Service and the Security Service in the future.

7.31 pm

Mr. Mullin: Like the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason), I wish to register one or two small reservations about the Bill which I have had from the outset. It is true that it has been improved in Committee, but not all the problems have been solved. The problem is—it was mentioned by the hon. Member for Torbay and others during our deliberations—that a large part of the security apparatus has run out of things to do, and search parties have had to be sent out to find something useful for it to do.

If any other Government Department had run out of things to do, redundancies would have been declared and public money would have been saved. That is not the way things appear to happen in the security services, which have always been fairly lavish with public money, anyway. Those whose services were no longer required would be free to reapply to the police or wherever it was though that their talents could be used.

I do not dispute that some of the talents of the security services may be of use in fighting organised crime and, if so, that is how they should be deployed, but the relevant personnel should be transferred to the police so that they come under the authority of the police and are subject to the rule of law and the accountability—imperfect though it is—to which the police are subject. That is what should have happened.

It has been said several times during our deliberations that only 20 or 30 personnel will be involved. That may well be the case now, but the Bill opens up the possibility that in years to come several hundred people employed by the security services may be deployed in that way. The Bill that we are about to pass will be the authority for that. Who knows what those people may get up to or what difficulties may arise in, for example, giving evidence in a court of law?

I say the same as the hon. Member for Torbay. The Intelligence and Security Committee should monitor carefully how things work out with the 20 or 30 personnel. It should also monitor whether there is scope for saving some public money. If it thinks that there is, it should not hesitate to say so. This may be a subject to which the House will have to return if things do not work out as well as we all hope.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Local Government Reorganisation (Remuneration)

7.34 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I beg to move,

That the Local Government Reorganisation (Compensation for Loss of Remuneration) Regulations 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 2837), dated 3rd November 1995, a copy of which was laid before this House on 7th November, be revoked.

The regulations cover local authority staff who work for shire counties or shire districts and who have been affected by local government reorganisation. In particular, they cover those whose remuneration has been reduced as a result of the reorganisation—those who lose money through no fault of their own; those who suffer detriment.

It would probably be helpful to the House to spell out the large numbers who are potentially covered by the regulations. According to my calculations, 137,000 staff are involved in those areas where unitary authorities were elected last May and which will take control of those authorities this April. There are potentially 292,000 staff covered in the unitary authorities that will be elected this May and which will take control in April 1997 and 314,000 staff will be covered by those authorities for which there have been recommendations from the Local Government Commission but which, for one reason or another, have not yet been put to the House. Their position is unlikely to be sorted out for another two years. That makes a total of almost 750,000 people. We must bear in mind the fact that we are talking about the lives and livelihoods of that huge number of people.

The object of the rules is to attempt to treat people fairly, not just as chattels who work for a certain wage for one authority and who are then shifted to another authority and paid less money or who have their pay reduced because of reorganisation in the authority for which they are working. The object is to ease the pain of the insecurity.

The Government have turned the promotion of insecurity into an art form in recent times. People feel insecure on the streets where they live, old people feel insecure about their pension prospects, young people feel insecure about their chance of finding a job, sick people feel insecure about their chance of obtaining hospital treatment and, above all, many people feel insecure about the future of their jobs. One would have thought that some Conservative Members would have given that matter some close attention because some of them are insecure in their jobs.

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): If the hon. Gentleman considers this measure to be so important, will he explain why it took him and his colleagues from 28 November, when the regulations were introduced, to 10 January to lay a prayer against them?

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman is as daft as a brush, if it is not contrary to the rules of order to say so. We laid a prayer against them, but it took a long time for the Government to agree to debate it on the Floor of the House. We do not need any silly interventions like that. I do not think that many of the people whose pay has been affected will be interested in the toings and froings of this order. The Government proposed that we should debate the matter in Committee. We decided that the regulations should be debated not in Committee, but on the Floor of the House. They are now being debated on the Floor of the House; when matters are debated on the Floor of the House is decided not by the Opposition, but by the Government, as anybody should know.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): The hon. Gentleman referred to a number of issues about which people had concerns, such as health and youth unemployment. Yet youth unemployment is going down and we are doing better than other countries in Europe. Is it not the hon. Gentleman and his party who have raised fears, quite falsely, about those matters within the community at large? Do they take responsibility for using political opportunism?

Mr. Dobson: I could apply to the hon. Gentleman's contribution what Winston Churchill said in 1909 when talking about the future of the House of Lords. He challenged any Tory supporter of the existing position of the House of Lords to make speeches defending it. He pointed out that Lord Lansdowne had delivered an essay in feudalism in Oldham and he hoped that he would speak in every part of the country because the Liberals and Labour party members, who were against the House of Lords, would then not have to make their case because he had made it for them. Every time the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) gets up, he makes our case for us.

Above all, people feel insecure about their jobs. If Conservative Members do not believe that many of our fellow citizens feel insecure in their jobs, they are indulging in the worst form of deception, which is self-deception.

The local government reorganisation has been a shambles from start to finish. Against virtually a promise from the then Secretary of State for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), that virtually everywhere would become unitary authorities, we have shadow unitary authorities in office in Hartlepool, Stockton-on-Tees, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Bristol, North West Somerset, South Gloucestershire, Bath and North East Somerset, York, the East Riding, North Lincolnshire, Hull, North East Lincolnshire and Selby.

Other orders have been passed by the House, but the councils concerned have not yet come into operation. Those councils are Brighton and Hove, Bournemouth, Darlington, Derby, Luton, Milton Keynes, Poole, Portsmouth, Southampton, Stoke, Thamesdown, Leicester and Rutland. There are also a host of others that have not yet got through the House. Four councils have been approved by the Secretary of State for the Environment—Nottingham, Plymouth, Torbay and Southend. There are also six in Berkshire, plus Herefordshire, Blackburn, Blackpool, Halton, Medway Towns, Peterborough, Thurrock, Warrington and The Wrekin. People in all those areas do not know what is happening to their jobs.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I suspect that the House will find that in most authorities that are to be unitary authorities, there is substantial popular backing for those developments. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman's party backs those unitary authorities. The reason why the hon. Gentleman is so frustrated by the failure of local government reorganisation to sweep away the county

[Mr. David Nicholson]

tier—which, it is clear from this process, has considerable traditional, historical and popular backing—is that he hoped that the process would do the work of his party. Sweeping away that tier would mean that his party could introduce regional assemblies, which no one in England wants.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I am feeling rather helpful tonight. I inform hon. Members that it is not permissible to discuss local government reorganisation in general. We are talking about the remuneration of people who have been affected by the reorganisation.

Mr. Dobson: I accept your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as anyone should, so I shall not be tempted by what the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) has said, other than to say that when the right hon. Member for Henley, now the Deputy Prime Minister, introduced the idea of the Local Government Commission, he made it clear that he expected virtually everywhere in the country to be turned into a unitary authority. If we have had inconsistency, stupidity and a total mess, it is no good blaming the Opposition.

The problem with all this is that, as Conservatives clearly recognise—or should recognise if they are genuinely conservative—change costs money. If we are to have change in local government, whatever the merits of the end of the process of change, we must realise that the process absorbs resources, costs money and causes a lot of bother for the people involved. That is certainly happening at the moment.

For that reason, the Government have just announced that they cannot find the money to finance the process of change, some of which would be devoted to meeting the compensation under the regulations. In effect, the Government have announced that they cannot find money for the process of change in Nottingham, Plymouth, Blackpool, Peterborough, Torbay, Southend, Thurrock, Warrington, Blackburn, Halton, The Wrekin and the Medway towns, and all the changes in the whole of Berkshire.

It appears that the country is in such a mess that the Government, despite the fact that it is their policy, which has the support of the Opposition, which has been proposed by the Local Government Commission and which, as the hon. Member for Taunton has pointed out, is supported by local people in most places, cannot find the money to fund the process of change. As a result, we have an extended period of uncertainty and a likely period during which further expenses will be incurred. That uncertainty and expense will be bad for local people, bad for local purposes and bad for staff.

It is not as if the provision that is being made, either to compensate those who lose their jobs or those whose pay goes down, which is what we are dealing with tonight, is generous. Neither the provision for individuals nor the provision for funding the process of change is generous.

Humberside is being abolished, yet the new East Riding council is short of funds. The new North Lincolnshire council is short of funds. The Bristol authority is clearly short of funds; I think that one or more of my colleagues from Cleveland intend to make the same point. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) will want to make the point about the difficulties faced in Selby, which has been knocked about in two ways.

First, the removal of York from North Yorkshire has led to increases in costs for the rest of North Yorkshire, which includes Selby. Secondly, Selby, in the process of change, also lost a substantial amount of the suburbs of York to the new York authority, so it has had an enormous reduction in the rateable value of its residential property. Clearly, Selby, unless the Minister comes up with some extra funds, will find it difficult to cope and even to fund the rather miserable terms of the regulations. Like the other regulations that have stemmed from the reorganisation, the best thing that we can do is to try—

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I am not making a partisan point; I am only interested in the hon. Gentleman's view. How does he think that we shall avoid the mistakes that were clearly made in the previous major reorganisation of 1974, when there was a general view in the House that we were simply changing the deck chairs? There were enormous costs involved in that reorganisation. Despite the fact that the number of authorities was supposed to be reduced, it appeared that members of staff ensured that their jobs were preserved at their current levels. There was grave dissatisfaction throughout the country. How does the hon. Gentleman feel we can avoid that happening again?

Mr. Dobson: The best way in which to avoid having daft reorganisations of local government is not to have a Tory Government. The hon. Gentleman refers to the previous reorganisation. That reorganisation, which the present Government are now reorganising, was carried out by a Tory Government and the Labour and Liberal parties voted against it. We accept no responsibility for the chaotic mismanagement of change which has been a major characteristic of the Conservative party. Those were the people who spent £16 billion—not million, billion—introducing, trying to run and then getting rid of the poll tax.

Mr. Thomason *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It will now be helpful if we can get back to the proposed remuneration for those who have suffered loss. We are going very wide of the debate, so I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would stick to the subject of the debate—remuneration.

Mr. Dobson: I have done my level best to do so all the way through, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Let us compare the regulations with similar regulations pertaining to the same circumstances. The last time that similar regulations were introduced was in 1986, when another Tory Government abolished the Greater London council and the metropolitan counties. The 1995 regulations are much meaner and more miserable in their approach to staff than were those introduced at the time of the 1986 negotiation.

Mr. Thomason: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: No. The hon. Gentleman constantly stands up and tries to cause me to go out of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I refuse to respond to the temptation any further.

The flavour of the regulations may be summarised as "meaner than Maggie", because they are meaner than the regulations that were introduced when Lady Thatcher was Prime Minister. The provisions are much meaner and more miserable than those that applied when Mrs. Thatcher abolished the Greater London council and the metropolitan counties.

The regulations are designed to compensate a person who is affected by the local government reorganisation and who, in the process of that reorganisation, is forced to take a job with pay worse than their existing pay. Under the regulations, such compensation as is given will be given for only three years. Under the 1986 Thatcherite regulations, compensation made up the full difference between the previous pay and the new pay for seven years, and half the difference for one year. Under the regulations, the difference will be made up for only three years—half as good as Mrs. T.

The compensation will not make up all the difference between the pay that people would have had and the pay that they get, because—

Mr. Thomason: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the previous regulations had a cap imposed on them, which the 1995 regulations do not, so there is a big difference?

Mr. Dobson: The people affected by the regulations, whom I have been consulting, all tell me that if they could go "snap" on the 1986 regulations instead of the 1995 regulations, they would do so. Generally speaking, whatever the differences between the two sets of regulations, the 1986 regulations, passed 10 years ago, were more advantageous to the people covered by them than are the 1995 regulations.

People will not be fully compensated for what they lose. Even in three years, people with their high level of pay would have reasonably expected pay increases, increments, and possibly bonus payments—even performance-related pay—but they will have to forgo all that, and the benchmark used to calculate compensation will only be the pay that they receive at the time when their pay decreases.

Let us suppose that a person was due to receive a pay increase as a result of a nationally negotiated agreement, or an increment, on the day that the scheme came into operation. As compensation will be calculated on the basis of the pay that the person received the day before the scheme came into operation, they will be robbed of one year's pay increase or increment. That is miserable and mean-minded.

Compensation payments will not be pensionable, so not only will people lose their pay during the three years, but their pension will be permanently lower than it would have been if they had stayed in their old job. The Government will not make any allowance for the pension. That is unfair generally, but especially unfair to people approaching retirement, who have worked hard all their lives and whose pension entitlement will be cut as well as their pay because they have lost out in the lottery of local government reorganisation, which was set in train by the present Deputy Prime Minister. I suppose it is yet another of his unsigned cheques.

At the other end of the time scale, people will not be entitled to any compensation unless they have been in post for 12 months before the scheme comes into operation. I do not understand why that constraint applies. It is as much a pay cut for a person who has recently started a job as for a person who has been in it for a long time.

If the Government were logical and allowed people to include the compensation for pension purposes, it might be possible to justify giving a slight advantage to people who had served an authority for a long time. A person at the lower end of the pay scale, starting their career, who may have recently married, who has just been appointed or promoted, will lose out by receiving no compensation.

An important matter arises from the due commencement date of the regulations. Previously, the Minister and I have clashed over whether we understood orders and I believe that once it could be reasonably proved that neither of us understood the part of an order that was under discussion. As I understand the regulations, however, eligibility for compensation will come into operation only on the day of the election for the shadow authority.

In the case of people in the Brighton and Hove or Southampton group of authorities—I shall not read out all the place-names—the scheme will come into operation on 2 May 1996. A substantial problem will result, however, from the Government's decision to postpone elections or not to hold elections for the other tranche of authorities—Nottingham, Plymouth, The Wrekin, Blackpool, Blackburn and so on—because it is quite possible that, reasonably, those authorities will wish to make progress with reorganisation. It would make good sense for the new unitary authorities and the counties to start the reorganisation process once they know that reorganisation will take place. Even if they start moving people about and reorganising departments before the election day, that would trigger the arrangement.

People working for Nottinghamshire, Plymouth, Southend, The Wrekin, Warrington, Halton or the Medway Towns may therefore be moved in anticipation of local government reorganisation and may have their pay cut but not be eligible for the benefits of the compensation scheme.

Mr. Thomason: You are wrong.

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman sits on his behind, saying that I am wrong, but I am not at all sure that I am wrong. Obviously, no one will move from one employer to another to his detriment during that time, but it is quite possible that forward-looking authorities will want to start reorganising their departments as quickly as possible to minimise costs and so on, and very many staff are therefore exposed to being shifted around to their detriment without being entitled to compensation. I do not think I am wrong about that. I suspect that I will be proved right—not about everything, but about some things. *[Laughter.]* It is all very well for people to laugh, but supposing Conservative Members were employed by these authorities and had to anticipate a change—

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I shall explain why we are laughing as slowly and simply as I can. I am not laughing at the grief of people who find their employment disappearing. I am laughing at the spectacle of someone at the Dispatch Box admitting that he does not understand much of his brief but hoping that one day he will. That is highly insulting to those affected by the regulations.

Mr. Dobson: I made a new year's resolution two or three years ago never to give way again to the hon. Gentleman—

[Mr. Dobson]

ever since his affair with the taxi and the drink in Bournemouth. Clearly I must stick to my resolutions in future.

The other problem that arises concerns the limitation on compensation. Compensation covers only remuneration, so that any leave entitlement that may have been built up over a long, hard-working career, or the number of hours worked, can be cut with no compensation. That too shows that these arrangements are harmful to a great many hard-working people. It is one reason why we shall vote against them tonight. I repeat: these regulations are meaner than Maggie, an achievement most people would have thought quite difficult.

On top of all this, and as a result of the Government's decision not to proceed quickly with the remaining orders, there will be a massive period of unpleasant insecurity for large numbers of hard-working staff. That is bound to affect the quality of the services provided, and to lead to increased costs. We think the whole thing is a bad deal; that is why we shall vote against it tonight.

8.1 pm

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): We should note, first, the touching affection displayed by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) for Lady Thatcher. I shall see that she is informed instantly of the hon. Gentleman's retrospective Valentine. Meanwhile, he gave us an account of recent history which I should briefly like to correct, so as to set the debate in the necessary context.

When we set up the Cooksey commission, the hon. Gentleman and I agreed that there were some areas that needed to be reviewed, and we discussed which ones should be referred to the commission. The recommendations fell due before Christmas. We then had a period of consultation that closed yesterday. Indeed, the last two delegations came to the Department on Monday. We therefore need to reflect on the consultations, because we have not yet made up our minds—if we had, the consultations would have been a charade. In fact they were real.

We then have to produce the orders implementing our decisions. Subject to consultations again, we shall consider the practical details with the local authorities concerned to make sure that they are technically correct. We must then lay the orders and vote on them, here and in another place.

Anyone who thinks that all this can be done in order to hold shadow elections in May is not being realistic. The reason for the delay, which I regret, is one of timetabling. It would be difficult to do all the necessary spadework in time to give local authorities even a sporting chance of holding shadow elections in May—

Mr. Dobson: It would be impossible not to accept some logic in what the Minister says about the authorities that were recommended for unitary status by the Cooksey commission—they are the products of the re-review. The same, however, certainly does not apply to Nottingham, Plymouth and Torbay, because the Secretary of State has made clear his decision that they are to go ahead. But they were held up while other parts of the relevant counties were reconsidered, and the propositions for reconsideration of the other parts of these counties have not been endorsed by the commission. As Nottingham, Plymouth and Torbay have been on hold all this time, it would surely be reasonable to go ahead with them. It would not be difficult, and I can guarantee that we would help to get them through.

Mr. Curry: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's continuing intention to treat these matters, as far as possible, in a bipartisan fashion. That is only sensible. But he will know that the commission re-reviewed some new areas in places where certain arrangements had already been agreed for the creation of new unitary status. Some of the recommendations that I have received in the past few weeks have come from areas which the Cooksey commission declined to recommend for unitary status, asking me to send them back for a third time around the course. That is what has prevented us from closing out the matter and going ahead. Consultation is bound to leave options open.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Let us leave aside for a moment areas apparently decided on and agreed by the Government some time ago—including Berkshire, which has had difficulties with judicial review, and so on. It has at least been through the draft order process once, though. The Minister seems to be saying that timetabling difficulties are the sole reason for his withholding the orders dealing with the Cooksey-type recommendations. Surely he should have realised that a long time ago. He has left the authorities in ignorance of whether they are going to go ahead with May elections until the last possible moment. The Minister could have known about any timetabling difficulties last year.

Mr. Curry: When we set up the Cooksey commission it was not clear when it would make its recommendations. Had it asked for more time to consider, it would have been logical to allow it more time. When local authorities have discussed the matter with me, I have made it clear that we intend to facilitate an effective transfer of power during the reorganisation. Of course everyone wants to know what is going to happen, but we want to ensure an effective transfer of responsibilities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister's opening remarks have been helpful, but now we should get down to the regulations.

Mr. Curry: I anticipated your desire, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and was about to move to the precise subject matter of today's debate.

As the House will be aware, we intend reorganisation to bring benefits, and both sides of the House agree that reorganisation means big changes, not least for local authority staff. Some of the savings that will come from reorganisation necessarily result from changes in the staffing structure. It may be helpful to outline the three main changes to arrangements for staff that flow from reorganisation.

The first change is the redundancy compensation scheme which was debated in the House more than a year ago and which has been in place for more than a year. So that piece of the jigsaw is already in place. Secondly, there are the staff transfer orders. They will provide automatic transfer

for front-line service staff, to ensure that there is no disruption to essential local services over the reorganisation period. The Welsh Office and my Department have worked closely with the authorities over recent months to prepare the staff transfer orders. The orders governing staff in Avon, Cleveland, Humberside and North Yorkshire have now all been agreed with all the relevant authorities, and will be laid, as planned, at the end of this month, in time for the reorganisation on 1 April.

The third element of the package is the scheme for compensating staff who take a lower paid job as a result of the reorganisation—the subject of tonight's debate. The regulations are the result of two extensive consultation exercises in England and Wales. There were obviously a large number of comments. We have considered them carefully, and they are reflected in the final scheme which I am about to describe.

Mr. Thomason: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, if the regulations do not make progress today, the future of authority staff will be uncertain and that it is in their interest to have the matter determined promptly?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend is right. If the regulations were not passed, the detriment scheme would not exist. I have no doubt that the Government would wish to look again at the detriment arrangements, but it would take many weeks, given the consultation that we have to go through. Undoubtedly, that would mean that the uncertainty would be prolonged, as he suggested

Ms Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): Could the Minister explain why people in Avon are being offered a less generous detriment scheme than has been offered in any previous local government reorganisation and less generous than those currently in place for civil servants? Why are they being asked to take the penalty of the cost of reorganisation?

Mr. Curry: I am delighted that the hon. Lady is so impatient to hear what I will say. I intend to address directly the scheme before us.

Ms Primarolo: So why is it a less generous scheme?

Mr. Curry: I do not accept the premise of that remark.

The purpose of compensation for financial detriment is to encourage staff who wish to continue their careers in local government to stay rather than take redundancy. We recognise that there is a great deal of expertise in local government which new councils will not wish to lose. Employees are not prevented from taking redundancy if it arises but if they wish to stay in local government, despite a drop in pay, we need to provide a bridging mechanism. The regulations provide the bridging mechanism. By avoiding the need for redundancy payments and encouraging councils to retain existing employees in new jobs, the scheme should benefit staff, employers and the taxpayer.

The regulations do not give anything away. They do not change in any way the normal protection afforded to staff by employment law. Terms and conditions can be changed only with an employee's agreement. The detriment compensation scheme is there to give employer and employee additional options in making the transition from old to new staffing structures.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): It is of course the case that the transfer of undertakings regulations to which the Minister alludes do not cover pensions. What specific provision is being made to build in proper protection for future service in the pension funds of those people that the Minister recognises as valuable to local government?

Mr. Curry: I am disappointed that there is so little faith among Opposition Members in my willingness to cover comprehensively the matters that arise from the regulations. The hon. Gentleman can rest assured that I intend to deal with pensions.

Detriment compensation is mandatory. That was requested by many consultees, including the local authority associations and the unions. It is available widely to staff affected by reorganisation and can arise in a number of ways. The shadow unitary authority, having decided on its staffing structure, will offer appointments to staff from an outgoing or transferring authority on the basis of the new salary structure. That may mean a reduction for some staff. Many staff will transfer by staff transfer orders or under TUPE and carry on doing the same job with no change in terms and conditions. However, in the subsequent restructuring that the authority may undertake to sort out the varying terms and conditions of the staff that it has inherited, such staff may be offered a change of terms and conditions.

Finally, staff who stay in continuing authorities may similarly be offered changed terms and conditions as a result of restructuring. The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) will recall the occasion on which he and I fell into some terminological inexactitudes in an earlier debate over what constituted a continuing authority. The hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) will recall that as well. A continuing authority is a unitary authority built on an existing district which acquires additional functions.

If a change in salary arises at any time in the period running from the date of the shadow elections to 18 months after the reorganisation date, detriment compensation will be triggered. The shadow authority may therefore pay detriment compensation and the fully operational authority may also do so up to 18 months following reorganisation. That should provide adequate time for any restructuring that flows from the reorganisation.

Whenever it is triggered, the compensation is paid for three years. Provided that they meet certain criteria, which I shall describe later, staff will receive compensation equal to three times the fall in annual remuneration. It will be payable over 36 months, thus in effect ensuring that the individual monthly total of pay and benefits will be maintained at the old level following the change in salary.

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend is receiving considerable flak from the Opposition about how mean he has been, but he would be the first to accept that, in the private sector, things such as detriment contributions are not available. Will he answer the question that I put to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson)

[Mr. Leigh]

that he declined to answer? While the public are concerned about junior members of staff who lose their jobs altogether, what they are really worried about is what happened in the previous reorganisation, when senior members of staff cushioned their positions. They ensured that, where there were two directors of housing, both kept their jobs and a controller of housing was appointed on top of them. That is what the public want to hear about. Will my hon. Friend make it clear that the Government will ensure that such cheating of council tax payers does not continue?

Mr. Curry: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reflecting a point of view that one hears widely. People wish to make sure that the reorganisation is carried out effectively and does not become a pretext for people to upgrade their jobs when a change in functions is not necessarily involved. We will examine carefully some of the increases in salary that appear to have been awarded in some authorities.

Mr. Dobson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Curry: I shall in a moment. I must make it clear to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) that the regulations do not include an element of surtax on people who have received a higher salary to fund the detriment compensation scheme.

Mr. Dobson: Will the Minister comment on the eligibility of Ministers of the Crown who have lost their ministerial posts and gone to the Back Benches—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister would be wise not to reply to that.

Mr. Curry: Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is with the utmost restraint that I observe your injunction not to respond, deeply conscious as I am of what the ministerial compensation would be should I suffer a mishap in my relations with the Prime Minister over the next 24 hours.

Mr. Dobson: Great Scott!

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman is in characteristic form—largely unoriginal but none the less endearing for that.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras compared this scheme with that made available in 1986. Such comparisons must be fair and take into account all aspects of the two schemes. Under the 1986 scheme, the compensation payable was limited to £5,000 a year. There is no limit in these regulations, which in that respect are more generous. That was something that the local authority associations and the unions specifically asked for during the consultation.

Secondly, in the 1986 scheme a person had to have been in employment continuously for three years before reorganisation before becoming eligible for compensation. We have taken a more liberal approach in the regulations and require people to have been in employment on 1 April in the year before reorganisation—that is, one year's service at the most.

Thirdly, in the regulations, we require employers to make monthly payments of compensation. In the 1986 scheme, they were required by law only to make annual payments in arrears, although authorities had the option of making interim payments. If the schemes are compared in their totality, recognising the need to take account of the money available, the regulations offer significant benefits when compared with the scheme available in 1986, and are better able to deliver their object. It is a better-engineered scheme.

The detriment scheme aims to ease the transition from the old to the new staffing structure. It is not salary protection. New councils will wish to set up new staffing arrangements, with a salary structure to match and staff will get the salary set by the employer as the rate for the job. That may well increase over time. The payments under the regulations are compensation, not part of that salary and there is no presumption that they should increase in line with the salary.

The underlying salary may, of course, increase, and the employee will not be denied that increase if the increase in salary is matched by a decrease in compensation. If an individual is unfortunate enough to suffer more than one reduction in remuneration during the prescribed period, the regulations allow those reductions to be considered as a separate event, and allow separate sets of detriment payments to be made in respect of each reduction.

I have used the term "salary" as a convenient form of shorthand. The regulations provide for total remuneration—that is, salary as well as other payments or benefits in kind—to be taken into account in the calculation of entitlement to compensation. The definition of remuneration is similar to that used for pension purposes, and is generally familiar.

Some consultees have been anxious about the effect on the pensions of staff who qualify for detriment compensation under the regulations, and have asked why detriment payments are not pensionable. The answer is that there is no need for them to be: pensions are protected by other means. The Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 1995—which, no doubt, hon. Members will instantly recall—provide for staff to receive a certificate of material change enabling them to elect to have any pensions calculations based on higher previous earnings.

The certificate enables staff to choose their highest earnings in a period going back as far as 13 years. Staff are therefore protected—and, in addition, will receive a slight financial benefit through not having to pay contributions to their local government pension schemes on their detriment compensation.

Mr. Miller *rose—*

Mr. Curry: No doubt the hon. Gentleman will wish to deal with the subject in his own speech. If the House gives me leave to do so, I shall try to respond to any additional points that he makes in my winding-up speech.

Mr. Miller *rose—*

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman seems to be rather anxious for his dinner.

Mr. Miller: In fact, the hon. Gentleman had his dinner earlier so that he could listen to the Minister.

I accept that regulations are in place to deal with the pensions certificate, but they do not provide for a notional final salary—the salary that someone within four or five years of retirement might have achieved under the previous arrangements. There is a difference between the position created by the regulations to which the Minister referred and the detriment that some people might suffer. I do not expect the Minister to make arrangements for someone who may have just joined the scheme, but those approaching pensionable age could be significantly disadvantaged by the final salary arrangements. Could not amendments be made to the existing regulations?

Mr. Curry: I shall reflect on what the hon. Gentleman has said, and hope to deal with it later if the House gives me permission. If I cannot do so, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman giving more details. Pensions are a complex issue, and I do not pretend to be conversant with every detail. The hon. Gentleman and I will have to mug up on it.

We have been asked to make the scheme widely available, and we have done so; but there are some qualifying criteria. The drop in salary must be attributable to local government reorganisation, because the regulations do not extend to more general restructuring exercises. The employee must be in the employment of a relevant council on or before 1 April of the year prior to the reorganisation; staff employed after that date must accept the job on that basis. The drop in salary must be suffered in the prescribed period, staff must be employed by councils directly affected by reorganisation, and detriment compensation will not be payable to any individual receiving redundancy compensation or retirement benefits.

In the regulations, we have set out a scheme that is widely available to local government staff affected by reorganisation. The normal protection accorded to staff by employment law is unaffected by the regulations. Detriment compensation will enable authorities and staff to make arrangements to ease the transition to the new structures. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) has said, the motion to revoke the regulations will deny employers and staff that possibility. It will make it more difficult for staff to stay in local government employment, and for councils to retain experienced staff during restructuring. On that basis, I strongly advise the House to reject the motion.

8.24 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Hon. Members will not be surprised by my speech. Over the past 15 months, I have opposed a number of measures of this kind. I am disappointed that so few hon. Members are present, because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) pointed out, the regulations will eventually affect hundreds of thousands of people.

I suppose that the reason for the poor attendance is the piecemeal way in which the Government are introducing these measures. They have used a combination of SI—statutory instrument—and SO, or stealth and obfuscation. Many of my hon. Friends—and, I suspect, quite a few Conservative Members—will regret the scant regard that has been paid to the way in which those gradual steps have eroded the forms of local government that existed until this year.

I speak as a representative of one of the early authorities. My constituency is part of Cleveland county, where the process of transition is all but complete. It gives me no satisfaction to tell the House that all my predictions about the Government's proposals are coming true, and that the impact on staff—I am aware that that is the point of our debate—has been grave.

I intend to speak generally. Perhaps some Conservative Members will pick up a few tips on what to expect after the next general election, but I hesitate to lower the debate to the ridiculous levels to which some Conservatives have tried to lower it—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman's general comments will be within the scope of the debate.

Mr. Cook: I am trying to explain how staff will be affected by the proposals, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that that will be within the scope of the debate.

We are not talking about fat cats; we are not even talking about top officers in local authorities.

Mr. Thomason: Yes, we are.

Mr. Cook: If the hon. Gentleman would listen, rather than trying to get his name on to the record—as he has tried to do throughout the debate—he might learn something, and Bromsgrove might be a better place.

We should not even be talking about top officers, many of whom have done rather nicely out of reorganisation, either through generous pay-offs—for those taking early retirement—or through enhanced salaries for those taking promotion or moving on. Conservative Members have mentioned that. We should be talking about the thousands of hard-working and frequently low-paid staff in local authorities—the many people referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras—whose lives and careers have been thrown into disarray through no fault of their own.

They are the victims of a cynical and, in my view, dishonest political and bilious vendetta against authorities such as the effective and efficient Labour authority in Cleveland, whose only crime was to have the nerve to defend local services and defy the Government's unremitting drive to destroy a truly democratic local government structure, transferring its responsibilities lock, stock and barrel to a quango state. The county of Cleveland is rapidly becoming known as "quangoland".

I know, from the experience of my constituents who work in the local authority, the heartache and disruption that is being inflicted on so many local authority employees. Junior staff have had to apply for 30, 40—sometimes 50—different jobs, in the desperate hope of finding further employment. I know of highly qualified senior staff whose careers have been destroyed and who are now told that they are simply the casualties of the reorganisation. I know of examples where staff have reached such desperation about their future that they have been unable to eat or sleep. There have been reports in the local media that at least one employee was driven to the point where he took his own life. His fears over reorganisation were considered a significant factor.

Yet what happened to Cleveland county council—the current employer and which will be dismantled at the end of next month—when it offered modest counselling and

[Mr. Cook]

support? Abuse was piled on it, not least by some hon. Members, because it had the temerity to offer a counselling service to the very people whom we are discussing, who not only were in danger of a miserly level of compensation but were thrust into the maelstrom of emotional turmoil. I wonder what those hon. Members would say if they came face to face with those workers or their families tonight.

What do the Government, who so hate public services, offer to victims of the vendetta? The regulations offer the worst compensation ever offered in any reorganisation. The offer is far worse than the terms that the Government provide for civil servants or, indeed, Ministers. Is it any wonder that morale among so many workers is at rock bottom? They are seeing the services that they have worked so hard to build up ripped apart and their future thrown into chaos and confusion. They are not only losing their employment, but seeing the structures that they have helped to build over the years dismantled as they leave.

As a former construction worker, I can tell the House that when I took redundancy at the end of a contract, I was happy to walk away and see that what had been a green-field site when I walked on to it had become an operating entity contributing to the community. The individuals we are discussing will not have that benefit.

Against such a background, what hope is there for the consumers of local services, who are being treated with precisely the same cynical disregard as the staff? Day in, day out, they are discovering that the promises made to them by Ministers and their stooges in local government were total illusions. Let us remember some of the promises. Let us remember that Sir John Banham and his commission colleagues told the people of Cleveland that, with regard to costs, they estimated that the annual savings under their proposals would be, on average, £46 a household, or the equivalent of 10 per cent. of the average council tax bill. The people of Cleveland are paying more, the services are fewer and the people who provide those services are threatened with meagre compensation.

Only last night, my local evening paper carried on its front page what it described as "the full horror" that my constituents, my council's employees and the rest of the Teesside community face. It is a horror that is likely to include drastic cuts in services to some of the most vulnerable groups—the elderly, disabled people and the mentally ill. Yet local council tax payers will face bigger bills, and local employees the prospect of unemployment.

It is a disgrace that the architects of this disastrous reorganisation are so silent and so absent. So uninterested are they that they seem to have walked away from the havoc that they have wreaked, the careers and lives that they have ruined and the services that they have wrecked. My constituents will be living with that for many years to come.

8.33 pm

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): The hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) represents a neighbouring county to my own in North Yorkshire, and nobody who lives in and represents the north of England can dispute the fact that Cleveland has been at the eye of the storm in terms of local government change and reform in recent years. I understand the points that he made. As a representative of a county with Cleveland to the north and Humberside to the south, I understand what it means to have awkward neighbours, if I can put it like that, in county terms.

The hon. Gentleman has, however, cast a pall of gloom over the regulations before us, which do not merit the negative criticism that he levelled at them. This is, after all, a compensation measure.

I am obliged to my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration, who pinpointed and spelled out clearly the improvements that have been made to the measure compared with what was on offer in 1986. As I understand it, local government officers who are confronted with the dilemma of having to choose between transferring to new local authorities as a result of the reorganisation and thereby having to accept lower salaried posts, and ceasing employment in local government altogether and henceforth going into retirement with a pension, or accepting redundancy, will have a real incentive as a result of my hon. Friend's measure. They will have an incentive at least to try to find a new lease of life in local government.

That is particularly relevant to the parliamentary division of Selby, which is coterminous with our local government district. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) was good enough to refer to Selby in his speech. Indeed, I hardly ever see him on his feet without Selby district getting a notice, and I am obliged to him tonight. He is quite right to say that Selby has been rather hard hit by the local government reorganisation—the double whammy, as he referred to it.

I remind my hon. Friend the Minister that, out of a staff provision of about 250 local government officers in the Selby district, no fewer than 65, which is a high proportion, will depart from Selby district employment. Forty-three of them will go to York. That is a relief, because they will continue in local government service. No fewer than 23 are not in local government employment, because there does not seem to be the opportunity for them at present, and early retirement or redundancy looks like the only option for them.

For the 43 or so Selby local government officers who are going to York, the compensation offered this evening, which will extend for three years and represent the difference between old and new pay, frozen at the point of reorganisation, will be a welcome incentive for the younger men in particular to continue to try to make a career in local government, even if it means an initial drop in salary.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for giving in the regulations—it may be a standard, but it is refreshing to have it reiterated—the welcome definition of remuneration, which is set out on page 2 in the interpretation clause. There are incidental expenses in changing one's local government employer, particularly in a rural area such as Selby district, where distances are quite extensive. There are the repercussions of the increased cost of travel from one's home to the new employer, of the uprooting of home and household and so on. Those are real and measurable disincentives to moving to a new local government employing authority, but I am glad to say that they are covered in the remuneration definition. I am grateful to the Minister for that.

Unquestionably, the taxpayer and the Government will pay for the scheme. I trust that local government will not have to foot the bill for the remuneration and

compensation schemes. My hon. Friend will be vividly aware that part of the purpose of the scheme is to encourage people not to take the redundancy route or to opt for early retirement but to continue to try to find work in local government.

A recurring problem that is acutely felt in the Selby district is that the cost of redundancy falls on the ratepayer, not on the taxpayer. That is why it is valuable to have a proposed scheme that will be funded by the Government, one of whose purposes is to avoid redundancy costs, which, as I say, fall directly on the shoulders of ratepayers.

The dilemma of whether to take further employment with local government or to take redundancy raises a potential problem. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, represent a coal mining constituency. The option of redundancy or the payment of early pensions for miners causes a difficulty that I am anxious should not be repeated in the proposed scheme. I do not know whether the Minister has heard of the troubles that are occurring partly in the Department of Trade and Industry as a result of the British Coal compensation scheme, and especially its staff superannuation fund. When the coal industry was privatised, the trustees of that superannuation fund provided that those who would be made redundant should be able to draw their pension at the age of 50 instead of the normal age of 60, which was the transitional or payable date for the pension under the fund.

We are discussing a redundancy compensation package. In the British Coal scheme, some miners who were made redundant on privatisation automatically qualified under the special provision to receive a pension at the age of 50. However, those miners were rapidly employed by the new employer and worked alongside miners who would have to work to the age of 60 before they received a pension. What will happen under the proposed scheme if local government officers take the redundancy route?

Mr. Curry *rose—*

Mr. Alison: My hon. Friend is prepared to advise me before I have completed the question.

Mr. Curry: I think that my right hon. Friend is asking whether it is possible for someone to get compensation for redundancy and a job with the successor authority and, in practice, walk out of one authority on, say, 31 March and into another on 1 April, pocketing the redundancy payment. I do not think that the regulations permit that, but to be sure, we are amending the staff regulations and are consulting on amendments to the redundancy compensation regulations. We shall lay them shortly.

Mr. Alison: I am obliged to the Minister for that reassuring answer. It shows that the Government have continued to keep their finger on the pulse of some of the sensitivities in this area of transferring from one employment to another. The problem is reflected in the disastrous situation in Selby. Within the coal mining industry, there is profound disenchantment because people working alongside each other are being treated differently.

I am glad that the Minister has pre-empted that recurring, because it would be deleterious for local government if there were stresses and strains between people arriving from different backgrounds of employment and with different prior entitlements. It would not be desirable for them to have to work in the same environment under the same terms of reference and have entirely different conditions of service. I am obliged to my hon. Friend for pre-empting that problem and reassuring me about it.

The Minister is manifestly following the debate closely and is ready to concede even before a point has been fully developed. That is a most disarming attitude for a Minister to adopt. Will he refresh his memory about the fundamental purpose of the provision, which is to direct local government officers who are facing redeployment in the direction of continuing employment under a compensation scheme that the taxpayer will accept? Will he remember that, although the sheep may be on the right, some goats will have to go on the left? Those goats are the unfortunate local government officers—20 or 30 of them in the Selby district—who cannot get openings in, for example, the new York unitary authority and will have to take redundancy. Selby will have to pick up the cost of that redundancy, and it will be gigantic for the officers who will not be re-employed in local government.

A few days ago, I reminded my hon. Friend about an SSA revenue support grant from his Department of more than £4 million. But the cost of redundancy in the Selby district for those who cannot go down the preferred route will be £1.5 million.

Mr. Curry *rose—*

Mr. Alison: Once again my hon. Friend pre-empts my question.

Mr. Curry: I remember the debate in which the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) urged liberality upon me and I said that I would take Selby's case seriously. I think that my right hon. Friend is speaking about SCAs, supplementary credit approvals for redundancy, rather than the normal revenue support grant payments. I think that I am right in saying that, up to the present, the only demand by Selby is for a small amount of, I think, £100,000, which is manifestly inadequate. My Department is waiting for Selby to formulate a realistic demand. It is unusual for a Minister to describe a realistic demand as one that is likely to be higher than the one that has been made.

Mr. Alison: My hon. Friend has—very conveniently, I dare say—put his head into a little noose. In fact, the point at which redundancy liabilities become operative is crucial to Selby's problem. There are two years in question—1995-96 and 1996-97. In 1995-96—the year Selby's redundancy liabilities arose—the council put in a bid for £1.5 million to the Department of the Environment, and was offered £500,000.

My hon. Friend is suggesting that, for 1996-97, the council should make up the tally by putting in for what it did not succeed in getting in its first claim. But the chief finance officer of Selby district council has told me that in order not to falsify the claim—and thus be subject to the scrutiny of the district auditor—the council cannot

[Mr. Alison]

pretend that the liabilities arise in 1996-97, the year in which my hon. Friend is asking me to claim for more. If the council claimed for more, it would face the prospect of being faulted by the district auditor for falsifying a claim, as such claims can be made only in respect of the year in which a liability arises. It is no use my hon. Friend saying that, if the council increases the bid for the 1996-97 provision, it might get something. The council will not get it without falling foul of the district auditor.

I hope that my hon. Friend will focus his intensely perceptive and analytical mind on that relatively limited, specific problem, and decide whether he can provide a little retrospection for Selby, so that the offers that he makes of supplementary credit approvals can be unified with the council's liabilities. I do not want to bore my hon. Friend, who has been helpful. Perhaps he can bring the matter to a consummated and fruitful conclusion, so that we can get something for Selby that helps.

I remind the House that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in a speech on 31 January that he

"announced a scheme last November to damp unacceptable increases in council taxes directly attributable to local government reorganisation".—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1996; Vol. 270, c. 1026.]

He also talked about the special help that might be available in, for example, North Lincolnshire. I hope very much that my hon. Friend the Minister will see whether he can allow Selby to dip its ladle into that pot of soup—limited though it may be—to get the special help that is needed.

I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I know of your sympathy for the coal industry—for having allowed me to digress a little. Nevertheless, I offer my warmest commendation to my hon. Friend on bringing forward this admirable and worthwhile scheme. I wish it every success.

8.52 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I am delighted to have the chance to take part in the debate. It is a very suitable day for the debate to take place, following the announcement yesterday that much of the local government review has been postponed for a further year. Opposition Members have accepted for a long time that the local government review is a shambles, as it leaves us with an enormous number of different situations. Councils in some parts of the country have not yet been made unitary authorities but are expecting that to happen, while others have been made unitary authorities but have not yet had their elections. All sorts of different results have emerged, and many people have been left in uncertainty as a result.

I was disappointed by the Minister's answer to my intervention, because it seemed to show that, until Sir David Cooksey produced his report, he was worried about what the timetable might be. The timetable must have been obvious to the Minister from the middle of last December, at the very latest. Staff in the authorities that have had their unitary status put off for another year have been left unnecessarily in doubt about what will happen for at least two months beyond the moment the Minister could have made things entirely clear. I was disappointed by the hon. Gentleman's answer and by the shambles of the whole process.

We are beginning to know when authorities will finally gain unitary status. The difficulties that the review has caused mean that staff have been facing uncertainty for at least four years and, in some cases, rather longer. The possibility of redundancy and loss of earnings has been hanging over people all that time, and has left them in a worrying position.

It is not surprising that morale in local government has fallen a great deal, as it has in many different jobs. People have been left in an uncertain situation, particularly in areas where it is most likely that unitary authorities will be introduced. Sadly, the compensation package under review tonight will not do very much—if anything—to restore morale to the levels that existed before the review. That is due to the uncertainty of many councils, particularly those where the orders have not yet been laid but are likely. We now know that those orders probably will not be laid for some time.

Because of that uncertainty, many councils have been losing some of their best officers. Perhaps not surprisingly—one cannot blame them—many have felt it more sensible to take a job in an authority that they know will continue for the foreseeable future, rather than risk remaining in one which, at some time in the next two or three years, could move to unitary status; such a move might leave them either without a job at all, or in a job in which their pay, for one reason or another, was lower. This completely undermines the authorities which we ought to be strengthening in the run-up to unitary authority status, as they are losing some of their best staff.

The problems with these regulations are very much the same as the problems described to us by the Minister more than a year ago when we were discussing redundancy regulations. Those regulations failed entirely to match up to previous reorganisation packages for compensation, and the same is true of the current regulations. These regulations state that compensation for loss of earnings is available for three years; yet, in 1974, open-ended compensation was available. As we have heard, in 1986 compensation was available for six years, with reduced compensation again after that. The fact that aspects of previous schemes were less generous than aspects of the current scheme does not make up for the problems caused where the current scheme is less generous than previous schemes.

Other matters add to the view that there is a lack of generosity under this scheme compared with previous schemes. There is the fact that increments that people might have been expecting will not be included in the compensation package. Staff will lose the value of any assumed increments, at least, if they move to another less well-paid job. Someone who serves for less than a year is excluded from the package altogether. I see no reason to suppose that, just because someone has served less than a year, he should be excluded from the package.

That measure has one particular danger as well. Some people who are moving into authorities are taking over from other officers who wanted to leave to assure their future. It will be particularly difficult to recruit staff to fill the positions where good officers have left early to make their future more secure. If we are to say to those very people whom we are trying to recruit to fill those vital posts that they will not get the compensation package that other officers will get, it will be even more difficult to fill those posts before unitary status arrives.

If the increments are not to be taken into account—as has been made clear, despite what the Minister said earlier—there may still be a difficulty over pension payments, as people may lose out. The fact that reductions in leave entitlement will not be taken into account is another example of how the current compensation package is not as generous as it could and should have been.

There is one important point about the regulations that has not yet been mentioned. Regulation 4(h) refers to those working variable hours who are to be excluded from the regulations, which is a significant problem. What it does not say is that those whose variable hours are reduced because of a change in their job when a new unitary authority takes over will be included. Instead, it says that all who have a contract to work variable hours will be excluded, even if that change has come about simply because of the change of authority and the need to take on a new job. That is grossly unfair to the many people on variable hours contracts.

It could mean that people who may have worked an average of 40 hours a week on a variable hours contract will in future not be given any compensation if they move to a job where, on average, their hours are reduced to only 20 hours a week.

Mr. Thomason: The hon. Gentleman seems to be suggesting that, if somebody who has been working for 40 hours has his hours reduced to 20, he should then be paid double for a period of three years for working only half the hours that he previously worked. Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that?

Mr. Rendel: I am suggesting that compensation should be due to somebody who has found that, through no fault of his own but purely because the Government have set up a new unitary authority, his pay level has been drastically reduced because of the need to change jobs, for which he cannot be blamed. I think it entirely fair that such people should get the same compensation as others who may change to jobs where they work less hard, with much better conditions of service.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am following the careful and sensitive way in which the hon. Gentleman advances his case. However, as far as I can recall, he has not yet mentioned the council tax payer or the income tax payer. How does what he describes relate to the private sector, where, unfortunately, many people find themselves out of a job, through no fault of their own, because of a change in the market? How does the hon. Gentleman compare local government with other sectors of the economy? Surely they cannot be divorced.

Mr. Rendel: That is an interesting argument. There are regulations that cover redundancy in the private sector. The hon. Gentleman seems to be suggesting that this whole compensation package, which will inevitably fall on the taxpayer, should be thrown out. I shall wait with interest to see whether he will vote against it tonight. The logic behind his argument was that it was wrong for the taxpayer to have to pay any sort of compensation when someone had to change his job as a result of the Government's reorganisation of local government.

There is no reason to exclude from the compensation package people who work on variable hours contracts. We have already been told that the calculation of compensation for fees is to be based on an average amount earned over the previous five years. The same principle could easily be applied to the people I have mentioned. It would be reasonable to calculate what average hours they had been working over a previous period and allow for that level of compensation when they have to change their jobs.

It is not an insignificant problem—some 900,000 local authority employees work part-time. Of course, not all of them are affected by the change. Some will not be working in areas that will become unitary authorities, but many will. There is also an increasing trend towards variable hours contracts, so the problem is, if anything, becoming more important day by day.

Regulation 4(h) is especially likely to be important to people such as home helps, non-teaching school staff, grounds maintenance workers and many other local authority manual workers. It is poorly worded, and I fear that it will be an opening for exploitation of staff by employers. At the very least, it needs some qualification to make it clear that it should apply only to cases where there has been a genuine change of employment rather than a change of job because of the introduction of the unitary structure.

Regulation 4(h) should be deleted altogether. It is not possible, however, to make such a change, which is reason enough to throw out the regulations in their entirety and instruct the Government to introduce some new ones even though to do so would cause further delay, which would, I acknowledge, cause extra worries for local authority workers. We do not yet know what the outcome of the vote tonight will be, although it is interesting that some Conservative Members seem to think that the regulations should be thrown out. Will the Minister clarify what the Government mean by the regulation? After all, if local authority staff find themselves in conflict with their employers as a result of regulation 4(h), it will be important for the Minister to specify exactly how it should be interpreted.

I conclude on the point with which I started. The entire local government review has been an on/off affair—proposals were going through but then delayed, and the Government ducked and dived, issued guidelines beyond their legal powers and now seem to have run out of stamina altogether. People have been kept guessing and waiting to see what compensation they would receive, and will now have to wait for at least a further two years as a result of yesterday's announcement.

It is bad enough that the public have been kept waiting and guessing what would happen to their future relationship with their local authority, but it is much worse that local government staff have been kept waiting. The Government have been grossly insensitive. Finally, at the end of a long dark tunnel, staff have been offered a wholly inadequate compensation package. That shows how little the Government think of local democracy and, in particular, of the public servants who make it work on our behalf.

9.6 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): There was clearly a speech to be made in support of the prayer which the Labour party tabled against the regulations. Even if one does not agree with the final analysis, there was a speech to be made—and the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) made it. We do not have to agree with all his

[Mr. Patrick Nicholls]

conclusions to say that he made a typically passionate and eloquent speech. It is with some sadness that I have to say that it was a speech that one might like to have heard from the Opposition Dispatch Box.

It has been my unhappy privilege to see the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) operate a number of times. It is immensely sad to hear interventions responded to with derision, personal invective and contempt but, in the years during which it has been my misfortune to deal with him, he has been prepared to behave in that way. As I said, there was a speech to be made, and it is a pity that, not for the first time—and, I suspect, not for the last time—we did not hear it from the hon. Gentleman.

It is possible to agree with the proposition that, during the winding-up of a council and the establishment of a new unitary authority, people employed by the defunct authority, who may have been so employed for many years, will feel a certain insecurity or even bitterness at the fact that their jobs are going to disappear. The problem is that, just as parliamentary constituencies exist not for the benefit of those who represent them but as a service to the public—

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Constituencies can disappear, too.

Mr. Nicholls: Indeed. Constituencies exist not for the benefit of those who represent, or occupy, them but as a service to the public, and the same principle applies to local government jobs.

Underpinning the speech of the hon. Member for Stockton, North and, indeed, even that of the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), was the assumption that what is being done to the councils that are disappearing is so wrong that we must offer levels of compensation far above what the taxpayer can afford. It is a key point because it is easy, with straightforward human sympathy, to say that we should increase the compensation package. At the end of the day, however, it is the taxpayer who pays. I am sure that the rhetoric exists whereby one can say that the rich should pay, but ultimately 89 per cent. of income tax is paid by basic rate taxpayers. Whenever one brings a compensation package before the House of Commons, one has to bear in mind who is paying for it. Such compensation packages are paid for not by the Government or the Treasury but by taxpayers.

Ms Hilary Armstrong (North-West Durham) *rose—*

Mr. Nicholls: I shall give way to the hon. Lady in a moment.

It is very easy to say that, if the package were a little better, it would be okay. I do not know of any way in which one can say that a compensation package is completely correct. To use an old phrase, it is a question of balance. Subject to a point that I shall make after I have given way to the hon. Lady, the compensation package in the regulations is basically right.

Ms Armstrong: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that he refused his ministerial severance pay?

Mr. Nicholls: That is typical of the level of homework that we have come to expect from the Labour Front-Bench team. I did not qualify for ministerial redundancy pay. I should make it perfectly clear to the hon. Lady that, had I done so, I would have been extremely grateful and would not have demanded even more. I hope that that clarifies the position for the hon. Lady. If it does not, I am sorry. It was a straightforward answer to an irrelevant question.

Aspects of any compensation package need to be considered. My right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) referred to a point that concerned me and that was partly answered by my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration. My right hon. Friend referred to what might happen to those who receive a redundancy package and go straight into a job the following day. That is not a fanciful scenario. The most extraordinary wastage of money occurs when councils die. One has only to cast one's mind back to 1986 when the Greater London council finally went down. There was an extraordinary wastage of money on a massive fireworks display. I remember sitting on the Terrace watching all the London taxpayers' money going up into the sky.

Judging from a report in *The Guardian*, there was also a dispute over whether the GLC would be able to give away the £26 million left in its coffers to voluntary organisations. Such memories—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member has been present throughout the debate and heard me advise other hon. Members on its scope. He is quite wide of that scope.

Mr. Nicholls: The only point that I was making was that the public will be concerned at the way in which money will be used by local authorities that are to disappear. It is relevant to make the point that the public will be concerned if they find that somebody can be made redundant one day and walk into a similar position—perhaps an even a better position—the following day with a successor authority. My right hon. Friend the Member for Selby and I are concerned about that.

I wonder whether that problem had been anticipated by my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench and whether the way in which to stop it had been anticipated in regulation 4(d). As I understood my hon. Friend the Minister, no other regulations are to be laid. It is troubling—perhaps the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), will deal with the matter in his winding-up speech or write to me about it—that it was made perfectly clear that the package does not have any effect on the general operation of the law. Whatever rights and privileges exist in law at the moment remain.

At the law stands, if one is made redundant in an authority, there will not be anything wrong in taking another position the following day. Far be it from me to put difficulties in the way of my right hon. and hon. Friends, but it may be no easy task to frame the regulations so that, when true redundancies arise because a council has gone under, a person can be stopped from walking into another position right away. That must be considered.

It is easy enough to say that the package is not quite right and that there should be a little more here or there, as did the hon. Member for Newbury, who will be able to

cut up his speech from *Hansard* and distribute different bits of it around his constituency to create a particular effect in a particular way. Even though the compensation package is fair and right, the public will take an entirely view of it if they find that, despite the efforts that have been made, it is possible for people to walk off with substantial redundancy payments and be re-employed almost at once. That would greatly discredit the regulations and should be considered, even if it cannot be dealt with entirely in this debate.

9.14 pm

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): The Minister referred to the fact that the debate is taking place on St. Valentine's day. I should admit that I was so keen to be called that I took the trouble to send a Valentine to Madam Speaker. It might be helpful if I clarify that the terms of my billet doux were addressed to her rather than to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Any terms of affection come to an end there, however, because I must express my great sadness and disappointment at, and disagreement with, the mean-minded regulations and the chaotic mismanagement of the transition and change into which they place us.

I should, however, express gratitude to the Minister because, in his opening remarks, he attempted to explain the regulations in the context of the transitional timetable and arrangements that he has brought forward. I shall concentrate most of my remarks on the specific problems consequently facing authorities such as Nottingham.

Nottingham is one of the authorities that is in the programme but not in the timetable. In such a situation, the regulations only add to the problems of chaos, confusion and demoralisation with which we are having to deal.

The Minister said that he wanted the programme to give local authorities a sporting chance to be ready for elections in May. I thank the Minister and his Department for the way in which they have continued with the preparatory work in Nottingham even though a re-review was taking place, not of Nottingham but of adjoining districts.

Huge progress has been made in preparation for the transition. Many of the difficult discussions about the terms of transfer of staff, the specific structure of services and the location and relocation of jobs could be addressed within the timetable. But in that context, there has been huge disappointment—and now confusion—about the situation in which the authority has been left. Nottingham is in a programme but not in a timetable, and its discussions with its staff have been thrown into absolute confusion. We are talking about staff who would legitimately like to know whether they will have a post in the new authority, and, if so, whether it will be the same post or a different one.

The city authority is preparing to assume unitary status, but has no legal authority to do so, so it is having to incur a large tranche of transitional costs—often on short or fixed-term appointments—in an attempt to develop a basis upon which a smooth transition from employment in the county to employment in the city can take place. It now lacks a timetable within which that can be delivered. Moreover, the county authority has to deliver its own services and faces serious pressures on its budget.

The staff who may be affected by the transition do not know whether they will be caught up in a game of pass the parcel—whether they will be part of a group affected by their relocation out of the city to secure their employment, but where the services that they currently deliver in the city will be run down; or whether they will be recruited into permanent employment that relates to the city, in the hope that the city will take on those posts in a framework that the city cannot yet define; or whether they will be relocated into the city in the belief that the county will have played pass the parcel with the relocation and remuneration costs.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: The hon. Member is making a good case and is being helpful to the area that he represents. Does not the problem lie with Nottinghamshire county council, rather than Nottingham city council—which is due to become a unitary authority and, therefore, likely to take on rather than lay off staff? I presume that the hon. Gentleman supports the Government's decision that Nottingham city council should become a unitary authority.

I support Warrington borough council and Halton borough council, both in Cheshire, becoming unitary authorities—something that is supported by most Labour Members and by my borough council, which also sought unitary status but, sadly, did not get it, despite the support of the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle), the hon. Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall) and me. Is it not a problem for county councils rather than city councils, which as unitary authorities will provide more, rather than fewer, jobs?

Mr. Simpson: It is not as simple as that. I have always been a supporter of a unitary Nottingham, but it is not clear whether the city, when it takes over from the county, will seek to deliver services exactly as they are currently structured. It has gone to considerable lengths to offer reassurances to staff, but it cannot offer guaranteed assurances because it does not have a timetable. The staff are caught in limbo because the city cannot guarantee the nature of jobs that will be on offer or even when they will be on offer.

The staff are quite properly saying to both authorities, "You have a responsibility to treat us properly. We do a decent day's work and we make a commitment to deliver good services. We do not know whether the services that we are asked to deliver now will be the ones the city will decide to deliver or that it will deliver them as they are currently delivered. No one can give us those assurances because the Government have failed to define a timetable in which the order will be laid and a transition date." Both local authorities have to step back from proper and responsible commitments that they would want to make in relation to their staff. It is almost impossible to see how these regulations will be applied in the context of authorities such as Nottingham without a timetable in which to work.

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): Does my hon. Friend agree that the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) has completely missed the point? In Nottingham and Plymouth, the county runs social services and education. The jobs of the officers who currently deliver those services in Nottingham and Plymouth are threatened. Although the new unitary

[Mr. David Jamieson]

authority is employing more people, the officers of the authority that is currently delivering many of the vital services are threatened by these proposals.

Mr. Simpson: That is exactly the case. Quite properly, the city authority is able to employ additional people only on temporary contracts. It wants to offer proper, open recruitment for the permanent jobs it is to provide. Nottingham cannot do that until it acquires the authority to do so. The county is having to look in a different direction and it is reducing its assumed commitments in relation to the city. These regulations fail to cover the circumstances affecting the staff who do the transition work.

In many ways, the problems will be compounded by the extended transitional period, because talented staff will look for an opportunity to move to a secure post, with a defined set of prospects to deliver new services—possibly in some of the new unitary authorities. The county will then find it almost impossible to recruit their replacements because of uncertainty about prospects. These regulations will mean that anyone who has only one year's service will not be covered by the terms of compensation and remuneration. Both authorities will be caught in a nightmare. It will be impossible for the county to recruit because it is refocusing, and it will be impossible for the city to recruit because it has no legitimate focus to do so. There will be a lot of staff in pursuit of secure employment elsewhere.

The staff in the two authorities are in utter confusion, as are the public in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. They find the position in which the Government have placed them incomprehensible. They cannot understand the delay and I suspect that the same would be true in Plymouth. In a local context, they can understand it less than many other authorities because, just beyond the doorstep, there is a programme of change already under way in Rutland, which has a population of 30,000. I must say with a certain amount of deference that Rutland probably has more windsurfers than workers, but in Nottingham, which has a population of 300,000 and a large number of staff in the two local authorities, it is impossible to carry out the cautious and responsible planning that both authorities seek to do.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: The rational way in which the hon. Gentleman is tackling the problem is helping the debate. I was a local councillor some years ago and it is my experience that there is pretty good co-operation between counties and most boroughs or districts. Is not it sensible and more than likely that Nottingham city council, as a unitary authority, will take on the majority of those who are currently employed in the city boundaries, to undertake responsibilities that currently lie in the jurisdiction of Nottinghamshire county council?

Mr. Simpson: In normal circumstances that might be correct, but there has been legitimate political disagreement—I suspect the same is true in many other areas—about whether the transfer of responsibilities should have occurred in the first place. I believe that, in Nottingham, an accord has now been worked out—although the two authorities have not always been of one mind. Those who face further delays will find that that accord will begin to break down. If the county council decides in its forward planning that it would be helpful to relocate staff that it did not want into the city to let the city deal with them on transition, it is unlikely that the city would make an open commitment to those staff. The city has a commitment to take on responsibility for delivering services, but not necessarily in the same way as the county has delivered them.

I am trying to point out that if one tries to apply the regulations to that indeterminate transition process, they simply do not work. We have a recipe for even greater chaos than we had two days ago before the Minister's non-announcement. I do not think that there is any rational basis for leaving the marooned authorities in such a position. I suspect that Plymouth has been making similar strides preparing for the change that would have happened if the shadow elections had taken place this May. Nottingham has done that with the support and help of the Department of the Environment. It is absolutely ready—the local authority is ready, the public are ready and the staff are ready. The only explanation that makes sense locally is that the Conservative party is not ready.

In the elections last year, the Conservatives had huge difficulty in getting candidates to stand and they had to dragoon the dog, the cat and the budgie to field a full team of candidates. The dog, the cat and the budgie have served notice that they are not willing to stand again, and the Conservatives are in a panic. That is how the delay is explained at local level. The public employees and the public will pay the political price of this delay and uncertainty.

Under the regulations, staff in the two authorities, especially those in the county, will have poorer protection and poorer compensation. The authorities will find it impossible to plan services and impossible to deliver job guarantees. With the absence of a timetable, there will be a haemorrhage of talented staff and a blight on the recruitment of new staff. There will be a huge increase in transitional costs as a result of wholly unnecessary delays.

The Minister and the Government should make a commitment to three things tonight. They should make a commitment to the authorities that have been left in limbo that within the next couple of weeks, they will lay the orders that will define the timetable in which transition will take place. They should make a commitment that they will extend the compensation cover for the current staff to at least the level offered in reorganisations a decade ago and they should introduce proposals for additional compensation that will cover the otherwise avoidable transitional costs incurred by those authorities as a result of recruitment blight and for the temporary contract staff whom the authorities have had to take on.

9.31 pm

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): Much has been made of the reorganisation that took place in 1986 and the regulations introduced at that time. There may be a few of us in the Chamber who can remember the 1974 reorganisation and the considerable staff problems associated with that. Some of us remember the senior officers who were peeled off local authorities as the proud traditions of the county boroughs were lost and subsumed into extraordinary creations such as the county of Cleveland and the county of Avon.

How welcome it is, therefore, to see that process reversed in a manner that will give opportunities to officers who are often at the second or third tier in the

current county councils to become seniors in the new authorities. We are much more likely in this reorganisation to see opportunities for career moves to be made and for greater responsibilities to be taken by local government officers than under the reverse process which occurred in 1974. We should, therefore, see this process in that historical context.

I now turn to Labour's attitude in tabling the prayer today. I find it extraordinary that a measure that was laid before the House in the middle of November and came into effect on 28 November should be the subject of a prayer that was laid on 10 January this year. I understand that Labour Members have a Christmas holiday and have all sorts of things to do over that period, such as, no doubt, choosing to which schools to send their children. However, I find it extraordinary that there should be such a delay over what we have been told this evening is an issue of great importance. It is apparently of such great importance that the Labour party could wait a couple of months before it tabled its prayer. It appeared in the Order Paper of 10 January 1996. There it is, as large as life. There is the prayer and that is the date.

I understand that it takes a little time for a prayer to be presented to the House. The fact is, however, that nearly two months went by before that action was taken in this case.

It is interesting that the Labour party appears to be joined, in some of its representations, by the local government associations. Is it possible that the fact that the cost of the regulations will be met by the general taxpayer, not the council tax payer, has something to do with their determination to bring pressure to bear to obtain what are alleged to be better terms?

Staff welfare is the most important issue, although members of the Labour party appear to be keen to ignore it. The regulations pivot around that point. Staff are entitled to some certainty about their future, yet the prayer would prevent them from having that certainty about their future because it would delay the implementation of proposals designed to help them when that reorganisation takes place—in the case of some authorities, in a few weeks' time. Surely the Labour party is not suggesting that the consultation procedure that the Government introduced previously should not be repeated for any amended proposals.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): The hon. Gentleman said that he cared about the impact on staff and he is right to care, but he also mentioned the 1974 reorganisation, which was undertaken by a Conservative Government. The present reorganisation is being undertaken by a Conservative Government, but there are two differences. First, the scheme that we are discussing is not as generous as the scheme for the 1974 reorganisation and, secondly, the 1974 reorganisation was a reorganisation of large counties, and all staff had equal opportunities to apply for vacancies in the new authorities.

In the forthcoming reorganisation, when an authority passes to unitary status, as in the case of my authority, North Lincolnshire, the advantage lies with staff who were with county councils, because they have managed larger departments and received higher salaries. Many district council staff have been unfairly disadvantaged in the reorganisation, yet the compensation scheme is not as generous as the 1974 scheme. How can the hon. Gentleman justify that?

Mr. Thomason: I do not accept that district council staff will be, on the whole, disadvantaged by the proposals.

Mr. Morley: I have been through this—I know.

Mr. Thomason: Perhaps some extraordinary recruitment procedures are being adopted by some Labour-controlled councils, but, on the whole, district council staff should not be disadvantaged, and, where proper recruitment procedures are followed, they will not be disadvantaged. The responsibilities that they bear for district council functions will remain in the new unitary authorities. County staff will be added to district staff to form the new unitary authorities. For example, opportunities for directors of education will be created in a series of authorities. There will be new jobs throughout local government. I believe that the career prospects of many authority officers will be considerably enhanced as a result of the changes.

It is fascinating that the Labour party gets excited about the proposals at a time when the local government associations, which I criticised a few moments ago for being anxious to spend taxpayers' money, say that settlement of the proposals is essential. Their briefing, which no doubt many hon. Members have received, says:

"It is vital now that . . . staff, who face reorganisation a mere 6 weeks away, know where they stand as soon as possible."

Obviously it is essential that the order receives its passage today and that the regulations are implemented.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my hon. Friend agree that the scheme that we are debating follows two separate consultation exercises and that, during those consultation exercises with all those who were interested and involved, several positive changes were made, which were fully appreciated by all authorities concerned?

Is it not the case that many authorities, especially in Cheshire—such as Halton and Warrington borough councils, which campaigned strongly with me, through their Members of Parliament, for unitary status—have had an input into the two separate consultation exercises, which obviously resulted in many changes to the original scheme?

Mr. Thomason: I am most grateful for that point. The regulations have indeed been the subject of a great deal of consultation, and many in local government have expressed their gratitude to central Government for the amendments made to the original proposals in the light of their representations.

I therefore wonder what the Labour party is up to today. Have the trade union paymasters decided that they want their puppets to speak? Is a requirement being imposed on some Labour Members to dance to their paymasters' tune? Is this an example of new Labour being operated by old unions?

I should like to close with a word about the cost implications. When the metropolitan counties were abolished and the metropolitan districts took over unitary responsibilities, there were substantial savings for the taxpayer. If the local authorities are prepared to grasp the opportunities that this reorganisation affords, they too will make substantial savings for the council tax payer and—for the purposes of grant—for the general taxpayer. These

[Mr. Thomason]

opportunities are encapsulated in the terms of the regulations in so far as they relate to staff. I commend them to the House.

9.41 pm

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): I was interested to hear the speech of the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason). I will not join in his blistering attack on the Conservative Government of the 1970s who brought about the last local government reorganisation. It was also interesting to hear the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) who, as usual, spread balm over our proceedings with his comments, which are always welcome for their creation of cross-party accord. It was, however, a pity that he did not deal with Devon, where his own constituency is to be found. I will endeavour to fill the gap that he left in his speech.

The regulations arise from the reorganisation of local government, and the unitary status that Plymouth and Nottingham, for instance, will enjoy is greatly welcomed. It is supported by almost all the Conservatives in my area and by all in the Labour party. There is strong feeling in Plymouth about the fact that many aspects of our local government have been controlled from Exeter, which is 40 miles away and considerably smaller than Plymouth. That has been a bone of contention in the area. Unitary status will enable local services to be delivered closer to local people.

Like the Minister, we are anxious for an effective transfer of power from the one authority to the other. Education and social services are the most important aspects in this context. I contend that, to achieve high-quality services, we need dedicated local government officers whose morale is high. To deliver services of value, the officers delivering the services must feel valued. There is thus a close relationship between the standard of services and the interests of the people who deliver them.

Unfortunately, with yesterday's announcement, the Government have inflicted on Plymouth, Nottingham and other areas subject to delay the worst possible option not just for the services but for the officers who are trying to deliver them. Reorganisation was announced, then there was equivocation over the timing and now it is to be delayed from 1997 to 1998 or possibly beyond. As he has delayed the introduction of the orders for Plymouth and Nottingham, will the Minister give a date tonight for when the Government intend to bring them in?

The regulations seek to compensate local government officers whose jobs have been reorganised. Several hon. Members have said that it is mean and poor compensation. We must think of its effect on local services. The reorganisation and the delay have created uncertainty where certainty is essential for delivering high-quality services. They have blighted services and inhibited forward planning.

There is one point that I especially want the Minister to answer. Some of the best officers in Plymouth, and I am sure in other places, working in the best interests of delivering services, have been planning in anticipation of the implementation of the orders. In Plymouth, especially on education, there has been much good work over nearly 18 months. To their great credit, several officers have taken on the role of undertaking the pre-planning that is essential to keeping services going and making sure that there is an effective transfer of power from one authority to the other.

What will happen after May this year to officers who have accepted new posts in anticipation of the changes if the changes occur in less than 12 months by May 1997? If the new jobs with the new authority were then changed, would those officers have protection under the regulations? If they have not, we will be inflicting punishment on the very officers who are doing the loyal job of trying to perform a seamless handover of powers from one authority to another. I suspect that the regulations are a recipe for non-co-operation from those officers, who will fear for their jobs. The Minister must give some reassurance on that.

There is more uncertainty where certainty is absolutely required. Local government officers who are unsure of their future, as the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) said, will go to other areas where there is certainty. Areas such as Plymouth will lose their better officers as they plump for authorities whose future is known rather than staying where there is uncertainty. It affects not only Plymouth but the whole county. All the authorities that are not being reorganised are strategically affected. We have the absurd prospect next year in Devon of having county council elections by which councillors will be elected to serve one year on a dying authority while at the same time we have elections for the new unitary authority for the people who will take over their functions in a year's time. I would be interested to hear the Minister's views on that.

In the interest of the services that are provided for local people, we need to protect those who are running the services. The regulations and yesterday's announcement of delay create more uncertainty where we need certainty. To achieve that certainty and high-quality services, we need a proper and sympathetic package of compensation for the staff and, in the case of Devon, an end to the delay and the early forging of a new authority in both Plymouth and Torbay.

9.48 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I shall be brief, as I know that my hon. Friend the Minister wants, 10 minutes to respond to this important debate.

I come from Cheshire, where there is some proposed, change. I wish that the change were greater than the Government have permitted. As we stand, Warrington borough, an old county borough, and Halton borough council will become unitary authorities. As the Minister knows, I made an excellent case, with the borough council, that was widely supported by the public, for unitary status for Macclesfield. We have an excellent council, super officers and a slimmed-down administration that is very competent to take over responsibility from Cheshire county council for education and social services. Moreover, we have a united council: its super Conservative leader, Mrs. Margaret Duddy, and the Liberal Democrats and Labour were united in wanting unitary status for a competent authority.

My borough council goes along with the compensation scheme, believing that in 1996 it is reasonable. Mention has been made of the 1980s and early 1970s, when there

was a major reorganisation of local government. We do not live in the 1970s or the 1980s now; we live in the 1990s. As I said in an intervention on the speech by the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), we cannot isolate local government from the realities of business throughout the country; we cannot provide exceptional compensation schemes for those in local government if similar schemes do not exist in the commercial private sector.

Although I support the call for timetables for local government, which has come from hon. Members on both sides of the House, I believe that on balance the compensation scheme will not allow the taxpayer, and the council tax payer, to be exploited. I think that the balance is about right. My borough council supports the scheme, and—given its expertise in running local government—if it supports the scheme, its Member of Parliament does likewise.

9.51 pm

Mr. Curry: With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall reply to the debate.

A number of detailed points have been raised; I shall respond by letter to those with which I cannot deal tonight.

Fearing that there might be some confusion between my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) and me, I sought clarification. Such is the romance of the evening that almost no one is obtainable in my Department, for reasons with which I sympathise and, indeed, have a certain empathy.

Mr. Dobson: Surely not the Secretary of State!

Mr. Curry: I shall refrain from saying anything that might open up a war on two fronts. I shall, however, ensure that the hon. Gentleman and I are at one in regard to what is possible and what is not.

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): Why are those covered by the Teachers Superannuation Consolidation Regulations not covered by this scheme? I take it that the reorganisation does not really affect teachers, so they should not lose out in salary terms. Is that the reason?

Mr. Curry: Teachers are transferred en bloc to the new authorities, and those regulations are transferred with them. In practice, they have new employers, but that is the only novel aspect of their position.

Let me tell the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) that Plymouth will become a unitary authority, subject to the agreement of the House of Commons and the other place. I appreciate what he said about the extent to which the authority is valued by officials who work for it. I shall not reply in detail to his point about elections for local authorities—I shall write to him—but orders are able to defer elections or, indeed, mandates. It is possible for us to make orders that will make it unnecessary for an election that would immediately be superseded by another to take place.

Mr. Simpson *rose—*

Mr. Curry: I am replying to the question posed by the hon. Member for Devonport, which may well deal with the hon. Gentleman's point.

There has been a delay in Devon because the commission had to examine the case for Exeter. We had to receive representations not really from those asking us to accept or reject the recommendation for change, but from those asking for yet another re-examination of the position.

One cannot anticipate the outcome of that consultation, although we intend to draw the threads together as soon as we possibly can, so that we may clarify the circumstances for people. I intend to bring forward the orders as soon as they have cleared the statutory processes that are required. In other words, I intend to consult on the details of the orders, because we must get the details right. It is my intention that even if the process of reorganisation in constitutional terms may not start as early as we had hoped, the certainty of what will happen will be established. In psychological terms, that will be important for everybody.

Mr. Simpson: May I direct the Minister's attention to Nottingham? The re-review that took place in Nottingham was of the adjoining boroughs, and the Minister gave his departmental staff all the time they needed to go through the preparatory stages. In the light of that, is he able to give a date for the transition of Nottingham to a unitary authority?

Mr. Curry: I have made it clear that we intend to announce the outcome of the consultation process that follows the local government commission's new review and to introduce the orders as soon as we are able to do so. I do not want it to last longer than anybody else. As the hon. Gentleman said, quite fairly, Nottinghamshire districts were involved in the re-review. One would not want reorganisations in the same county in successive years. That would be one transition too many, and I think that the hon. Gentleman understands that.

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) asked about pensions. I shall write to him in detail on that. I think that he was asking me to make a projection of where people's salaries would have gone had they continued in their old employment. It would have been a very difficult operation to anticipate all the circumstances. That is my off-the-cuff remark, but I shall, of course, write to him with the specific details of that matter and put the case fully.

There have been some misunderstandings. For example, it would be curious—although not illegal—if a transferring authority took the decision to regrade staff a year or more before the reorganisation took place and lost the functions and responsibilities that I presume the staff had helped to provide. We had to draw a line somewhere. That is true of all legislation. It is not the case that employees must have been in post for at least 18 months. They must have been in employment on 1 April in the year before reorganisation.

They could suffer a drop in salary a couple of months later and be entitled to detriment compensation. Equally, they could take a cut in hours and still receive detriment compensation. No one will be forced to take a worse paid job, because the normal protection afforded by employment law is unaffected and the staff cannot be forced to accept worse terms and conditions. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before the Minister continues, it is increasingly difficult to hear him, largely because of background conversations on both sides of the House.

Mr. Curry: I shall try to bring some passion to the debate on the detriment compensation for local government employees who have to suffer reorganisation. I am anxious to respond to some quite detailed points, which I know are of concern to those affected, so I hope that the House will excuse me if I perhaps forgo my normal peroration to try to give more detail, which is necessary.

On compensation for the loss of variable hours pay, it is difficult to determine the changes in variable hours pay that result from reorganisation from those that result from natural fluctuations in a variable working week. By definition, that would be difficult.

I repeat that we do not intend to permit a situation whereby people can be compensated and walk out of one job and straight into another and collect a salary. We shall amend the regulations to close any door that would lead to that. An American philosopher said that the best way to leave any place was through the door. At this hour I am sure that the House will understand if I do that and respond to further points in writing.

I commend the regulations to the House. They are fair, reasonable and honourable and they will give a new and a good start to the new unitary authorities. They are worth our support.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 255, Noes 293.

Division No. 55] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George

Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Clelland and
Mr. Eric Martlew.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gryffs, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard

Viggers, Peter	Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William	Wilkinson, John
Walden, George	Willetts, David
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*	Wilshire, David
Waller, Gary	Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Ward, John	Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*	Wolfson, Mark
Waterson, Nigel	Wood, Timothy
Watts, John	Yeo, Tim
Wells, Bowen	Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Whitney, Ray	
Whittingdale, John	**Tellers for the Noes:**
Widdecombe, Ann	**Mr. Gary Streeter and**
	Mr. Giles Brandreth.

Question accordingly negatived.

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That—

(1) the Order of the House [11th December] be further amended as follows—

(a) in paragraph 5, by leaving out the words 'in Scotland on Monday 4th March' and inserting the words 'in the Palace Theatre, Kilmarnock, on Monday 4th March to take Questions for oral answer and';

(b) in paragraph 6, by leaving out the words 'in Scotland' and inserting the words 'in the City Chambers, Glasgow,'; and

(c) in paragraph 7, by leaving out the words 'in Scotland on Monday 22nd April' and inserting the words 'in the Highland Council Building, Inverness, on Monday 22nd April to take Questions for oral answer and';

(2) in respect of the meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee in the Highland Council Building, Inverness, on Monday 22nd April, the Order of the House [11th December] shall have effect with the substitution of the words 'half-past Eleven o'clock' for the words 'half-past Ten o'clock' and the Chairman shall interrupt the proceedings at Two o'clock; and

(3) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 94B (Scottish Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)), notices of questions for Monday 4th March may be given on Tuesday 20th February.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

PETITION

Wild Mammals (Protection)

10.14 pm

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): I have the honour to present a petition on behalf of 200 branches of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and of Muriel Haig and 60 branches of the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in support of my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale), whose Bill to protect wild mammals received a Second Reading in another place today. I am grateful to the RSPCA, Rona Macdonald and her colleagues for all their assistance.

To lie upon the Table.

Norwich (Road Links)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

10.16 pm

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I am pleased to have secured a debate on road links with Norwich, and am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads for once again responding to concerns in East Anglia about the region's transport infrastructure. I know that my hon. Friend is used to responding to Adjournment debates, and it is for that reason that I am pleased that he is here. I also welcome my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor). It is his birthday today, so it is a considerable sacrifice on his part to attend tonight's debate. I appreciate his support and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss), other hon. Members and the Whip—I appreciate support from wherever it may come.

Along with the Norwich and Waveney chamber of commerce and the local newspapers—the *Eastern Daily Press* and the *Evening News*—I have long campaigned for improvements to the A11 and the A47 in particular. Some years ago—I think it was 1985 or thereabouts—I recall driving a heavy goods vehicle all the way from Norwich to London with members of the local press in the cab and television cameras on at least some of the bridges along the way. It was part of a campaign to improve the roads to Norwich, a campaign that I have since continued with the support of my colleagues who represent Norfolk and the surrounding area.

That journey was interesting. I think that I caused a traffic jam because I was not driving quite as fast as I should have been to keep up with the normal heavy goods vehicle traffic. In view of this impending debate, last Monday I decided to take a particular interest in my journey from Norwich to London. I left Norwich at 12.20 pm and reached the Attleborough bypass, but, at about 1 pm, there was an accident further down the single carriageway. I then had to take a very roundabout, cross-country route to Thetford and eventually reached London at 4.15 pm. From Newmarket onwards there was a clear run, but, once again, there were serious problems in Norfolk caused by the single carriageway. Even that journey last Monday illustrates my point, which is that there are still serious bottlenecks on the route from Norwich to London.

Not everyone realises that every single important entry route into Norwich, whether it is the A17 from Newark and Sleaford, the A47 from Peterborough and Wisbech or the A11 from London, forms a single carriageway as it crosses the Norfolk boundary. People in Norfolk are therefore right to say that we have not yet done enough to improve our roads.

There has been genuine concern in Norwich about the prospects for economic growth and employment following the sale of Colmans and job losses at Nestlé. Leading business men in the city felt it essential to address the challenge of providing new markets and work for local people rather than waiting for some fairy godmother to appear.

That positive response led to the creation in January of the new Norwich area development agency under the chairmanship of Malcolm Wall. I pay tribute to the

agency's stimulus, which has widened the debate on the prospects of Norwich, Norfolk in general and our transport links in particular.

There is no need for undue gloom. Norwich's role as the capital of Norfolk and the regional centre of East Anglia is well known. The strength of the city's economy lies in its wide range of industrial and commercial companies that operate in manufacturing and the service sector. The decline in employment in our local clothing and footwear trades, electrical engineering and metal goods has been more than counter-balanced by the growth in printing and publishing, the media, mechanical engineering and the exciting area of bio-technology research, which is centred on the university of East Anglia.

Today's unemployment figures show a continuing fall in unemployment in Norwich. Norwich suffered less in the recession of the late 1980s and early 1990s than other parts of the country. Forecasts by Norwich city council in September 1994 and the Norfolk and Waveney training and enterprise council last year suggest that Norwich and its surrounding area can expect a further growth in construction and the service sector in the next 10 years.

If those predictions are to be realised, good road communication is essential. Norwich is the biggest conurbation not to have direct access to the national dual carriageway network. The city's link with the region's most important port, the A47 to Great Yarmouth, is a single carriageway from Acle to Great Yarmouth, with a poor accident and congestion record.

Traffic movements on the A47 are expected to rise from the 15,000 a day in 1993, which was already above its designed capacity on undualled sections, to between 21,000 and 24,000 a day by 2001. Similarly, it is predicted that traffic movements on the A11 will grow from about 20,000 a day to between 27,000 and 31,000 a day by the same date. They are potential increases in traffic of between 35 per cent. and 60 per cent.

Without significant improvement of both roads, increased traffic congestion will lead to longer delays in delivery times and poorer service from firms based in Norwich compared to those available from competitors operating in areas with better road networks. Companies, individuals and households will be penalised in time lost, lower competitiveness, lost job prospects and environmental damage.

Fuel consumption is inevitably higher on congested roads where there is slow stop-start travel. Recent research by the Centre for Economics and Business Research Ltd. demonstrates the environmental damage that will arise in urban areas from reduced spending on the road programme. The Government are rightly taking seriously the environmental arguments on traffic control and road structure, and that is fine. Nevertheless, my argument is environmental. Traffic jams on the A11 and the A47, caused by a single carriageway, long queues of traffic and accidents, lead to people travelling slowly and increased pollution. I certainly reject any environmental argument against the case that I am presenting.

Businesses in Norwich are acutely aware of the challenges of the major road network. Almost 35 per cent. of firms surveyed in Norwich in 1994 consider access to motorways, major transport links and ease of distribution the top factors in influencing their possible locations. That was the concern most frequently expressed by firms taking part in the survey. A number of companies commented on the benefits of being somewhere where distribution would be easier, somewhere with a better road network. The eastern region of the CBI, covering more than 2,300 member companies, has come to the same conclusion.

There is no doubt that, during my 12 years as a Member of Parliament for Norwich, North, the issue that the business community has raised most regularly with me has been the one that I am raising tonight. That issue has been at the top of the business man's agenda since I have been a Member of Parliament.

Actively managed firms regretted the extra day or so that it took to reach their customers and some expressed the view that if they were starting again from scratch they would have preferred a location in the midlands.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk was Secretary of State for Transport and one of his predecessors described East Anglia as the Cinderella of the national road network. In spite of recent improvements, to which I shall refer in a moment, that is still true. It is not surprising that, in recent months, business leaders in Norwich have even been in touch with the Chairman of the Select Committee on Transport on that issue.

It was partly to address that issue that the Norwich area development agency was created in 1995. It has argued consistently for the upgrading of the A11 and the A47 to improve the region's economic ties with Holland, Denmark and the Baltic states and for a wider range of services from Norwich airport. Those pleas have had the support of the European Commission which recommended that the A47 should be included in the trans-European road network of routes of more than national importance to form one of the vital strategic routes throughout Europe. Norwich airport's links with offshore industries would certainly benefit from the dualling of that route. I, too, am happy to support that argument.

In case that should appear to be a rather gloomy introduction to this short speech, I should like to say that I do not wish to claim that the Government have done nothing to invest in the road network around Norwich or in Norfolk. I have had some difficulty in the past week in obtaining figures from the Department of Transport. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will not mind my referring to that, but it is difficult to collect together all the figures and I shall therefore be deliberately vague. In the past 10 years, about £100 million has been spent on the A11, about half of that in Norfolk, and somewhat more than £100 million on the A47, nearly all of that in Norfolk. That is pretty well all since the May 1989 White Paper "Roads to Prosperity".

The opening of Norwich's southern bypass and the completion of the newly constructed section of the A11 between Stump Cross and Fourwentways have made a fantastic difference. As I mentioned earlier with regard to my journey from Norwich to London, once I reached the Newmarket area it was full—I had better be careful what I say because there was a lot of bad driving, and that is a subject for another Adjournment debate; but it was certainly a clear run all the way, and that is good.

The new Wymondham bypass, which will be opened shortly—I gather that it has been delayed a little—will be a great benefit to road commuters and to those commuting

[Mr. Patrick Thompson]

to and from London. Links to Cambridge on the A11 and beyond, with the A1-M1 link to the west midlands, are rightly to the Government's credit. I hope that my hon. Friend recognises that I understand what has been done and I pay tribute and give thanks for that.

I also pay tribute to the tremendous work done in all this by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk in his capacity not only as a Norfolk Member of Parliament but as Secretary of State for Transport. I also welcome to the debate my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham), who also has an interest in the A47 in particular and road links in general.

Even so, the announcement of the changes to the road programme in East Anglia following the Budget has caused concern to the Norwich area development agency and to a wide cross-section of business opinion in my constituency. Only one scheme on the A11 between Roudham Heath and Attleborough remains in the active programme, with all the other remaining improvements postponed to an uncertain future. On the A47, one scheme remains in the main programme, but it may well be put on hold, while seven further schemes are in the longer-term programme, and four more appear to have been abandoned entirely.

The position is that there are no new planned starts on any trunk road in Norfolk in the forthcoming financial year 1996-97. No private sector design, build, finance and operate schemes are envisaged for the county. Norwich and Norfolk lack the financial support to alleviate traffic bottlenecks and to remove danger spots. There is no prospect of a basic network of strategic dual carriageways being completed to link the county with the national or international route network until well into the next century.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): The Minister will soon open a new road—the A47 west of King's Lynn—in my constituency. However, a number of my constituents are concerned about the delays over the Hardwick flyover on the A47—a scheme that all the environmentalists support. My constituents often say, "In other parts of the country people do not want roads, such as the Newbury bypass. Why not build a road where there is overwhelming support?" It would not be an expensive scheme and it has gone through its planning stages. I am sure that the Minister will support my campaign to have that road built soon.

Mr. Thompson: I support the case put by my hon. Friend. The A47 has an appalling accident rate and causes great delays. In fact, a lot of the traffic that should use the A47 diverts on to the A14 and comes through to Great Yarmouth. When the business community in my constituency tell me that this situation is not good enough, I have to agree with them. Road links to Norwich have had a low priority in the past, and that is why we have this problem. This is not the time to abandon the push for improvements. The campaign must be stepped up so that the Government accept that they must look again at their priorities.

I am campaigning on behalf of businesses in Norwich. I hope to receive an early reply from my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads to my questions. When will works on the schemes remaining in the main program start? What does "likely to be put on hold" mean in terms of programme timing? Does my hon. Friend recognise the serious economic, environmental and safety consequences of the lack of capacity on these trunk roads? I look forward to my hon. Friend's reply, and I thank him for being present tonight.

10.31 pm

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): During my time in this House—including when I was the Secretary of State for Transport—I have sought to improve the road links from Norfolk and to gain the bypasses that are needed. I demonstrate the priority that I attach to this issue by spending my birthday participating in the Adjournment debate. There have been substantial improvements to the roads in my constituency, with the introduction of bypasses—which make a great difference to rural towns and villages—and the improvements to the A11.

Now that we have improved those roads, we need to finish the job. If we do not, the perception that Norfolk is far way will continue to exist. That is why it is important to complete the links and the bypasses on the A11 and the A47. There is an impression in Norfolk county council that, Government policy at the moment is against bypasses. An important county council bypass on the A413 still has not been completed. There have been bypasses on the rest of the road, but the village of Broome is facing real difficulties.

Last October, the Secretary of State for Transport told me, "I recognise that rural bypasses will continue to be important." It is important that that message gets through to Norfolk county council in drawing up its priorities. I should be grateful if my hon. Friend would confirm that that is the Government's approach to bypasses.

10.33 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) on securing the debate. I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) on spending his birthday with us.

My hon. Friend expressed concern about the effect that managing the trunk road programme announcement has had on the various schemes to improve the A11 and the A47 leading to Norwich. It may help if I explain briefly the background to the announcement that was made at the time of the Budget by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. A combination of sharply rising road construction costs and a continuing need to keep firm control of public expenditure, necessitated a review of the trunk road programme.

The new programme has been targeted at key routes, and primarily at making the best possible use of the existing network. The new national programme includes a significant number of bypasses, but many very desirable and strongly supported schemes have had to be deferred or withdrawn altogether.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk asked about our commitment to bypasses. I can assure him that we remain committed to funding local bypasses as far as resources permit, as that is often the best method of dealing with traffic congestion and improving the environment in rural areas. As a demonstration of that,

I can tell my right hon. Friend that bypasses account for nearly one third of the road schemes currently being funded by transport supplementary grant—a total of 48 out of 147 schemes. I must point out also that in the tight 1996-97 public expenditure settlement, we have still managed to approve five new rural bypasses for TSG. It is for the local highways authority to decide on the priority that it wishes to give to promoting bypasses when putting its bids to us. About a quarter of the trunk road programme is devoted to bypass schemes.

Our main priorities for East Anglia are the A14 and the M11-A11. In recent years, the No. 1 priority for East Anglia has been the A14. That dual carriageway trunk road all the way from the M1-M6 junction to Felixstowe is one of the key strategic routes for the region.

We have five further schemes in the programme for capacity and safety improvements on the route. Those are the Thrapston to Brampton grade separated junction, the A14/M11-A10 widening, the A14(M) Bar Hill-M1/A1 link, the A14 Quarries Cross GSJ and the Rookery crossroads GSJ.

The A14 is also one of the 14 Christophersen priority projects for the European Community and it is eligible for some funding from the trans-European networks budget.

As well as constructing that major new route, to open up East Anglia to the west midlands and elsewhere, we have been investing significantly nearer to the homes of my right hon and hon. Friends. In the past five years, we have spent over £180 million on improvements to trunk roads in Norfolk alone.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North will be pleased to learn that our next priority in the region is the M11-A11 route from London to Norwich. The priority placed upon that route is widely accepted in the region, as it is the key route to Norwich, and thence on to the coast.

We are making great strides with the dualling of the A11 from south of Cambridge, with eight of the 12 schemes already opened. Just before Christmas, I opened the latest section, the Stumps Cross-Fourwentways scheme, which I am sure my right hon. and hon. Friends have used. Another, the Besthorpe-Wymondham improvement scheme, is also nearing completion and will be opened very shortly.

That will leave us with only three schemes to complete the dualling of the A11 from the M11 to Norwich. All those schemes have been retained in the main programme. The most advanced of those, the Roudham Heath-Attleborough improvement scheme, is ready to start when funds become available. The others—the A11 Attleborough bypass dualling and the Fiveways to Thetford improvement—will follow, and it remains our firm intention to complete the dualling of that key route.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North asked me to explain what was meant by the term "on hold". When looking at the main road programme, we must try to ensure that we have the right number of schemes reaching the start of work stage to match the funding that we think will be available to start construction. If we take schemes through their preparation stages too quickly, we build up a backlog and the expenditure could be aborted, particularly if we have made orders for compulsory purchase and they time-expire. That means that we have too many other schemes at the same stage. We shall move forward at the appropriate pace so as to be ready when funding is likely to be available for construction.

Our third priority in the region is the A47. I am sorry that we have not been able to make as much progress as we had hoped, and I recognise that the long-cherished hopes of many local businesses and authorities for a complete dual carriageway route will not be immediately forthcoming.

However, it should be remembered that in recent years, we have spent some £150 million on schemes on the A47 in Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, between the A1 at Peterborough and Great Yarmouth. They include the Norwich southern bypass, which has not only greatly benefited the city, but considerably improved travel to the coastal towns of Great Yarmouth and, to a lesser degree, Lowestoft. There are other schemes in Cambridgeshire and Norfolk. They include the A47 East Dereham-North Tuddenham improvement, the Narborough improvement and the Walpole Highway-Tilney End bypass.

The latest scheme, the Walpole Highway-Tilney End bypass, is nearing completion and should be opened in a few weeks' time. There are also two further schemes in the main programme: the Hardwick roundabout flyover at King's Lynn, on which my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) has made such strong and repeated representations, and the Thorney bypass, in whose support my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) has made strenuous efforts.

I must disabuse my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk of the misconception that the Newbury bypass is not wanted. It is wanted by the overwhelming majority of the people of Newbury. In reality, there are few schemes in the programme that face significant opposition, except from those whom I call NIYBYs—the "not in your back yard" people who live nowhere near the area that suffers from the traffic, but who none the less wish to deny the bypass to those who would benefit from it.

All the other schemes on the A47 will be brought forward as the programme rolls on. However, I cannot give any undertakings at this stage about when schemes in the long-term programme can move into the main programme. However, where we have withdrawn major schemes or are unable to make rapid progress with them in the foreseeable future, as a matter of course we shall consider whether more limited improvements to the existing roads can be implemented to improve safety and to ease congestion.

In continuing to maintain the existing routes, we are currently constructing the A47-A1122 roundabout junction at Swaffham Heath, which should be completed this financial year. We also have proposals to provide a right-turn facility at Knarr Fen at an estimated cost of £220,000 and an addition of 1 m hardstrips between Thorney and Guyhirn, at an estimated cost of between £2 million and 3 million. That is all further evidence of our commitment to a realistic programme of improvements to the strategic routes serving Norwich on trunk roads.

We must not look solely to the trunk road network as being the only routes serving East Anglia and Norwich. My Department has provided considerable financial support for Norfolk county council schemes in recent years. In the past two years alone, support has been given

[Mr. John Watts]

for the A143 Scole-Stuston bypass and the A143 Brockdish-Needham bypass, both of which are now open to traffic, and construction works are in progress on the A149 Ormesby bypass.

I am also pleased that, in the latest local transport settlement, we were able to continue to support the county council's package bid for Norwich for a second year—including the Cringleford park-and-ride scheme—with a further £2.3 million-worth of credit approvals.

I said earlier that it was vital that priorities were set within a realistic financial framework. We have done that in a responsible manner, concentrating our efforts on the key national routes. To retain schemes in the main programme or the long-term programme that we know would have little realistic opportunity of being delivered would be to mislead people.

I know that my hon. Friend would not want me to excite expectations that could not be realised among his constituents. However, I can assure him that the needs of Norfolk and Norwich were very much in my mind in determining priorities in the trunk road programme. We shall continue to invest sensibly and carefully to meet the transport needs of the county and the East Anglia region of which it is an important part. Cinderella will go to the ball.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seventeen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 15 February 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords]*

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Promoters of the City of Westminster Bill *[Lords]* may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session; and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session;

That, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed) and shall be committed to the Chairman of Ways and Means, who shall make such Amendments thereto as were made by him in the last Session, and shall report the Bill as amended to the House forthwith, and the Bill, so amended, shall be ordered to lie upon the Table;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during any previous Session.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered again on Thursday 22 February.

SCOTT INQUIRY

Ordered,

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, That she will be graciously pleased to give directions that there will be laid before this House a Return of the Report of an Inquiry into the Export of Defence Equipment and Dual-Use Goods to Iraq and related prosecutions.—*[Mr. Ian Taylor].*

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Private Finance Initiative (Police)

1. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the funding to be made available to police authorities through the private finance initiative. [13849]

5. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the funding to be made available to police authorities through the private finance initiative. [13853]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): Police authorities are currently exploring a range of projects under the private finance initiative with an estimated total capital value of about £70 million. There is scope for many more. The private finance initiative provides an exciting new opportunity for the police to enhance and extend their capital resources.

Mr. Prentice: But is there not a cut of £23 million in capital provision for the police this year? I want the Home Secretary to tell us whether the much-vaunted private finance initiative will meet that shortfall. If it will not, was not *The Economist* correct to describe the PFI as "a dog's dinner" and a "deceit" that is becoming larger all the time?

Mr. Howard: Lo and behold. I thought that the Labour party was in favour of bringing private finance into the public sector. I thought that they wanted to take advantage of the opportunities available. That is what the Front-Bench spokesmen keep telling us. But whenever those on the Front Bench say something, those on the Back Benches pop up and say the opposite.

Mr. O'Hara: Precisely so; the whole House will know that the PFI is really an invention of the Labour party. The Home Secretary should give credit to my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) who, when he was shadow Transport spokesman, first mooted the idea of bringing private finance into the public service. However, the right hon. and learned Gentleman will remember that the whole point of the PFI, according to his colleague the Chancellor of the Exchequer, is to bring extra money into the police service. Can he assure us that extra money will come in through the PFI, and that it will not simply make up the £23 million shortfall? Can he give some practical examples of what it will produce in the police service?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is now claiming credit for what his hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) has just described as a dog's breakfast. When will the Labour party make up its mind, even about the simplest things? Of course the private finance initiative has the scope to produce extra capital for the police service, and it is already doing so. We look forward to an exciting opportunity for the PFI to increase the capital available to the police service.

Mr. David Nicholson: My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware that in Avon and Somerset there has been a considerable welcome for the significant increases in the general funding of the local police authorities over the past two years—increases much needed, but none the less much welcomed. Will he ensure that the police authority can get proper advice and guidance on how to deal with the PFI, which has caused difficulties in the past, so that both the authority and the local building industry may benefit from it?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the increased resources that we are making available to the police throughout the country. I assure him that advice on the private finance initiative will be available. But it is no use the police having more resources available to fight crime if the Leader of the Opposition goes up and down

the country telling people that it is all right to shoplift and to put treats in their pockets. When will the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) dissociate himself from the disgraceful remarks made by his leader last night?

Mr. Ian Bruce: Can my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that, despite the rumours that are being put out by the Opposition, there has been a large increase in the resources for counties such as Dorset and that there are opportunities for local authorities, if they want to put their money where their mouth is, to transfer money from county council funds to give the police extra funding? Surely the private finance initiative is an additional source of finance.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Dorset will get a 3.9 per cent. increase in its funding next year. I am sure that it will make full use of those extra resources and be on the alert to add to them through the private finance initiative.

Crime (New Technology)

2. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what initiatives his Department has taken to maximise the use of new technology in the fight against crime. [13850]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): There are many exciting initiatives, including the world's first national DNA database, the national strategy for police information systems, the closed circuit television challenge competition and major projects providing national automated fingerprint identification and radio systems.

Mr. Congdon: May I very much welcome that answer and especially the DNA database, which I understand now has 20,000 items on it? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that will play an increasingly valuable part in the fight against crime by ensuring that we get convictions? Can he assure me that he will continue to ignore the advice from those in the civil liberties lobby and elsewhere who are soft on crime and soft on the causes of crime?

Mr. Maclean: The DNA technology is the greatest breakthrough since fingerprints. It is wonderful technology and it has been provided to the British police service. It is a world leader and a world first. It is no wonder that the New York police commissioner recently told me that Britain was light years ahead of our competitors in the use of police technology.

Mr. Sheerman: Does the Minister agree that there are problems in using the new technology in the pursuit of crime? Does he share my horror at hearing that someone who had had more than $500,000 transferred out of an account with a company in this country cannot find a police force to prosecute the perpetrator because no one can decide whose is the responsibility or in which police authority area it lies?

Mr. Maclean: Any time we introduce a world first technology, there are bound to be some teething problems. The DNA database is building up perfectly well. It is having some fantastic successes, which will become more public when cases currently before the courts are no longer sub judice. We have wonderful technology that is catching thousands of criminals up and down the country—CCTV is a good example. The people in the forefront of its development are shopkeepers and retailers, but there is no point catching all the criminals in the shops if the Leader of the Opposition says shoplifting is just putting a treat in their pockets. He does not believe in the stakeholder society but in the excuse makers' society.

Obscenity

3. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made by the interdepartmental working group on obscenity. [13851]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Tom Sackville): The interdepartmental group on obscenity has met four times so far. It has been considering the availability of pornography on computer networks; the display of indecent material in newsagents; and the sale of magazines to youngsters.

Mrs. Winterton: While I welcome that response, especially in respect of the enforcement of the law against child pornographers, may I remind my hon. Friend of the widespread view in the House that the definition of obscenity in the Obscene Publications Act 1959 is virtually unworkable? Will he bring forward proposals to improve the situation so that successful prosecutions can be brought?

Mr. Sackville: While I share all my hon. Friend's concerns, I remind her that in 1993, there were 293 prosecutions and 209 convictions under the Obscene Publications Act 1959. The flexibility in the formula of "depraved and corrupt" is, in the end, what a jury makes of it. That is one of its advantages. If we find that we need new legislation to control pornography—for the Internet, for example—we will act.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I welcome the information that the Minister has given us. Does he expect the working group to report in the near future or is it to be kept in being? When may we expect some decision from it?

Mr. Sackville: The working group has already been taking action, for example, in getting the service providers of the Internet together, so that we can work on a voluntary agreement—it has to be voluntary and international and there has to be co-operation—to try to prosecute those who are transmitting pornographic material on the Internet. That is one example of the way in which that interdepartmental group is already working. There are many others. Some may involve magazines and other new legislation that may be required.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend take note of the fact that many people would like stronger action to be taken against paedophiles who import videos showing themselves to be engaging in disgusting activities?

Mr. Sackville: The House is well aware of the Bill to deal with sex tourism which my hon. Friend has introduced. The question whether it is possible to extend

territorial jurisdiction overseas is under review. He is right to say that, if there are problems over evidence in that type of sex tourism, it is one category where the evidence might be available and usable under our law.

Prison Escapes

4. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people escaped from prison during 1995; and how many who escaped last year and in previous years are still at large. [13852]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): One hundred and twenty two prisoners escaped during 1995—62 from establishments and 60 from escort. Of those, 28 are still at large. As of 31 December 1995, a total of 116 of the prisoners who escaped since 20 June 1988 were still unlawfully at large.

Mr. Hardy: While I welcome that necessary improvement, have not 1,200 hundred prisoners escaped in the past six years? Is the Minister aware that there is public concern that any reduction in public expenditure, any excessive reliance on dogma, or any greatly increased tension inside prisons could mean that that number will rise and the recent improvement come to shuddering halt?

Miss Widdecombe: It is significant that the hon. Gentleman chose the past six years. If he had chosen the past three, since the Prison Service became an agency, he would have discovered an 83 per cent. fall in the number of escapes. Will he welcome that and will he acknowledge that that reduction was due to the efficient workings of that agency and, therefore, dissociate himself with Labour Front-Bench proposals to bring the service away from agency status?

Mr. Garnier: Is my hon. Friend aware that there were no escapes from Gartree prison in my constituency last year? Is she also aware that that prison recently received a most satisfactory report from the inspector of prisons? Will she bear in mind the good news about Gartree and add it to that which she has given the House?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. and learned Friend is right. I congratulate him on the performance of his local prison and I congratulate the governor and the staff of that prison.

Carl Bridgewater

6. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many fingerprints on the bicycle belonging to Carl Bridgewater are so far unidentified; and if he will make a statement. [13854]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): Two fingerprints found on the bicycle have never been identified.

Mr. Mullin: How come 16 years elapsed before it was disclosed that two unidentified fingerprints were found on the bicycle belonging to Carl Bridgewater? May I put it to the Minister that this case is not going to go away, and that the quicker that it goes back to the Court of Appeal, the better for everyone concerned?

Mr. Kirkhope: The defendant's solicitors knew of unidentified fingerprints three weeks before the referred case in 1989. Furthermore, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the provisional conclusions in the case were sent to the applicant's solicitors on 7 December last year. We await their making further representations. That may well happen shortly and we will then consider them.

Mr. Ashby: In view of the fact that all that substantial doubt has arisen and that there is so much extra evidence that was not available at the trial, should not the case be sent to the Court of Appeal so that it can consider all the extra evidence? It is a very worrying case and there may well have been a substantial miscarriage of justice.

Mr. Kirkhope: The evidence and information obtained in the case have been thoroughly examined—extremely thoroughly examined—over a long period of time. Every item that has been raised that is alleged to be new evidence has been carefully considered. As I said, my right hon. and learned Friend has reached his professional conclusion that the case should not be referred back to the Court of Appeal. The applicant's solicitors have an opportunity to make further representations, if they so wish, and we understand that we may hear from them shortly.

Mr. Hattersley: Is the Minister aware that 14 years ago I asked the previous Home Secretary about the missing fingerprints? I received an answer that could charitably be described as inadequate. Does not the Minister understand that almost every week that passes a new doubt arises about the case? Sooner or later it will go to the Court of Appeal once more—why does not the Home Secretary do the proper thing and refer it there straight away?

Mr. Kirkhope: Does not the right hon. Gentleman recognise the thoroughness of the investigations and inquiries that have been carried out? Four police forces have looked into the matter; all the evidence and the extra allegations that have been produced have been looked into carefully. Despite that, the provisional conclusions are quite clear: that the matter should not be referred back. It is now up to the applicants to come forward with anything further that they wish to put up at this time before final conclusions are reached.

Immigration

8. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of additional immigration problems in parliamentary constituencies near Heathrow and other major airports. [13856]

Miss Widdecombe: We keep our immigration controls under constant review and do not hesitate to take measures to strengthen the system where necessary. We are always ready to consider representations from hon. Members representing such constituencies.

Mr. Dykes: As local authorities undoubtedly face extra costs related to the provision of social, education and housing services locally—it is not anti-immigrant to state that as a realistic factor—does my hon. Friend agree that the necessary concomitant is to reassure people living in communities near the major airports that we have firm but fair and balanced immigration policies that oppress nobody from outside, but are fair to existing immigrants and other citizens?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend is right. Good, fair and firm control of immigration is essential to the preservation of good race relations. Of course, we recognise that some local authorities suffer disproportionately because of their geographical location. My hon. Friend will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has announced a special grant of £3 million to help unaccompanied children asylum seekers. He will also be aware that we are in negotiations with the local authorities to help towards the impact of our Bill in respect of both housing and services for children.

Mr. Henderson: Is not the Minister ashamed that, as a result of the social security regulations that came into force on 4 February and are linked to the Asylum and Immigration Bill, people with a genuine case for political asylum are now in London, sleeping rough on church floors and dependent on soup kitchens for sustenance? Will the Minister introduce amendments at the Report stage of the Asylum and Immigration Bill to reverse that outrage or does playing the race card take precedence over any sense of morality or justice?

Miss Widdecombe: If there is any outrage it is that caused by the Labour party in deliberately using the term "race" when discussing the problem. It is the Labour party that stirs alarmism; it is the Labour party that introduces scaremongering; it is the Labour party that attributes results to our policies for which there is no evidence. The Labour party causes the outrage. Good and fair control of immigration is essential to the maintenance of good race relations. Does the Labour party acknowledge that there is a problem? If there is a problem, what is its solution to it? If it has no solution to the problem, will it please welcome our solution?

Mr. Wilkinson: May I refer my hon. Friend to the particular problem of unaccompanied refugee children with which we continue to have to contend in the Heathrow area, particularly in the Hillingdon borough, in which my constituency is located? The £3 million that has been announced from the Department of the Environment is most welcome, but the borough that contains Heathrow within its boundaries is surely the most deserving.

Miss Widdecombe: All those boroughs that have to absorb extra costs as a result of the numbers of unaccompanied children deserve help, and I fully recognise what my hon. Friend has said. I am grateful to him for welcoming the £3 million grant and I assure him that we will not lose sight of the need to take due measures in respect of unaccompanied children, who must be looked after and for whom local authorities retain a duty of care.

Prisons

9. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisons or designated prison sites he has visited to discuss the provision of accommodation in the last year. [13857]

Miss Widdecombe: Since 1 January 1995, my right hon. and learned Friend has visited six prison establishments in England and Wales. I have visited 28 prisons since July 1995. In the course of those visits we discussed a range of issues affecting the Prison Service, including the provision of accommodation.

Mr. Griffiths: Did the Minister and the Secretary of State discuss with prison governors and other prison staff the increase in overcrowding since 1992? I understand that there are now more people crowded into single-prisoner cells than there were in 1992-93. In the prison planned for Bridgend in my constituency, will special care be taken to set strict limits on additional prisoners above the planned numbers—unless some of her right hon. Friends find their way there following the publication of the Scott report?

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman might have carried more conviction had he got his facts right. Far from increasing since 1992, overcrowding has decreased substantially. There has been no trebling whatever in cells designed for one since March 1994. We have completely eliminated the use of police cells and the incidence of two prisoners occupying cells that are designed for one has decreased from 21 per cent. to 17 per cent. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman does his homework before he comes to the House.

Mr. Hawkins: Will my hon. Friend confirm that much prison accommodation is occupied by those convicted of serious shoplifting offences? Does she agree that, whereas the Government provided a citizens charter, the Labour party clearly propose a shoplifters charter. Have we not had the clearest demonstration that my right hon. Friend was right to say that the Labour party is the villain's friend?

Miss Widdecombe: The Labour party's definition of villainy is for a thief to be putting a treat in his or her pocket. What message is the Leader of the Opposition sending to children throughout the country—that it is all right for Mummy to go shoplifting?

Mr. Alex Carlile: Can the Minister confirm that the Home Secretary's new sentencing policies are likely to lead to an increase of about £1 billion in the cost of the prison building programme? If that is not correct, will she give us an up-to-date estimate of the extra cost of those policies?

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. and learned Gentleman will have to wait for the White Paper to find out more about those policies, but clearly we shall take into account the impact on both the prison population and the prison budget of our sentencing proposals and we shall make sure that the sentencing proposals and those other requirements are properly matched in whatever phasing we introduce. The hon. and learned Gentleman knows

very well that he cannot get us to anticipate the White Paper now, but he needs telling firmly that we are aware of the problem and we shall find solutions to it. His party offers no solutions to crime, to prison or anything, other than the usual story of softness on prisoners.

Lady Olga Maitland: What progress can my hon. Friend report on the building of the secure training centres? Is she aware that youth courts are increasingly frustrated about their inability to put young persistent offenders into secure accommodation, so that they have to go back into the community and may offend again. Frankly, society is fed up.

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend is quite right that society expects us to provide sufficient accommodation to take out of circulation those of whatever age who commit crimes. That is why we have had the single biggest prison building programme this century; that is why we have six new prisons planned; that is why we have sufficient accommodation to meet our proposals. That is why, as I told the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), we shall make sure that the prisons are there for those who ought to be in them. That is the policy that the British public want to hear. They do not want to hear about how we shall praise and release shoplifters.

Mr. George Howarth: Is the Minister aware that the Director General of the Prison Service and senior members of his staff appeared before the Public Accounts Committee yesterday and confirmed what we have known for some time: that Prison Service finances are in complete chaos? Is not the Home Secretary's announcement earlier this week that he is seeking alternatives to imprisonment for fine defaulters—interesting though that proposal may be—a reflection of that chaos and of the growing problem of offenders continually entering the prison system? Is the Home Secretary's announcement an indication that he is going soft on crime?

Miss Widdecombe: The only chaos in the Prison Service exists in the heads and the minds of Labour Members. As the National Audit Office recognised, the Prison Service has taken steps to correct what was wrong in the past. It has introduced rigorous new measures and increased the number of staff accordingly in order to attack the problem. It is putting much right at an exemplary pace.

It is typical of the Opposition that they cannot welcome that fact or pay tribute to or thank the very hard-working Prison Service management and staff for all that they have achieved. Labour Members simply pour scorn on what the National Audit Office has acknowledged are strenuous efforts to put things right. The hon. Gentleman should stop proclaiming gloom and doom and start recognising the achievements of the Prison Service and praising the very hard-working staff. If he does that, perhaps the Prison Service may have more confidence in the hon. Gentleman—because it has none at present.

Thames Valley Police

10. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress Thames Valley police has made with civilianisation since 1979; and how many police officers have become available for operational duties as a result. [13859]

Mr. Maclean: Information from 1979 is not available. Since 1985, civilianisation of posts has released 152 police officers for operational duties, to add to the 1,100 extra police officers recruited by Thames Valley police since 1979.

Mr. Butler: Does my right hon. Friend accept that that success in putting policemen back on the streets to fight crime is greatly welcomed by my constituents and others? On top of that, there is the welcome news that 30 additional police officers will be recruited to the Milton Keynes force this year. [HON. MEMBERS: "Reading".] I am not ashamed of being able to read: I recommend it to Labour Members below the Gangway. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the 17,000 additional civilians recruited since 1979—not just to replace policemen, but to improve efficiency in the Thames Valley—is a record of which we can be truly and rightly proud?

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that since 1979 not only have we recruited an extra 17,000 civilians to relieve the load on police officers, but we have recruited 15,300 extra police officers. We had to recruit 7,500 of those officers in the first few years of Government because the Labour Government ran down the police force. Under the last Labour Government, the police force was 8,500 officers under strength: that is the record of the Labour party's care for the police force.

Mr. Straw: We have just heard another example of the Conservative lie machine. Will the Minister confirm that, under the last Labour Government, there was an average increase in police strength of 500 officers per year? That compares with an increase of just 300 per year since 1979.

As to the Thames Valley, does the Minister understand that no one in that area—least of all the police—will accept the complacent nonsense that we have heard from him and from his hon. Friend this afternoon? Does he not understand that in the Thames Valley area villainy has flourished in the past 15 years? Crime has increased by 150 per cent. and convictions have decreased by 33 per cent. Is it not true that, under the Conservatives, there is much more crime in the Thames valley and elsewhere and many more people who are getting away with it?

Mr. Maclean: I am delighted that, after half an hour of questions, we have finally managed to provoke the hon. Gentleman to get to his feet. If he is concerned about too many people getting away with it, why did he vote against all the measures that the Conservative party introduced in the 1980s to prevent people getting away with it? Why did he vote against giving the Attorney-General the power to review lenient sentences, and why did he try to pull the teeth out of the policy on secure training centres?

The hon. Gentleman is worried about people getting away with it in the past. How many will get away with it in the future because the Leader of the Opposition does not believe in prosecuting criminals who steal from shops? Rather, he regards it as perfectly okay, because they are just putting a treat in their pockets.

Prisoner Transfers

11. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many requests for transfer of prisoners from one prison to another the Prison Service dealt with in the last 12 months. [13860]

Hon. Members: Again, again.

Miss Widdecombe: Yes, I shall say it again and again until the Opposition get used to it.

The Prison Service deals with requests for transfers on a regular basis. The majority of such requests are dealt with locally and detailed records and statistics are not held centrally.

Mr. Pike: The Minister will recognise that the Prison Service believes that it is beneficial to prisoners and to the running of prisons to have prisoners near their families so that they can visit. What facilities does the Prison Service have to try to ensure that that is done wherever possible, given that, in many cases, the prisoners' families are totally innocent people?

Miss Widdecombe: The Prison Service has a very clear objective, which is—as far as possible—to keep prisoners near their families, but it has to take into account the security classification of the prisoner, available space and sundry other considerations. Nevertheless, the Prison Service's objective is that which the hon. Gentleman rightly described as important.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my hon. Friend accept that she is very unlikely to get any requests for transfers from Lancaster Farms young offenders institution, because it has cracked the problem of bullying? Instead of isolating the person who is bullied, thus depriving him of privileges, it isolates the bully, depriving him of privileges. That has had a magical effect on bullying and people from all over the world come to learn about it. It is also one of the reasons why the prison got an excellent report from prison inspectors. Will my hon. Friend congratulate the prison?

Miss Widdecombe: I have pleasure in congratulating Lancaster Farms. I can confirm what my hon. Friend has said—its anti-bullying strategy has provoked national and international interest.

I also congratulate the Prison Service in general on the emphasis that it has put on anti-bullying strategies and on the success of many such strategies, often with completely different characteristics, in various prisons.

Carl Bridgewater

12. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make a final decision in the Carl Bridgewater case, and if he will make a statement. [13861]

Mr. Kirkhope: A final decision will be made when we have received and considered the response to our provisional conclusions notified to the applicants, as I have already said, on 7 December 1995.

Mr. Burden: Will the Minister recognise that there is considerable concern about the reply he has just given and the one that he gave little while ago? He appears to be making a judgment on the quality of new evidence in the Carl Bridgewater case, rather than whether the new evidence is significant. Does he accept that it is for the courts, rather than the Home Secretary, to make such judgments? The sooner the matter is referred to the courts, the better.

Mr. Kirkhope: No, I do not accept that. As I explained to the House earlier, one of the most thorough investigations into any alleged case of miscarriage of justice has been made in that case. The matter was referred to the Court of Appeal in 1989, when the application was turned down. The further evidence, and the allegations that have been made since that time, have been meticulously and thoroughly investigated by the Merseyside police.

As I have already explained, if any other points were to arise from the applicants' solicitors in response to our preliminary conclusions, we would obviously wish to consider them carefully before finally concluding the matter.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Is my hon. Friend aware that, when that ghastly murder occurred in my constituency, there was widespread distress? There is real concern lest the wrong people have been convicted, so can my hon. Friend give some idea of when he expects matters to be finally resolved?

Mr. Kirkhope: We expect to receive further representations from the applicants' solicitors very soon. We hope then to be able to proceed further to our final conclusion. Undoubtedly, the delays have taken place because the case is very involved. It is a complex matter and a thorough consideration is taking place.

I hope that all hon. Members will also bear in mind the appalling time that the family of young Carl Bridgewater have had. They have suffered terribly, and the continuing publicity and time involved in considering the representations are causing them even more suffering.

Police Funding

13. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to change the funding formula for police forces in rural areas. [13863]

Mr. Maclean: For 1996-97, 0.5 per cent. of total police funding will be allocated on the basis of population sparsity. That has meant an extra £870,000 for the North Yorkshire force.

Mr. Bayley: Has the Minister seen the latest crime figures for North Yorkshire, for the year ending 31 December 1995, which show yet another increase—to 59,724 offences compared with 21,000 and falling under the last Labour Government? Is the Minister further aware that North Yorkshire—I checked this figure today—has 24 fewer police officers in post than in 1979, under the last Labour Government? Where have the extra 16,000 police officers gone that the Government claim to have provided? When will the Minister give the people of North Yorkshire protection from crime?

Mr. Maclean: I am not surprised that North Yorkshire has fewer officers. I am surprised even at the number that

the hon. Gentleman gave, given the way the county council underfunded the police under its standard spending assessment. In 1993, the county council gave the police £900,000 less than its SSA. The next year, it gave the police £1.3 million less than the amount to which they were entitled. When the Government took over direct funding under the new arrangements, we started by giving North Yorkshire an 8.2 per cent. increase, and this year the increase will be 4.5 per cent. The North Yorkshire force are recruiting bobbies again because the Tory Government are starting to fund them properly, which the Labour county council never did.

Mr. Alison: Does my right hon. Friend recall that the now Labour and Liberal-controlled North Yorkshire county council is laggard in appointing civilians in police administration, so keeping police officers in bureaucratic posts when they should be out on the street?

Mr. Maclean: Then it is just as well that there are now freestanding police authorities that can improve on that policy. Throughout the country, police are still doing jobs that could be done by civilians. Since 1979, the increase in the number of civilians engaged in police work has meant that 8,500 officers have been freed up to do proper policing jobs—but much more could be done.

Mr. Michael: With the Conservatives, it is always someone else's fault. They have forgotten Conservative rule in North Yorkshire. Last week, the Prime Minister excused rail ticket fraud with the words, "Someone has misbehaved." The Home Secretary's formula has cut the number of police officers in rural areas, as in others. Instead of the 1,000 extra police officers that the Prime Minister promised in the 1992 general election, their number has fallen by 800. That is the Conservatives on crime—they say one thing and mean another.

Mr. Maclean: What an extraordinary diatribe of fantasy. There are 1,454 more constables than there were at the last election. We will not take lessons on defending police numbers from a party who ran down and destroyed the police force when they were in office. They left the force 7,500 short. As for making excuses for crime, the hon. Gentleman should ask his leader to come forward today to explain what he meant when he excused shoplifters as merely putting a treat in their pockets.

Beat Police (Funding)

14. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with police authorities regarding additional finance for uniformed beat officers. [13864]

Mr. Howard: I have regular discussions with police authorities about police resources. The Government are giving police authorities an extra £240 million next year, bringing total spending on the police to almost £7 billion.

Mr. Skinner: It is strange that, 12 years ago, the Tory Government were able to fill every street in Derbyshire with as many police as they wanted during the miners' strike. Today, even the Police Federation is writing to me, asking me to help it to get more bobbies on the beat. That shows that the police are now swinging to Labour. It has taken me 12 years to cultivate it into learning some sense. Instead of trotting out all these feelgood factor figures, why does not the Secretary of State tell the truth, stop fiddling the figures and stop talking as his belly warms?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman's leader has blown it in 24 hours. The police will not approve of advice to people to fill their pockets with treats at shopkeepers' expense. The hon. Gentleman can tell the people of Derbyshire that they will have a 4.8 per cent. increase in their budget next year, on top of a 7.9 per cent. increase this year, and that they have 210 more police officers than they had in 1979.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 15 February. [13879]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mrs. Mahon: Will the Prime Minister tell the House how long it took him to read the Scott report?

The Prime Minister: I am a very rapid reader.

Mr. Dunn: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the destruction of the hereditary principle in the House of Lords is but a short distance from the destruction of the hereditary monarchy?

The Prime Minister: I am surprised at the hostility of the Labour party to the hereditary principle, for this reason: when the Government were defeated in a vote last week, we were defeated by the votes of hereditary peers. As it happens, one of the Labour Front Bench remarked to the House, "the people have spoken".

Mr. Blair: In retrospect, does the Prime Minister believe that the Scott report would have been better handled if it had been released in the way in which Sir Richard Scott requested? Does he have any regrets about the extraordinary disparity of treatment given, on the one hand, to Ministers and the Conservative machine and, on the other, to Members of Parliament, Opposition spokesmen and civil servants—a disparity about to be exemplified by the shambles at 3.30 pm?

The Prime Minister: Nothing has been given to the Conservative machine—the right hon. Gentleman should withdraw that remark. Sir Richard wrote—I think to you, Madam Speaker—on 31 January to say:

"Subject to the imposition of strict conditions on access (which Mr. Cook is prepared to observe), I view his request sympathetically."

We permitted access at 12 o'clock. I am surprised to hear the right hon. Gentleman disagree. The arrangements are exactly those offered to the shadow Home Secretary when

we published the Learmont report. We even offered him sandwiches. Not only did he not describe the arrangements as "outrageous and insulting" but, when he made his statement, he said:

"I thank the Secretary of State for his courtesy in arranging for me to see the report earlier than is usual."—[*Official Report*, 16 October 1995; Vol. 264, c. 33.]

I look forward to similar thanks from the shadow Foreign Secretary later.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my right hon. Friend believe that British Telecom's doubling of the amount that is spent on building the information super-highway by people other than BT is the Government's competition policy in action, or does he believe that it would be better to sign a sweetheart deal just with BT to have the information super-highway built more quickly?

The Prime Minister: The information super-highway has been in the process of being built for some years. The sweetheart deal that was entered into—apparently by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair)—seems to have come badly unstuck since its initial publicity.

Q2. **Mr. Hoon:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 15 February. [13880]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hoon: Will the Prime Minister tell the House how many of his Ministers who had early access to the Scott report have since been confined in a secure room, have had their mobile phones confiscated, have had all their messages brought to them by civil servants and have been escorted throughout by officials who are present for their convenience and security?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman heard what I said to the right hon. Member for Sedgefield a few moments ago. The hon. Gentleman is overacting outrageously on this issue. I shall tell the House why Labour Members are behaving in this fashion. The right hon. Gentleman did not want to sign a form promising secrecy and decided to attack the Government for asking him to do so. He then discovered that the requirement to sign the form was not that of the Government but that of Sir Richard Scott and that all Ministers, including me, have signed it. To save face, the Opposition went into sulks and denounced the whole arrangement.

Mr. Brooke: Does my right hon. Friend share the following view expressed in today's *The Times*:

"Kenneth Clarke, the Chancellor, was yesterday presented with a golden economic scenario of low inflation and falling unemployment."?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree with the comment. That economic scenario has resulted from the sustained policies that the Government have followed for some time. We now have the lowest sustained level of inflation for 50 years, which today has fallen to below 3 per cent; the lowest mortgage rates for 30 years; the lowest basic rate of tax for 50 years; more foreign investment than any other nation in Europe; and we export more per person than Japan and the United States.

The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), in his usual heckling form, talked about taxes. Let him tell us about the new taxes that the Labour party plans: the windfall tax, the tartan tax, the training tax and the social chapter tax on jobs. The right hon. Gentleman should realise that the Labour party is the taxing party—it is in opposition now and that is where it will stay.

Q3. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 15 February. [13881]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. McFall: Why has it been necessary for the Government to prepare a shorthand version of the Scott report for distribution to Conservative Members and to the media? Would it not have been preferable to allow people to make up their own minds, based on Sir Richard Scott's key conclusions and not on the Government's version of events?

The Prime Minister: That is rich coming from the hon. Gentleman. Most Labour Members made up their minds about this issue three years ago—long before Sir Richard started his report. If the hon. Gentleman wishes, I shall read to him a large selection of quotations from Labour Front Benchers that show that they had made up their minds before Sir Richard Scott started his investigation.

I set up the inquiry so that we could find out precisely what happened and so that the matter could be investigated independently and publicly. It was investigated under the conditions that Sir Richard Scott wanted. I was determined that the report be published and debated by the House, as it has been. The hon. Gentleman will see the outcome shortly.

Q4. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 15 February. [13882]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hawkins: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that more than 7,000 head teachers are members of the Secondary Heads Association? Is he aware that that association has described Labour's education policy as naive? Is it not typical of the Opposition's arrogance that they have now said that those 7,000 hard-working headteachers should go to the bottom of the class for not doing their homework?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend characteristically understates what was said by the secondary heads. What they actually said was:

"The document is an uncomfortable combination of the naive and the messianic",

that they find

"little evidence in the document of thought in detail or research"

and that they regret

"the absence of recognition of valuable initiatives already in place"—

put in place by this Government.

We have learnt over the months that Labour's education spokesman has a tough job. Teachers openly criticise his policy and shadow Cabinet Members openly contradict it—but now that they know what makes a good school, I am sure that they will be able to improve their education policy.

Mr. Radice: In April 1994, the Prime Minister wrote to me to say that, if Ministers fail to give accurate and truthful information to the House of Commons, they should relinquish their positions. Is that still the case?

The Prime Minister: I have said before that, if I judge Ministers to have knowingly misled the House, they cannot stay. That remains my position.

Q5. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 15 February. [13883]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Butler: Will my right hon. Friend join me in rejecting the insulting suggestion made last night by the Leader of the Opposition—that when old-age pensioners want a treat, they should steal it? Is he aware that shoplifting costs every household in the country £90 a year? Does he agree that the idea that shoplifters from certain groups should not be prosecuted is yet another example of Labour saying one thing and wanting to do quite another?

The Prime Minister: Shoplifting is certainly a serious crime. It causes a great deal of loss for small and large shopkeepers. If the right hon. Member for Sedgefield did indeed describe it as my hon. Friend suggests he did, I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will withdraw those remarks. They certainly cannot reflect his settled consideration.

Q6. **Mr. Keith Hill:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 15 February. [13884]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hill: As the Prime Minister has had a full eight days to read the Scott report, and as I have only eight minutes, would he care to advise me which of the 1,800 pages I should find the most interesting?

The Prime Minister: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept from me that, in addition to examining the report so that I and others can be answerable to this House, there have been some other things to do. The hon. Gentleman has 11 days now to consider the report. I hope that he will contribute to the debate in the House then—on the basis of fact, not of sneers, smears and innuendo of the sort that we have heard for three years.

Q7. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 15 February. [13886]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend accept that we have the most encouraging set of economic indicators that this country has had in modern history? Will he further accept, although he knows that I have had concerns in the past about aspects of the health service reforms, that the private health sector is now so popular and so instrumental in playing a role in the health service that my socialist opponent at the next election works for it?

The Prime Minister: I am truly shocked at that example of how Labour does not always do what it says. I hope that we will not find it in other elements of the Labour party.

Q8. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 15 February. [13887]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Prentice: Did Lord Justice Scott not make it quite clear that all hon. Members should receive his report at the same time? Is it not almost a contempt of court that Back Benchers such as me have no time at all to absorb his important report and that we will find it impossible to quiz the President of the Board of Trade intelligently on its conclusions?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman should really come off this silly line that he and his hon. Friends—*[Interruption.]*—this silly line that he and his hon. Friends are concerting. The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), who is having hysteria, would be better advised to look at the precedent, to see what happened to the shadow Home Secretary, and to see what he said a few days later.

Hon. Members have tried every trick to prejudice the reception of the Scott report. I suggest that they would be very wise to wait for just a few minutes to see what is in the Scott report. They can then deal with the reality of it on the basis of knowledge, and not on the basis of the smears that they have been putting around for the past three years.

3.30 pm

Sitting suspended.

3.40 pm

On resuming—

Scott Report

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian Lang): Madam Speaker, with permission, I should like to make a statement about the report published today of the inquiry by Sir Richard Scott, which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister commissioned in November 1992, following the end of the Matrix Churchill trial.

The Government have arranged for the report to be debated in both Houses of Parliament on 26 February. During the past three and a quarter years the inquiry, with the full co-operation of the Government, has received many tens of thousands of pages of documentation from Government files and has taken written or oral evidence from 268 witnesses. All Ministers, former Ministers and civil servants who were asked to give evidence did so conscientiously and thoroughly. The detailed procedures of the inquiry were left to the discretion of Sir Richard Scott himself.

The House will realise the diligence with which Sir Richard Scott and his team have scrutinised the events covered by their remit, and for which the Government are most grateful. The report is wide-ranging and detailed, extending to five volumes and some 2,000 pages. In addition, the inquiry will be making available as soon as possible several thousand copy documents. The House will recall that the essence of the inquiry, as reflected in its terms of reference, was to establish whether the relevant Government Departments, agencies and Ministers operated in accordance with the Government's policies, and to report on decisions by the prosecuting authority in the Matrix Churchill case and by those signing public interest immunity certificates.

Let me turn first to the question of whether arms were supplied to Iraq. The report confirms, and I quote,

"the Government was not prepared to countenance the supply of lethal equipment to either Iran or Iraq."

Sir Richard Scott goes on to say in his report, and again I quote:

"Ammunition, guns, tanks, bombs, mines and the like were not licensed for export to Iraq. Nor for that matter were they licensed for export to Iran".

The inquiry also considered whether defence equipment supplied to countries other than Iraq might have been diverted to Iraq's armed forces. During the 1980s some evidence existed that certain other countries might have diverted goods to Iraq. As far as British goods were concerned, steps were taken to counter this. No British arms or ammunition were found in Iraq at the end of the Gulf war. Sir Richard Scott investigated a number of allegations to the contrary and found no evidence for them.

On more general non-lethal defence equipment, Sir Richard Scott recognises that the Government strove to balance the interests of employment in this country with the objectives of our foreign policy. He makes no criticism of the Government's policy. He does, however, make strong criticisms of what he sees as a lack of openness on that, to which I shall return later. Nevertheless, the Government's restrictive policy on exports is in sharp contrast to many of our international competitors which, during the eight-year conflict between Iran and Iraq, in addition to non-lethal defence equipment, were also content to sell fighter aircraft, guided missiles, munitions and other lethal equipment. This country did not.

I turn now to the most important reason why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set up the inquiry in the first place. This is the grave allegation that Ministers, by signing public interest immunity certificates, conspired in a way that could have sent innocent men to prison. Sir Richard Scott's report demonstrates that that allegation is false and without foundation.

I quote from Sir Richard's words—

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): What page?

Madam Speaker: Order. The Minister is making a statement. If the hon. Gentleman has questions to ask, he may seek to catch my eye later. Meanwhile, we shall hear the Minister out.

Mr. Lang: I quote from Sir Richard's words:

"Finally, I must refer to the charges made and repeated in the media that the Ministers who signed the PII certificates were seeking to deprive defendants in a criminal trial of the means by which to clear themselves".

Sir Richard Scott concludes, after more than three years of painstaking investigation, that all Ministers who signed PII certificates did so without any impropriety. There is no criticism of them for so doing. There was no attempt to gag. There was no conspiracy to gaol innocent men. Ministers who signed PII certificates did so in the knowledge that the judge was the final arbiter of what should be disclosed to the defence. There is no case for them to answer. As Sir Richard says:

"The charges to which I have referred are not, in my opinion well-founded".

That conclusion gives the lie to the many scurrilous comments by Opposition Members and by many in the media.

For three years, several of my right hon. Friends have had to endure repeated abuse and attacks on their honour and integrity of the most offensive and unpleasant nature, over their signing of public interest immunity certificates. They now stand wholly vindicated by the report.

As one example, I remind the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) that he said on 7 November 1995 in respect of PII certificates:

"Once again we see Ministers caught trying to cover up their role in arming Saddam Hussein . . . Not only did they try to arm Saddam Hussein and keep it quiet but they were willing to cover up even at the expense of sending businessmen to court, knowing that those businessmen would be convicted, and knowing that if convicted they might well have gone to prison."

The same criticisms were made by other Opposition Members. As recently as last week, the deputy Leader of the Opposition said:

"Next week, we'll have more evidence with the Scott report. Showing how Ministers were prepared to send citizens to jail to cover their own backs."

There could hardly be a more serious set of charges levelled against Ministers of the Crown, and they are now shown to be utterly unfounded. There was no conspiracy. There was no cover-up. Such charges are reckless and

malicious and they should never have been made. The House will now expect to hear them withdrawn without reservation.

Sir Richard Scott has cast his net widely and examined a whole range of issues. He has made recommendations in a number of areas, and he has also made some criticisms. I should like to comment now on the subjects of those recommendations and criticisms, including in particular export control legislation, the law on public interest immunity, the ministerial guidelines on exports, the Matrix Churchill trial and ministerial accountability.

The report deals with the legislation that has governed the control of imports and exports since 1939. Since the second world war, that legislation has served its purpose effectively in allowing controls to be imposed on the import and export of certain categories of goods.

Sir Richard criticises the continued use of wartime emergency legislation by both Labour and Conservative Administrations over the past 50 years.

The appellants in the Ordtech appeal in early 1995 challenged the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939, praying in aid Sir Richard Scott's views, which he had first expressed a year earlier. However, in the Court of Appeal hearing on 22 May, before the Lord Chief Justice, the orders made under the 1939 Act were declared lawful. We shall, however, wish to consider further the future arrangements in that area in the light of Sir Richard Scott's comments.

I turn now to the interpretation of the common law as it relates to public interest immunity. The inquiry has suggested that in the period of the Matrix Churchill and Ordtech trials, the law did not support the concept that Ministers had a duty to sign public interest immunity certificates, nor the idea that those certificates could be used in criminal prosecutions.

The Government followed well-established case law, backed up by independent legal advice, in holding both that Ministers had a duty to sign PII certificates and that such certificates were applicable in criminal cases. It was then for the judge to decide which documents to release. The Attorney-General took advice on that from independent and eminent counsel—and incidentally, the Government's handling of PII was endorsed by three defence counsel in the Matrix Churchill trial.

The proposition that PII claims were a matter of duty was supported by authoritative judgments by such distinguished judges as Lord Scarman, Lord Donaldson of Lymington and Lord Justice Bingham. The applicability of PII to criminal cases has been established by a decision by Lord Justice Mann. It has since been confirmed by a series of decisions of the Court of Appeal presided over by the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Taylor of Gosforth.

In his report, Sir Richard Scott does not in any way question the personal integrity of the Attorney-General. He does, however, express criticism of the adequacy of the instructions to prosecuting counsel conveying the views of the then President of the Board of Trade, and said in particular that the Attorney-General should personally have supervised them. It must be a matter of opinion whether that was something that the Attorney-General could reasonably have been expected to do. Sir Richard does, however, accept the genuineness of the Attorney-General's belief that it was not. In the event, it made no difference. The judge exercised his discretion, as the Attorney-General had said that he would, and ordered the release of the relevant papers to the defence counsel.

The Government remain firmly of the view that the advice given at the time to Ministers by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General was correct. There is no doubt that he acted throughout with complete propriety and integrity.

The inquiry has found failings to have arisen in the 1980s in the distribution of intelligence material within and between Government Departments. We accept that there is substance in that criticism. The report makes it clear, for example, that the junior Ministers who approved the Matrix Churchill licences for which the directors were later prosecuted did so without the benefit of intelligence reports that would have shown the intended military use of the items covered. Sir Richard concludes that the Ministers took their decisions on a false footing, which he makes clear was not their fault. Substantial revisions of procedures have already been made to prevent, as far as possible, a repetition of such failings. Sir Richard's report recognises that improvements in that area have been made.

I turn to the Government's policy from the outset of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980. Our policy was to remain neutral in the conflict and not to sell lethal weapons to either side. Further, the Government took steps to ensure that non-lethal defence goods that could have had an impact on the way in which the war was prosecuted were controlled. In support of that policy, and to assist in its application as events unfolded, a set of guidelines was established in 1984 by my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Howe, then Foreign Secretary.

The guidelines established that export orders that would "significantly enhance the capability of either side to prolong or exacerbate the conflict" would not be approved. Following the ceasefire in August 1988, those guidelines had to be applied in changed circumstances. Opportunities for expansion of legitimate trade began to emerge. At the same time, relations with Iran and Iraq were affected by concern over the hostages in Lebanon, human rights in Iraq, the fatwa against Salman Rushdie, the execution of Farzad Bazoft, and the safety of British nationals held in both Iraq and Iran. Ministers and officials were obliged to react to circumstances that were continually changing.

Sir Richard Scott concludes that, following the ceasefire in 1988, but not before—

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. Points of order are always taken at the end of statements.

Mr. Faulds: No. This is a new practice.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will resume his seat.

Mr. Faulds *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will resume his seat.

Mr. Faulds: I have done so, under protest.

Madam Speaker: There would have been greater protest had I used the Standing Order.

Mr. Lang: Sir Richard Scott concludes that, following the ceasefire in 1988, but not before, Government policy

[Mr. Lang]

towards the export of non-lethal military goods changed in a way that he believes should have been drawn to the attention of the House. Both Ministers and officials believed at the time that they were applying policy in a way that remained within the existing guidelines and Sir Richard expressly accepts that they were sincere in doing so. However, he does not agree that they were correct in their belief. On that basis, he concludes that a number of Ministers' letters and answers to parliamentary questions were inaccurate because they restated what Ministers understood to be the policy but which Sir Richard believes, in retrospect, had changed.

Discussions about the guidelines took place on several occasions in late 1988 and early 1989 between junior Ministers and officials at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Defence as the situation developed. Those Ministers reached no settled decision to change policy which they regarded as requiring the approval of senior Ministers or an announcement to the House. As I said, Sir Richard disagrees with them, but accepts that they were sincere in their beliefs.

The crucial issue is whether those junior Ministers intended to mislead this House and the country. Sir Richard gives an unequivocal answer on that. He accepts that the Ministers believed that they were avoiding a formal change to the guidelines and that in holding that belief, they had, to quote his words, "no duplicitous intention". In respect of my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who was at the time one of the junior Ministers concerned, Sir Richard goes on to say:

"he did not intend his letters to be misleading and did not so regard them."

My right hon. Friend is therefore absolved of the charge that he intended to mislead Members of the House or anyone else.

The House will recall that the Scott inquiry was set up following the collapse of the Matrix Churchill trial in 1992. Sir Richard has scrutinised that prosecution. The inquiry finds no evidence of impropriety in the way in which the Matrix Churchill prosecution was brought. There was no conspiracy and no deliberate withholding of material known to be relevant that might have helped the defence.

It is worth emphasising, too, that the court itself, at the time, expressed no criticism of the way in which the prosecution, with the advice of independent and well-respected counsel, was brought and conducted. But as Sir Richard Scott says, with the benefit of hindsight, this was a trial that ought never to have commenced. I stress, as Sir Richard himself does unequivocally, that this is a judgment with the benefit of hindsight.

While Sir Richard dismisses the serious allegations of personal impropriety that have been made about the conduct of Ministers, there is a continuing line of criticism running through the report of what he describes as the

"consistent undervaluing by Government of the public interest that full information should be made available to Parliament".

One of his major recommendations is that there should be a review of the long-standing parliamentary convention whereby questions on certain subjects are not answered, or are not fully answered. He recommends that that review should take account of an enhanced need for Ministers to provide full and accurate information to Parliament.

That subject will form an important aspect of parliamentary consideration of the Scott report. This Government have made advances in the openness of government which go beyond the position of any of their predecessors. Nevertheless, it is right that we should debate those issues further in the light of the findings in Sir Richard Scott's report, and the Government are ready to do so.

In the light of that debate, the Government will consider whether any amendments to current practice should be made. It would be unrealistic, however, if I did not say at the outset that there are bound to continue to be areas, particularly in the field of international diplomacy and commercial operations, in which a degree of confidentiality will sometimes be necessary.

Sir Richard Scott's report contains a substantial section of recommendations. The Government have already taken action on a number of the issues on which the inquiry now makes recommendations, for example, on intelligence handling. We are able to accept others straight away, such as those relating to export controls and licensing procedures, on which a consultation paper will be produced as Sir Richard Scott recommends.

Other recommendations, such as those on changes to the law relating to prosecution practices and the approach to public interest immunity, for example, are technically complex and will need careful and detailed consideration. They will receive it. In sum, all Sir Richard Scott's recommendations are under active consideration and a number have already been accepted.

The House will recognise that the Scott inquiry has been long, searching and thorough. It will want to consider the report fully and to discuss the issues raised by it. There are lessons to be learned from the inquiry and Sir Richard Scott has made a number of important recommendations, which the Government will now pursue. The inquiry has identified areas where systems and procedures can be improved and those will be closely and urgently studied.

The overall picture that emerges is that, while mistakes were made, Ministers and officials acted honestly and in good faith. This country went to enormous lengths rigorously to enforce a self-imposed ban on the supply of all lethal and other offensive weapons to either combatant in the Iran-Iraq war and to remain neutral in the conflict. Our policy towards the combatants in that terrible war was sound and principled. It stands very favourable comparison with that of any other nation. It was conducted and sustained throughout with integrity.

Not only did Britain sell no lethal weapons to Iraq, but, as Sir Richard Scott's report makes absolutely clear, nor was there any conspiracy among Ministers to send innocent men to gaol. Those who alleged otherwise should now withdraw unreservedly and apologise to the House and to my right hon. and hon. Friends whom they have defamed.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): The President has just made a statement in which he laid blame on the Opposition, official advisers and the system, but accepted no blame for Ministers. The public outside will not find that a credible or dignified response to such a serious report.

I have spent the past three hours studying the report. It fully vindicates our two central charges—that Ministers changed the guidelines on defence sales to Saddam Hussein and that they repeatedly refused to admit that, either to Parliament or to the courts.

I did not recognise the report that I read from the statement that the House has just heard. The right hon. Gentleman tells us that the Government accept many of the report's recommendations. Those recommendations arise from Sir Richard's conclusions. If the Government are going to accept his recommendations—[HON. MEMBERS: "Question."] Here is the question: does that mean that the Government will accept the conclusions on which the recommendations were based?

The right hon. Gentleman has just accepted what witness after witness from the Government at the Scott inquiry tried to deny: that the guidelines on defence sales were changed and that the Government failed to inform Parliament of the change. Now that he has accepted that conclusion, will he also accept Sir Richard's conclusion that that failure was, in his words, deliberate and the result of three Ministers agreeing to give that no publicity? [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] It is in the report. Will he also accept the conclusion that the reason that they gave it no publicity was that they did not want the public outrage that would greet it?

The President described the statement by the Chief Secretary as inaccurate. Does he accept the conclusion of Sir Richard Scott that the Chief Secretary signed letters to Members of Parliament denying that the guidelines had been changed, which were misleading and that, in the words of Sir Richard Scott,

"he was in a position to know that was so"?

Does the President accept—he did not mention it in his statement—that Sir Richard's conclusion is that Government statements on defence exports to Iraq, in his words, "consistently failed" to comply with "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" and thereby failed to discharge the principle of ministerial accountability?

The President's statement contained no mention of the super-gun. I presume that he is aware that the longest chapter in the report is on the super-gun. Does he accept the conclusion in that chapter that there is, in Sir Richard's words, "clear evidence" that the Government knew about the super-gun a full year before its seizure by Customs and Excise? Does he accept that, in Sir Richard's opinion, Parliament could and should have been told, and that the failure to tell Parliament constituted, in his words,

"a further example of a failure to discharge the obligations of accountability"?

Does the President accept Sir Richard's conclusion that the intelligence information that the machine tools from Matrix Churchill went into the Iraqi arms programme was, in Sir Richard's words, "so strong" that for Ministers to maintain that they were possibly for civilian use was

"the equivalent to the . . . use of a blind eye"?

Does the President accept the conclusion that public interest immunity certificates, denying the defence in the Matrix Churchill trial an entire class of documents, had never before been used in any criminal trial and Sir Richard recommends that they should never be used again? Will the Government at least give an assurance that they will never repeat the practice that led to that prosecution of Matrix Churchill?

Does the President accept that Sir Richard Scott found "risible" the defence claim by the then Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the right hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), that the release of the documents would cause "unquantifiable damage" to the public interest? If the right hon. Gentleman does not think that being called risible is a criticism, when will he recognise a criticism?

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the Attorney-General was personally at fault in terms of the failure of the Government's Law Officers to instruct the prosecution to tell the trial judge that the current Deputy Prime Minister signed his certificate with reservations? Will he say whether the Government accept those conclusions—it takes only one word to say it: yes or no? He has had plenty of time to work it out: he has had eight days to study a report that Members of Parliament have had eight minutes to read. His difficulty in answering the question is not that he has not had the time to make up his mind, but that his colleagues could not survive his acceptance of those conclusions.

Are the Government really going to ask us to accept a report that says that the current Chief Secretary signed 27 letters to Members of Parliament that were misleading, and which he was in a position to know were misleading, then tell us that he can remain in office as if the report had never been published? Is the President really going to ask the House to accept a report that shows that the Attorney-General wrongly advised Ministers and failed to tell the court that at least one Minister signed under protest, then tell us that the Attorney-General can also stay in office? Is the President really going to ask the House to accept a report which, over five volumes, demonstrates how this Government misjudged Saddam Hussein, misled Members of Parliament and misdirected the prosecution, then tell us that no one in the Government will accept responsibility for getting it wrong?

Will the President, before he passes the buck any further, confirm that yesterday, civil servants named in the report were told that any public comments they made must be cleared with their head of department, must be consistent with Government policy and must not criticise Ministers? How dare Ministers blame civil servants while ordering civil servants not to blame Ministers.

The report goes beyond the career of individual Ministers or the reputation of some officials. It reveals the price that Britain pays for a culture of secrecy in government. The report documents how Ministers changed the guidelines, but were more worried that Members of Parliament and the public might find out than they were about what Saddam Hussein might do with the weapons.

The President now has a second opportunity to rise to the occasion. Will he now tell us which Ministers accept responsibility for what went wrong while they were in office? Will he tell us whether the Government will dismiss those Ministers who, in the opinion of Sir Richard, failed to discharge the obligation of ministerial accountability to the House? Will he take the steps that are now essential if the Government are to be trusted in office? I warn the President that if he fails to answer those questions, the Government will forfeit any right to remain in office.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Member for Livingston has twisted and distorted almost every single point to which

[Mr. Lang]

he referred in answering my statement. [HON. MEMBERS: "Guilty."] He has repeatedly claimed that he has not had enough time to read the report. That did not stop him spending the past three years prejudging its findings and getting them wrong.

The hon. Gentleman was invited to come to the Department of Trade and Industry at 12 o'clock to see the report, but instead of rushing in to see it, he was seen standing outside on the pavement for 10 minutes talking to the press. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order. *[Interruption.]* Order—on both sides.

Mr. Lang: When the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) arrived and saw the hon. Member for Livingston talking to the press, he asked his car to go round the block so that he too could stop and talk to the press. So much for the enthusiasm of Opposition Members to read the report; I hope that they will now read it and they will be considerably better informed.

For the past three years, week after week and month after month, the hon. Gentleman has fed the House, the press and the public a sour stream of invective, innuendo and invention. It has been one of the most odious campaigns of manipulation and black propaganda that the House will be able to recall. He repeatedly—as we now know, without a shred of justification—charged Ministers with secretly plotting to arm a foreign dictator and with conspiring to pervert the course of justice. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] Now he tries to sidle off the ground that he so malevolently pegged out for three years and pretend that it does not matter any more, but it does.

In 1992, the hon. Gentleman said:

"You cannot diminish the level of political scandal of a Government that privately, covertly, without public statement, arms a brutal psychopath who exposes British troops to fire from those arms."

In 1993, he was saying:

"Ministers were prepared to see businessmen wrongly convicted rather than tell how much they knew about the arms trade with Iraq".

In 1995, he said:

"None of these businessmen would have been convicted in the first place if Ministers had not"—

[Interruption.]

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members will have an opportunity in 10 days' time—*[Interruption.]* Order. They will have an opportunity then to tell us what is in the report. I shall spend the weekend reading it, as all hon. Members may. The Secretary of State has the freedom of the House to say what he wishes. *[Interruption.]* Order. Hon. Members will have an opportunity to put their points of view later.

Mr. Lang: Now the hon. Member for Livingston has been found out: it was all without foundation, and the Scott report shows that. It was a cheap and nasty smear campaign, with his whole party joining in the chorus. Their behaviour was contemptible.

The hon. Gentleman asked me whether the Government accept the conclusions. On all the essential issues that concern the public, yes, the Government accept the conclusions. The hon. Gentleman referred to the changing of guidelines and to the quotation from the report, that the failure to inform Parliament about the current state of Government policy was deliberate. The point is that my right hon. and hon. Friends, as Ministers in the Departments concerned, were of the complete and sincere belief—which Lord Justice Scott accepts—that they had not changed the guidelines. There is no question of his suggesting that they had deliberately misled the House. He accepts their good faith and their integrity.

The hon. Gentleman raised the question of super-gun. If he reads the report, he will find that it is accepted that the Government did not know about that until 1989. He also raised the question of the use of PII in criminal cases. The use of PII is judge made; it is court made. It is not decided by Ministers. The use of PII in criminal cases has been supported in a series of judgments, including by the Lord Chief Justice.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the prosecution in Matrix Churchill. That is a matter for the independent prosecuting authority. He suggested that my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General wrongly advised on PII. My right hon. and learned Friend has the support of the four judges to whom I referred in my statement on that matter.

The hon. Gentleman raised the question of the treatment of civil servants. That is a matter for the Departments concerned. Sir Richard Scott's report will be examined carefully and any action taken will be in accordance with normal civil service discipline procedures. No disciplinary action will be taken if civil servants acted conscientiously, in good faith and in accordance with Government policy.

By his behaviour in the past three years on the issue and by his failure to apologise at the Dispatch Box today, the hon. Gentleman has blighted the rest of his career in this place. He will never be trusted in the House again. There is one course open to the hon. Gentleman: he should seek to make a personal statement and apologise to the House, or he should resign.

Mr. Tim Renton (Mid-Sussex): I am glad that I caught your eye, Madam Speaker. I received my copy of the Scott report at only 3.32 pm. Although there are many references to me in the index, I have not yet had time to read them—although of course I shall do so. However, I must say to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook)—

Madam Speaker: Order. I shall put the proceedings in their proper context: we are questioning the Secretary of State.

Mr. Renton: Between 1985 and 1987, I was the Minister of State at the Foreign Office responsible for implementing the guidelines—[HON. MEMBERS: "Question."] I say that because some hon. Members were not here at that time and they should know the background. Can my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State confirm my memory of events: we were the only country to introduce a published set of guidelines, in addition to export licence applications, for the export of defence equipment to Iran and Iraq? We were the only country to do that.

Does my right hon. Friend further agree with my abiding impression, from two years at the Foreign Office, of the immense amount of trouble taken by Ministers and civil servants alike to see that the guidelines were implemented fairly and effectively? Is there any reason to believe that that ethos in Whitehall and that ingrained custom of caution about the guidelines was not every bit as prevalent in 1989-90 as it was in 1985-87? I can assure the House that that was so.

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend and I assure him that that is the case. I cannot find another country that operated such a principled and carefully controlled policy on defence exports as the United Kingdom. My right hon. Friend might like to know that France was exporting Exocets and Mirage fighters to Iraq; Belgium was exporting ammunition; and the Soviet Union was selling tanks, aircraft and missiles. This country exported no lethal weapons to Iraq and Sir Richard Scott's inquiry has confirmed that.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): Why did the President of the Board of Trade not refer us to paragraphs D4.42 and D4.43? Is not it blindingly clear from those paragraphs that the Government stand condemned of deliberately failing to inform Members of Parliament and Parliament itself of a fundamental change in policy and of a consistent failure to discharge their constitutional responsibilities?

When the Government's chief Law Officer, who has responsibilities beyond those of being a Minister, gives wrong legal advice on such matters as the use of public interest immunity certificates in criminal trials and fails to ensure that the reservations of the then President of the Board of Trade are passed to the court, how can the House and the public have confidence in him?

Why is it that the President of the Board of Trade failed to refer us to paragraphs D3.123, D3.124 and D3.125? How can anyone have confidence in the Chief Secretary to the Treasury when, in those paragraphs, his views are rejected by Sir Richard Scott as "misleading", "sophistry" and

"not . . . to correspond with reality"?

Mr. Lang: Let me tell the hon. and learned Gentleman that the legal advice given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General has been supported by all the distinguished judges to whom I referred, including the Lord Chief Justice. The Government believe that the advice given at that time was correct.

As far as the question of sophistry is concerned, the hon. and learned Gentleman is asking the House to believe that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary, with two other Ministers, single-handedly changed Government policy without telling the Secretary of State—against the advice of many of his officials—and sustained that change for several years with nobody knowing. That is palpably incredible and Sir Richard Scott accepts that, although the guidelines changed over a period of time, they were not deliberately changed by my right hon. and hon. Friends, who sincerely believed—as did all Ministers and as the Government continue to do—that the 1984 guidelines remained in place throughout their existence.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): As someone who, in his time, had to sign PII certificates to protect essential intelligence information, but who did so always on the clear understanding that the judge had full access to the information and could decide whether it ran the risk of prejudicing the rights of defendants, may I say how pleased I am to hear that, as I understand Sir Richard Scott has made clear, there is no evidence whatever of some conspiracy to send innocent men to gaol?

In answer to the second smear, that in some way we sent lethal arms to Iraq, is my right hon. Friend aware that I walked round the largest lorry park in the world at Al Jubail at the end of the Gulf war and personally inspected a vast range of equipment that we had captured from the Iraqis? I found there lethal equipment from a whole range of countries but, from the United Kingdom, I found one Land Rover. That bore out my own evidence and impression that Sir Richard Scott's conclusion—that we scrupulously observed the guidelines about the sale of lethal weapons—was correct.

Mr. Lang: I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend, and I am happy to reassure him on public interest immunity. The report confirms the behaviour of all right hon. and hon. Members who signed PII certificates. The Government's clear view is that the advice given by the Attorney-General is supported by a range of senior judges—that Ministers had a duty to sign, the trial judge decides, PIIs are not gagging orders and PII law is court-made law, not Government law.

My right hon. Friend is absolutely right about evidence on the ground in Iraq and Kuwait. Any variation in the application of guidelines is the result of the oncome of peace in 1988. That was the major change that led to the application of guidelines affecting different products.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Will the right hon. Gentleman refer to the section in the report that deals with the letter that the Prime Minister sent to me on 17 February 1992, which Lord Justice Scott says was misleading? [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I shall certainly do every justice to the Prime Minister. Will the Secretary of State refer to that letter, in which the Prime Minister wrote:

"Guidelines laying down which types of equipment could be licensed for export, and which could not, were first introduced in 1980, were revised and made more stringent in 1984, and were announced to the House by Geoffrey Howe in 1985. The guidelines announced by Geoffrey Howe remained in force until the invasion in 1990 when they were replaced by a total embargo."?

Sir Richard says that that letter was "misleading". He says also, at paragraph D4.16:

"I do not doubt Mr. Major's evidence that he signed the letters believing the statements they contained to be accurate, but I do not accept that they were in fact accurate."

If the Secretary of State looks further at that section, he will see that the Prime Minister unknowingly sent me an inaccurate letter, because an originally truthful letter was deliberately doctored by the right hon. Gentleman's private secretary at the Foreign Office, to remove the truth. If the Secretary of State will refer to paragraph D4.13, he will see that the root of the untruth that the Prime Minister unknowingly sent to me lay in the action of the present Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Sir Richard Scott makes it clear that the letter that the Chief Secretary sent to the hon. Member for Lancaster

[Mr. Gerald Kaufman]

(Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) was untrue. Sir Richard confirms that the Chief Secretary sent a letter that was untrue. How can he remain in office?

Mr. Lang: This whole question turns on whether or not the guidelines were changed. Sir Richard Scott concludes that the guidelines were changed, but he accepts that all Ministers throughout the period in question were of the view, and continued to be of the view, that the guidelines had not changed, that they acted entirely in good faith and that the flexibility that they used was applied in the light of changing circumstances.

After the ceasefire, items that had been refused before it—such as hovercraft spares to Iran and mobile radar equipment to Iraq—were approved, but still refused in those continuing guidelines were high-grade secure radios, Hawk trainer aircraft, phototypesetting spares, metal detectors, modems and optical disc drives. I thought that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), having read the report's findings, would bear it in mind that he said in 1992:

"this Government have no excuse at all for a cynical operation aimed at arming a dictator".—[*Official Report*, 23 November 1992; Vol. 214, c. 667.]

I thought that the right hon. Gentleman would come to the House to apologise, having slandered the Government.

Sir Michael Grylls (North-West Surrey): Does my right hon. Friend accept that it is perfectly clear from the Scott inquiry that in the difficult decisions that Ministers had to take over a long period, they acted honourably—and that the people who have acted dishonourably are Opposition Members, with their smear campaign? Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important to remember that the defence industries are among our most important exporters and largest employers in the country? If the Opposition had had their way, they would have banned arms exports to innumerable countries, with the loss of millions of jobs and millions of pounds' worth of exports. Should not the whole thing be put in that context as well?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right, but as a result of the strict control and strict policy on defence-related exports that this country followed between 1985 and 1990 we contributed only around 1 per cent. of Iraq's defence-related imports. Under the last Labour Government, the value of total exports to Iraq rose from £61 million in 1974 to £427 million in 1979.

Mr. Faulds: Is it not the case that the report makes clear that the guidelines were changed, that certain named Ministers changed them, however much they have forgotten the significance of the change in the words, and in that case, why was the House lied to?

Mr. Lang: The House was not lied to. Sir Richard Scott accepts that no Minister deliberately misled the House and that all Ministers believed sincerely throughout the period that the guidelines that they were using remained the same as the ones originally set up in 1984.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Did defence counsel acting for Matrix Churchill have any cause for complaint in the handling of the public interest immunity certificates? During the Scott inquiry, was there any evidence, on the part of my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary or my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General, of deliberate misleading of the House? If that were the case, such a charge, to the knowledge of my right hon. and hon. Friends, would be a most ludicrous one.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. Friend raised the question of defence counsel in the Matrix Churchill trial. That counsel specifically supported the signing of PII certificates. The judge in that trial acknowledged that PII claims were properly made. He saw all the documents: he instructed the disclosure of some and not others, and he expressly noted the terms of the PII certificate of my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. On the question of misleading the House, with regard to the signing of letters by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary, Sir Richard Scott's report says:

"I accept that he did not intend his letters to be misleading and did not so regard them."

Sir Richard makes no charge against any Minister of having deliberately misled the House.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Despite your wise advice on 7 February, Madam Speaker, may I point out that, despite a request to the Department of Trade and Industry for prior access to the report for Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National party, that facility was not afforded to us. That is an abuse of a situation in which a request was put directly to the President of the Board of Trade. Therefore my comments can be only brief. I refer the right hon. Gentleman to volume IV, chapter 8, which clearly states that in 1985:

"Guidelines were deliberately not disclosed"

in answer to a parliamentary question. The following page states that there was

"a deliberate concealment from Parliament of the circumstances under which Mr. David Hastie had attended the Exhibition"

in Baghdad. That obviously impinges severely on the arms trade issue in general. I hope that we can discuss that matter in detail in the next debate. Will the President of the Board of Trade now tell us who was refusing to disclose the guidelines and who was organising the concealment?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Lady should understand that the guidelines are not statutorily based but self-imposed. They were established by my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Howe when Foreign Secretary as an operational arm of policy to assist in decision-making. It was felt that there was no immediate need to publish them. When they were published in October 1985, some nine months after they had originally been drawn up, that drew no complaint and no unexpected attitude on the part of any right hon. or hon. Member who discovered them. They were not the full embodiment of policy; they were the way by which decisions were made on a day-to-day basis on many tens of thousands of export licence applications so that the Government's strict control over arms and defence-related exports to Iraq could be carried out.

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): The exhaustive Scott report details the history of many years. Does my

right hon. Friend agree that in the real world the Government must answer two questions: did Ministers conspire to send people to prison? The answer is no. Did the House or the Government connive at exports of a lethal nature to either Iraq or Iran during this period? Again, the answer is no. Does not this report answer in the Government's favour on those two crucial issues?

Mr. Lang: My right hon. Friend is absolutely correct on both counts.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that until hon. Members have had the opportunity to read the entire report they cannot properly assess the conduct of Ministers, whether the House was misled and whether there was a cover-up? Is he aware that Iraqi pilots were trained in Britain until a few days before the invasion of Kuwait? Is he also aware that the charge against the Government is that they were an accessory to aggression and to genocide? The whole question of the arms trade, which was denounced by four bishops in a letter in *The Times* yesterday, is the real and on-going issue. This country subsidises the arms trade by £1 billion per year, and those weapons are often used to repress people—as is the case with Indonesia and the people of East Timor.

Mr. Lang: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that Labour Members repeatedly approached Ministers for support in securing defence contracts for factories in their constituencies. I remember what happened in the 1970s, when the then Labour Government set out to sell frigates and Canberra bombers to Argentina.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): I refer my right hon. Friend to paragraph D4.42, in which Sir Richard Scott observed:

"The answers to PQs, in both Houses of Parliament, failed to inform Parliament of the current state of Government policy on non-lethal arms sales to Iraq. This failure was deliberate and was an inevitable result of the agreement between the three junior Ministers that no publicity would be given to the decision to adopt a more liberal, or relaxed, policy, or interpretation of the Guidelines . . . I have come to the conclusion that the overriding and determinative reason was a fear of strong public opposition to the loosening of the restrictions on the supply of defence equipment".

Does that not go to the heart of democratic and accountable government? What is the Government's response to that statement?

Mr. Lang: Sir Richard Scott said:

"I accept also that the junior Ministers believed they were avoiding a formal change of the 1985 guidelines."

He believed that the Ministers acted in good faith. The parliamentary answer that they drafted in early 1989 said:

"The guidelines on the export of defence equipment to Iran and Iraq are kept under constant review and are applied in the light of prevailing circumstances, including the ceasefire and developments in the peace negotiations, and are not only informative but accurate."

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): The Chief Secretary told the inquiry that, in some circumstances, it is necessary to say something untrue in the House of Commons. As one of the people named in the report and having received unsatisfactory answers from a number of Ministers over seven years in relation to the question of arms sales to both Iran and Iraq, may I ask the Minister whether he thinks that Ministers who feel that it is necessary to tell untruths in the House of Commons should resign? In particular, does he think that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury should resign now in view of the way in which he misled the House?

Mr. Lang: Sir Richard Scott accepts that no Minister deliberately misled the House.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend turn his mind to the plight of the people who have been forgotten in all this welter of controversy? I refer to the 600 constituents of mine who used to have jobs at Matrix Churchill. They are a highly skilled team of men, and they are of the view that, if Customs and Excise had not blundered in, a deal in which the City of London and the management were trying to buy out the Iraqi shareholding would not have been aborted. Had they been able to complete that plan, those jobs might have been in existence today.

I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to paragraphs C3.25 to C3.65. Does he agree with my—albeit tentative—conclusion that Sir Richard Scott calls into question whether the Customs and Excise people behaved within the appropriate guidelines? If they did not, is there some question of liability here?

Mr. Lang: It is clear and generally agreed, with hindsight, that it would have been desirable if the Matrix Churchill trial had not taken place. But Customs and Excise are independent prosecutors and it would be wrong for the Government to seek to intervene in their decision over a prosecution. The report acknowledges that there was strong evidence of breach of controls, and Sir Richard Scott found that the Customs and Excise had observed the code for prosecutors.

Dr. John Gilbert (Dudley, East): Is it true, as alleged earlier this week in the *Financial Times*, that during the period under review components vital to Iraq's nuclear weapons programme were being shipped to that country? If so, when did the intelligence service learn about it, and when were Ministers informed?

Mr. Lang: There is no question of the Government having connived at the export to Iraq of equipment for use in the development of the Iraqi nuclear programme. The Matrix Churchill machine tool export licence—which mentions project K1000, to which the hon. Gentleman refers—was not approved: it was still outstanding when Iraq invaded Kuwait and United Nations sanctions were imposed.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): May I refer my right hon. Friend to paragraph 25 of chapter K6, on the subject of public interest immunity certificates in criminal cases? Does he agree with Sir Richard Scott's verdict that the use of these certificates on whole classes of documents is "bizarre and unacceptable"? Does he agree that there is a serious danger of a miscarriage of justice when PIICs are used primarily for administrative convenience? Does my right hon. Friend accept that Lord Justice Russell, the precedent used consistently in relation to public interest immunity certificates, said that matters of national security could never be decided by a court but only by Government?

[Mr. Rupert Allason]

Does my right hon. Friend therefore agree that no prosecution using public interest immunity certificates to ban the disclosure of whole classes of documents should be brought in future? Would it not be appropriate to take this judge-made law out of current use and put it on a statutory footing so that we can all understand it? Does my right hon. Friend accept the need to take a further look at cases, including that of Regina *v.* David Roche of Plymouth, in which there is a serious danger of a miscarriage of justice in criminal prosecutions in which a public interest immunity certificate prevents the defence from deploying its chosen defence?

Mr. Lang: As I told my hon. Friend in my statement, the Government intend to consider that matter further. The handling of PII certificates is court driven and case driven, not Government driven. The development of case law has governed the development of the handling of PII certificates. They are not a matter of administrative convenience: as my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General advised the Ministers in question, they had a duty to sign and it was then for the courts to decide on the admission or otherwise of the documents. In a criminal case, every document is seen by the judge. My right hon. and learned Friend's view on the matter is supported by eminent counsel, by three defence counsel in the Matrix Churchill trial and by Lord Bingham, Lord Donaldson, Lord Scarman and Lord Justice Mann, to whom I referred earlier.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): Given the seriousness of the issues covered by the report, and the number of Ministers and Departments involved, would it not have been better if the Prime Minister himself had made the statement this afternoon? As inevitably happens in these exchanges in the House, minds are concentrated on the conduct of Ministers. Surely that, too, goes to show that the Prime Minister alone, entitled as he is to deliver judgment on the conduct of Ministers—just as he is the author of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers", issued in his name—should have answered in the House.

Did the Attorney-General and the Ministers connected with the PIICs know when they signed the documents that Matrix Churchill was in touch with the secret services? If they did, surely they had an overriding obligation to see to it that Customs and Excise were pushed out of continuing the prosecution, just as they were pushed out of the super-gun case? Does not the Attorney-General have power to override Customs and Excise in the bringing of a prosecution by setting out what I believe is called a nolle prosequi?

Mr. Lang: The report came to me because it was commissioned to be delivered to me as President of the Board of Trade. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave evidence to the inquiry: it was therefore right that the report should come to me.

As for the PIICs, some of my colleagues may well have known about the connection with the secret services—that does not affect the matter. The point was that the Ministers in question had a duty to sign the certificates so that the public interest and the interests of justice could be weighed by the judge, who alone had access to all the documents and who could and did take a decision. The trial proceeded unaffected by the PIIs for four weeks before it was finally abandoned.

Sir Timothy Sainsbury (Hove): May I remind my right hon. Friend that when I was Minister for Trade I was one of those who had occasion to refer to, and give answers in connection with, the guidelines? When I asked to see them, the text that I was shown and the text to which I stuck used exactly the same words as the text given in the House by Lord Howe in 1985.

Does my right hon. Friend further agree that the guidelines are just as they are described—guidelines—which have to be applied with judgment to any specific application for a licence to export non-lethal equipment? The interpretation of the guidelines, as my right hon. Friend has already said, would surely be expected to reflect whether there was peace or war in the Gulf.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The consideration given in early 1989 and late 1988 to revising the guidelines was given precisely to reflect the fact that No.3 guideline referred to the prolongation and exacerbation of the conflict. Once the conflict had changed, it was sensible that Ministers should consider updating the guideline. The wording that they considered using differed in almost no respect other than to reflect that fact. The amended wording, however, was not adopted or put to Secretaries of State. The fatwa intervened in February 1989, which led to a different approach to the application of the existing guidelines.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): May I refer the President to the answer that he gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), which implied that all or some Ministers signed certificates in good faith, not understanding what had happened? But D4.16 quotes a briefing as follows:

> "Since the ceasefire in August 1988, the Guidelines have been applied with greater flexibility for Iraq (but since last February, with much greater rigidity for Iran)".

Surely that shows a marked change of policy. The quotation continues:

> "Our public presentation of our policy on arms supplies to both countries has, however, stayed broadly the same."

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that that public presentation included presentation to Parliament, whether by all Ministers or by some? Which Ministers made those changes, which clearly represented a difference from earlier guidelines?

Mr. Lang: It is the clear view of the Government that the policy remained the same and that the guideline was applied more flexibly to reflect changing circumstances. One of the circumstances was the ceasefire in 1988. Another was the Iranian fatwa in February 1989, when Britain broke off diplomatic relations and withdrew her chargé d'affaires. Another was the execution of Farzad Bazoft in March 1990, when the British ambassador was withdrawn from Iraq. There were general situations of an extremely unpleasant kind such as the retention of the hostages, the treatment of the Kurds and threats to British shipping in the Gulf. All those matters caused the existing guidelines to be applied flexibly. The amount of

equipment exported to Iraq as a result of the changing circumstances did not alter by any discernible amount, either in number or in the type of licences granted.

Sir John Cope (Northavon): My right hon. Friend has confirmed that Customs and Excise, in bringing the prosecution, was acting as an independent taxation and prosecuting authority and did not, therefore, consult the appropriate Minister—which was me at the time—about the matter. Will he also confirm—I think that he said it in his statement—that in bringing the prosecution Customs and Excise acted properly and withdrew it properly when the evidence given in court changed?

Mr. Lang: I am happy to agree with my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Will the Minister respond to allegations made in *The Independent* in November 1992 by John Gordon, the former head of the Foreign Office nuclear energy department, that by permitting the sale of nuclear-related technology to Iraq the Government breached not only their own guidelines but article 1 of the non-proliferation treaty which forbids the assisting of any other country in the making of nuclear weapons? Did Scott agree that the Government had breached the non-proliferation treaty?

Mr. Lang: I am disinclined to believe anything that the newspapers have said about these matters in recent days. I urge the hon. Gentleman to read the report.

Sir Michael Neubert (Romford): When it comes to doing business with dictators, does my right hon. Friend remember that to clinch an aircraft deal the last Labour Government invited the megalomaniac Communist tyrant Ceausescu on a state visit and had him put up at Buckingham palace? When it comes to changing tack within Government guidelines, does my right hon. Friend recall that the Labour Prime Minister embarked on the £1 billion Chevaline nuclear missile enhancement programme without—it is said—even consulting his Cabinet? In the light of Labour's record, does not Opposition Members' orchestrated outrage amount to humbug of the highest order?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Yet again, the Labour party has said one thing and done another.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Was not the Tory Government's real fear about the Scott report that as many as four witnesses would reveal that the Tory party received arms commissions—money—from some of the firms which were exporting to Iraq and Iran? Did the Tory party receive money from any of those firms and, if so, how much?

Mr. Lang: If the hon. Gentleman had had any evidence to that effect, I have no doubt that he would have passed it to Sir Richard Scott—in which case, I have no doubt that Sir Richard Scott would have commented on it.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Surely the key question that the House must ask with regard to Ministers' futures is whether they acted with integrity and in good faith. As I could not read the whole report in the few minutes that I had, can my right hon. Friend help me by pointing to anywhere in the report where Sir Richard Scott questions the good faith or integrity of any Minister? I have found one quotation where he says that the Chief Secretary

"did not intend his letters to be misleading and did not so regard them."

Why should any objective person therefore ask the Ministers in question to resign? Will my right hon. Friend reassure me on that point, since they felt that there were acting in the national interest with integrity and good faith?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Not only did Sir Richard Scott not find any evidence of any Minister's lack of integrity—he specifically went out of his way on several occasions to pay tribute to their good faith and the way in which they behaved.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that in advancing the defence of the relevant Ministers by describing them as models of integrity and good faith he is using the defence of incompetence and negligence? If they are to be lauded for their integrity and good faith, are they to be punished for their negligence and incompetence?

Mr. Lang: Sir Richard Scott identified some areas in which mistakes were made. They were largely of an administrative nature—for example, in intelligence handling and in the handling of some export licences. Those issues are already being looked at and action has already been taken to improve the administration of those matters. Sir Richard Scott did not impugn the integrity of any Minister; where there are disagreements, they are of principle and of attitude to proper practice and procedure in the House. The procedures that the Government have followed in relation to answers on defence-related exports are procedures which have been followed by successive Governments of both parties for very many years. I look forward to the debate on the issues so that Parliament can decide whether changes should be made.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there will always be differences of opinion as to how much information it is in the national interest to make available to Parliament about such sensitive matters as arms sales? Academics, editors and judges will put forward their various views on how much information ought to be made available to a sovereign Parliament, but in the end the decision on how much information should be given must be for the sovereign Parliament alone.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend makes a very sound constitutional point. To illustrate how policy has remained broadly the same over successive Administrations, I quote an answer given on 10 June 1974, which says:

"It has been the policy of successive Governments not to reveal information on the supply of arms to individual countries."—[*Official Report*, 10 June 1974; Vol. 874, c. 396-97.]

That answer was given by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) when he was a Minister.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): The President of the Board of Trade told the House in his

[Mr. Jim Cousins]

statement that the Government knew about the super-gun project in 1989. Can he therefore explain why, in the subsequent three years, a quite different story was told by Ministers and civil servants on numerous occasions? Does he regard that as being the responsibility of Ministers or of civil servants?

Mr. Lang: As the House has already been told, the report contains a long chapter on the super-gun. I urge the hon. Gentleman to read it. There he will find his answer.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Is it not especially sad that Opposition Members giggle and laugh when there has been a total vindication of the honour of two Ministers? May I direct Opposition Members' attention to paragraph K8.15, the very last page of volume iv, which explains how things can happen? It says:

"A Minister should not be held to blame or required to accept personal criticism unless he has some personal responsibility or some personal involvement in what has occurred."

Sir Richard Scott says that the Cabinet Secretary's point was that

"the conduct of government has become so complex and the need for Ministerial delegation of responsibilities to and reliance on the advice of officials has become so inevitable as to render unreal the attaching of blame to a Minister simply because something has gone wrong in the department of which he is in charge. For my part, I find it difficult to disagree."

Is it not obvious that that is the explanation, and is not my right hon. Friend absolutely right to say that the mistakes—which have undoubtedly been made—will be looked at, and also to say that Ministers of the Crown do not deserve the blame originally attached to them by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) for their behaviour in the matter?

Mr. Lang: My hon. and learned Friend makes a serious and worthwhile point. These are matters which should be debated. I illustrate the point by quoting from the article in *The Times* of 24 March by Mr. Gilbert Gray QC, one of the counsel for defence in the Matrix Churchill case. He said:

"All counsel agreed that great weight should be given to the interests of the accused. The judge ruled that all documents, save those concerning national security, should be disclosed. The case continued. Neither Ministers nor Attorney-Generals sought to intervene on this second question. How this narrative of fairness can be fabricated into an indictment of the Attorney-General I fail to follow. I never had the impression that he stooped to conquer or tried to gag. The Bar esteems him greatly for his honour and integrity and so do I. At no time did the trial judge ever suggest that the Attorney-General or Mr. Moses be criticised."

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Why was it that the reservations of the Deputy Prime Minister were not passed either to Alan Moses QC or to the trial judge?

Mr. Lang: The judge acknowledged that the PII claims were properly made. He saw all the documents and expressly noted the terms of the PII certificates signed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General. Although it may well be, as Sir Richard Scott says, that more specific action should have been taken to ensure that the matter was brought to the judge's attention, it had no effect on the trial. The judge saw the document and expressly noted the terms of that certificate.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to paragraphs F4.56 to F4.66, which concern the accountability of Select Committees to the House? He will be aware that Sir Robin Butler and Sir Michael Quinlan said to the Select Committee that two retired civil servants should not attend to give evidence. That is perfectly understandable in view of the then memorandum of guidance for officials appearing before Select Committees. The memorandum says:

"the official would remain subject to Ministerial instructions as to how to answer questions".

The officials concerned had retired.

Surely the Select Committee sought to inquire into facts, not into ministerial policy. We have, therefore, the suggestion in the report that Ministers' duty to account to Parliament should be recognised as extending to an obligation to assist an investigating Select Committee to obtain the best first-hand experience available. In his review of the recommendations, will my right hon. Friend consider changing or adjusting the memorandum of guidance for officials appearing before Select Committees so that we can avoid the requirement that officials have to follow ministerial instructions on how to answer questions?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. All these matters will certainly be further considered.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I refer the Secretary of State to page 487, which says:

"In March 1989, Mrs. Ann Clwyd MP asked '. . . if United Kingdom arms manufacturers will be granted export licences for sales to Iran or Iraq in the near future'."

A Foreign Office note apparently said:

"The FCO prefer to stick to the unamended version as used in reply to Teddy Taylor on 18 January . . . They, like we"—

that is, the DTI—

"wish to avoid the impression that the guidelines in relation to the Gulf conflict are being reviewed in the light of the current bilateral situation."

Sir Richard Scott says:

"In my opinion, neither Mr. Alton"—

who had asked a similar question—

"nor Mrs. Clwyd was given an adequate or an accurate answer."

Those of us who witnessed at first hand the victims of Halabja and realised that the shells that were delivered on Halabja were made by the lathes of Matrix Churchill, those of us who saw the wretched Kurds fleeing across the mountain tops in 1991, those of us who heard the shells of Saddam Hussein and those of us who realised the complicity of the British Government in all this are sickened by the Scott report today because it shows clearly that those on the Treasury Bench are the guilty men.

Is it not the case that at the core of the report is the simple big lie—that Britain, a decent democracy, does not sell arms to tyrants? We did so and we still do so. The Government assist in that process and the big lie has now exploded in their face.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Lady is absolutely wrong. I accept that she has not yet had an opportunity to read the report.

When she does, she will find that Sir Richard Scott, after three years of painstaking inquiry, acquits the Government of those charges, which have been repeatedly levelled at them.

The hon. Lady may like to know that between 1988 and 1989 machine tool exports to Iraq did not increase, as would be implied if the guidelines had been changed in some dramatic way: they actually fell to two fifths of the 1988 level.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): Does my right hon. Friend recall that my constituency is a manufacturing constituency? Firms there are furious that NATO companies and European Community companies export to countries to which they are not allowed to export. I have sent letters to Ministers, I have raised questions on the Floor of the House and I have brought representatives of firms to visit Ministers. Never once have the prescribed guidelines been subject to an exception, whichever Minister I have written to or been to see. Never once has any company in my constituency complained that other British companies got favours that they did not.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There can be no doubt that this country, uniquely, conducted a policy that was far more rigorous and far more principled than that of almost any other country involved in the export of arms and defence equipment.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Will the President of the Board of Trade now have the decency to apologise to the House on behalf of the Government, who were responsible for what Sir Richard Scott calls "deliberate" concealment from Parliament? If the Government had any respect for truth and open democracy, they should resign en masse and have a general election.

Mr. Lang: When the hon. Gentleman reads the report, he will find that Sir Richard Scott specifically exonerates my right hon. and hon. Friends from any intention deliberately to mislead Parliament. He accepts that their approach was principled and sincere.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): My constituents who work in the defence industry and related industries will be appalled if the outcome of the Scott inquiry and the navel-gazing that will go on in the House over the next few weeks is that they will not be able to export legitimate materials or to create jobs. Can my right hon. Friend assure the House that whatever changes are made to the way in which sensitive information is released to the House, it is not done at the expense of British jobs?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right to emphasise the importance to our economy of this industry. Some 400,000 jobs in this country are directly or indirectly related to the defence industry. Provided that the policy is conducted in a principled and consistent way, as the policy of this Government consistently has been, it is important to recognise the economic benefits to be derived.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): Does the Secretary of State recall that early in 1994 Sir Robin Butler, the Cabinet Secretary, gave evidence to the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service in which he adumbrated the ministerial right to lie to Parliament? Does he further recall that in March 1994 the then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, now Chief Secretary to the Treasury, told us that ministerial lying to Parliament was part of the natural order of things and that it would be naive to believe it could be otherwise? Now that the Chief Secretary has been convicted of deliberate concealment from Parliament, ought he not to take his odious theories and practices to the Back Benches?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman's question is distorted and the premise is unsound. His question has no validity whatever.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), is my right hon. Friend aware that the vast majority of questions from the Opposition, including the previous one, have been about the role of the present Chief Secretary to the Treasury? I looked at the report and in addition to the section quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle, I saw paragraph 4.12. Sir Richard Scott says that he accepts that the present Chief Secretary had no duplicitous intention At paragraph D4.6, Sir Richard says:

"I did not receive the impression of any insincerity on his part in giving me the evidence he did."

Surely we can conclude from this that the Chief Secretary's name is now completely cleared by Sir Richard Scott.

Mr. Lang: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Will the President of the Board of Trade look for a moment at page 495, paragraph D4.42, and perhaps add in the words that were left out by the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) when he quoted from that section:

"and a consequential fear that the pressure of the opposition might be detrimental to British trading interests."

Is not the truth of the matter that the guidelines were changed and matters were hidden because the Government were frightened that if the truth came out, some people in this country—not just Opposition Members—might simply say, "Stop selling to Iraq", because that is what the Government were doing? The Government were permitting lathes, which manufactured weapons of war, to be sold to re-arm Iraq. The Government did not want the truth to be known because, if it had been known, people would have discovered what was going on and the trade would have been stopped.

Mr. Lang: Sir Richard Scott recognised that British trading interests are a legitimate component of policy and can properly be taken into account. However, he also quite conclusively reached the view that no lethal weapons were sold to Iraq and that none was found at the end of the Iraq-Kuwait war.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Will my right hon. Friend turn to paragraph G18.106 and agree that it exonerates Ministers in relation to their signing of the

[Mr. Iain Duncan Smith]

PII certificates—clearly on the basis that the judge would have been able to look at them? Can my right hon. Friend also clear up the charge, which has been made during the past three years, that the case collapsed once the PII certificates—as gagging certificates—were released by the judge? In fact, the case continued for another four weeks. It was once Alan Clark changed his statement in the witness box—*[Interruption.]* He may well have done. The reality is that, as my right hon. Friend would agree, once Alan Clark changed his previous statements under oath, the prosecutor asked the presiding judge to withdraw the case.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The role of PII certificates in that case has been entirely distorted by Opposition Members. The PII certificate is not a gagging order: it is something that Ministers have a duty to sign so that the public interest can be brought before the judge and weighed against the interests of justice. That is what properly happened in that case.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): That being so, will the President of the Board of Trade comment on this? Sir Richard Scott, after three years of examining the issues, stated in his report that he found a Minister to be "personally at fault". What right have the Government to say that they reject that? I am quoting paragraph G13.125 in respect of the Attorney-General. That is the considered view. One cannot pray in aid Sir Richard Scott's report when it exonerates the policy but dismiss it when it states quite specifically that a Minister was personally at fault.

Will the President of the Board of Trade answer a question on a matter of finance? He did not refer even once in his statement to the financing of the arms trade. Will he tell us—I have had no time to read the report, so I do not know—whether at any time the Royal Bank of Scotland, which is the holder of the Conservative party's overdraft, ever received any taxpayers' money through the Export Credits Guarantee Department as a result of financing arms exports to Iran and Iraq?

Mr. Lang: On the latter point, if the hon. Gentleman cannot find the answer in the report, and if he will table a question, I will make sure that it is answered. As to the views of the Attorney-General, I readily accept that Sir Richard Scott takes a different view on some of these matters from that of my right hon. and learned Friend. My right hon. and learned Friend took great care to get detailed and specific advice from eminent counsel, and he has the support of a number of distinguished senior judges.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: We are now going to move on. Thank you very much.

Several hon. Members: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. Points of order come after the business statement.

Business of the House

5.14 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): With permission, I shall make a statement on forthcoming business.

MONDAY 19 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill.

Motion on the Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order.

TUESDAY 20 FEBRUARY—Motions on the Child Support (Maintenance Assessments and Special Cases) and Social Security (Claims and Payments) Amendment Regulations, the Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order, the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order, the Social Security (Contributions) Amendment Regulations, the Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating and National Insurance Fund Payments) Order and the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) (General) Amendment Regulations.

WEDNESDAY 21 FEBRUARY—Until 2 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Progress on remaining stages of the Asylum and Immigration Bill.

THURSDAY 22 FEBRUARY—Until about 7 o'clock, conclusion of remaining stages of the Asylum and Immigration Bill.

FRIDAY 23 FEBRUARY—The House will not be sitting.

MONDAY 26 FEBRUARY—Debate on the Scott report, on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

I am not yet in a position to be specific about the subsequent three days, other than to say that I expect to take Government business, and hope also to provide some Opposition time. On Friday 1 March, the business will be private Members' Bills.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I thank the Leader of the House for that information, and for taking on board our representations that the Asylum and Immigration Bill should have an extra half day for its remaining stages.

I turn first to the Scott report, because we have just heard a very important statement—everyone must agree with that. Will any of the Ministers who have been criticised in the report be making a personal statement next week, and are the Government prepared to reconsider their decision that the debate on the 26th should be on a motion for the Adjournment? Why are the Government not prepared to table a substantive motion that could be amendable, so that the House could have the opportunity to have a clear vote on many of the issues contained in the report? Will the Leader of the House tell us, today, who will be speaking in that debate, and which Ministers will be facing the House to answer further questions?

May I also repeat my regular question about the timing of the White Paper on the intergovernmental conference? In recent weeks, hon. Members have pressed the Lord President about that matter many times, and he has said that he will answer at some future stage. We have still not had an answer, and I think that that information would be of interest to hon. Members.

When do the Government intend to move the writ for the by-election in South-East Staffordshire? The Leader of the House will be aware that efforts are usually made to fill vacancies within three months. He will also be

aware that all the main political parties have their candidates in place, that the register is available, and that it has been published. To keep within the three-month agreement, I think that the writ will have to be moved next week. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether it will be, or are the Government afraid of that by-election?

Mr. Newton: I express my gratitude once again for the hon. Lady's reference to the modification of the business that has been made in response to the entirely reasonable representations that have been made through the usual channels.

I am not aware of plans for any Minister to make a personal statement on the Scott report next week. I think that a debate on the Adjournment is much the most appropriate way to debate such a wide-ranging report. The Ministers who will take part in the debate, I expect, will be the President of the Board of Trade and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

In relation to the IGC White Paper, the hon. Lady is wrong to suggest that I said that I would shortly be giving the House a date. I think that I said that the White Paper will be published in good time before the IGC, but I shall of course let the hon. Lady know as soon as I am in a position to give a date.

As for the writ for South-East Staffordshire by-election, the hon. Lady will know that that is not a matter for me. I shall, however, bring her comments to the attention of those concerned.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for an urgent early debate on the economic situation, so that we can point out that unemployment is still falling—it is now 7.9 per cent.—that inflation is low and falling, that this is all due to the Government's policies, and that our economy is very much stronger than those of western European countries which follow the policies advocated by the Opposition?

Mr. Newton: What an excellent question; I could not have put it better myself.

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): Will the Leader of the House ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to make a statement on the collapse of the Government's social housing programme? This morning, housing associations—the vehicle that the Government are now using to create social housing in place of local authorities—have had their private finance stopped because of the inadequacy of the Housing Bill. Will the Leader of the House ask his right hon. Friend to make a statement to put the matter right?

Mr. Newton: Were the hon. Gentleman's forecast accurate, I am sure that my right hon. Friend would wish to make the position clear. I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's description of the position, but I shall draw his comments to my right hon. Friend's attention.

Sir Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): Will my right hon. Friend arrange an early debate to discuss the resolution passed by Labour-controlled Sheffield city council on 31 January, which has been sent to the Secretary of State for Education and all Members of Parliament for Sheffield? In it, the council condemns the hypocrisy of senior Labour politicians in seeking privileges for their children in contradiction of their own stated educated policy.

Mr. Newton: That sounds rather a good subject for a debate, along with many others I can think of. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his suggestion.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Is the Leader of the House aware of the dramatic increase in the number of complaints being received from all parts of rural United Kingdom about the tangible effects of low-flying training? Will he arrange for a debate in Government time on this subject and, in particular, on the Ministry of Defence's restitution of compensation in cases where property is dislocated and destroyed, and where loss of life is a direct consequence of low-flying training?

Mr. Newton: I am aware of such concerns. Indeed, one or two have been expressed in my constituency. I shall, of course, bring the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. I should add that, inevitably, a balance has to be struck. This afternoon, we have been talking about Iraq. Our planes made such a contribution to the war there that we could not have failed to carry out the relevant flying training exercises.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a debate next week on the briefing of the press in this place? We heard in the statement about briefing against members of the Government which suggested dishonourable and scurrilous behaviour, but I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 421, which shows that briefing has occurred, but, in this case, by the deputy Leader of the Opposition against his own leader.

Mr. Newton: I am not in a position to add to what my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade said on this and other matters, but I hope that my hon. Friend's comments will be carefully considered by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook)—and, indeed, by the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott).

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): In the light of the evidence that he has heard and seen here today, does the Leader of the House really think that a single day is long enough for the debate on the Scott report?

Mr. Newton: I have already said that a debate on the Adjournment is appropriate. I also think that the proposal for a day's debate on the Adjournment is appropriate.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): As it is such a long time since the House debated health and safety, will the right hon. Gentleman be good enough to arrange a debate focusing in particular on the safety of children and young people in parks? I ask this because of the pollution of a stream running through Braunstone park in my constituency, which resulted in a number of young people being injured and burnt, and the destruction of thousands

[Mr. Greville Janner]

of fish. It is the sort of problem that afflicts people across the country, and I think that a debate would be appropriate.

Mr. Newton: The hon. and learned Gentleman knows that the Government are concerned to improve the protection of the environment and of people, and that they have taken action to that end. It sounds an appropriate subject for a Wednesday morning debate; perhaps the hon. and learned Gentleman might like to bid for a such a debate.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): In view of the right hon. Gentleman's announcement of a debate on the Scott report, does he agree that the way in which the arrangements were made for the report to be seen makes a mockery of parliamentary accountability, and that he, as Leader of the House, must be accused of showing contempt for Parliament in not persuading the Government to act otherwise? It is disgraceful that hon. Members were given only 10 minutes, or probably less, to read a five-volume report. Once again, the Government have shown contempt for our procedures.

Mr. Newton: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's strictures. Perhaps it may be of some comfort to him to know that I did not receive a copy of the report until 3.30 pm.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): May we have an early debate on the grievous effect of the Government's noxious habitual residence test and its impact on British citizen and United Kingdom nationals? Is the Leader of the House aware that the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux this week published a report entitled "Failing the Test", which shows that, far from catching benefit tourists, as the Secretary of State for Social Security claimed, the test is targeting more than 38,000 British citizens and UK nationals? As appeals against the test can take anything up to three months, many British citizens and UK nationals are living in their own country without any means of financial support. That is a grievous situation, and we should have an early debate on it.

Mr. Newton: There will, of course, be a number of social security debates next week, but I shall draw the hon. Lady's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. In introducing the test, the Government were responding to criticism of the easy access to income support for anyone who chose to come to this country. Experience has shown that abuse was substantially greater even than had been estimated, which originally caused the concern. There are certainly no plans to withdraw the test.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): The weather has improved, but may we have a debate on cold weather payments, as a number of people have missed out on them and been placed in very difficult circumstances? Even under the current rules, the temperature is often measured miles from where the problem is. Clay Cross in my constituency is almost 50 miles from Leeds, but Leeds is the centre where the relevant measurement is taken. However, there were probably at least two weeks in January, when, had the temperature properly been measured in north Derbyshire, people in Clay Cross and the surrounding areas would have received cold weather payments.

Mr. Newton: I shall ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security to examine the matter, but I know from experience that the scheme is a great deal quicker, more effective and sensitive than it was not so many years ago.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): May we have a debate on commercial lobbying? Does the Leader of the House think it right in principle that a Minister of the Crown should sign a renewal application for a pass for a commercial lobbyist, and that a pass to the House should then be issued? Surely there is a principle involved.

Mr. Newton: Madam Speaker, I understand that my hon. Friend to whom the hon. Gentleman refers has written to you about the matter, and I do not think that I should make any further comment from the Dispatch Box now.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Is the Leader of the House aware that the local government boundary commission for Wales gave the Secretary of State for Wales its proposals today to deal with anomalies in the border around the town of Bridgend? Because of the way in which the matter is being dealt with, there is a danger that, if the Secretary of State does not allow the proposal to be publicised tomorrow for a period of six weeks, the boundary changes will not come into effect for a full year after the local government reorganisation has taken place.

Great concern has been expressed in my constituency about the impact of this, and I would appreciate it if the Leader of the House could use his good offices to secure a debate on behalf of my constituents. Clearly, I am using mine, but I realise that his probably have a greater pull in this respect.

Mr. Newton: I had not been aware of that report or proposal, but I am now. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is aware of them both, and I must point out that he is due to answer questions here next Monday.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The Leader of the House is probably aware that next week is half-term holiday throughout most of the country, and that on Monday, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), speaking on behalf of the House of Commons Commission, revealed to the House that the Commission has no plans to introduce any kind of child care facility in this building for the children of Members or of staff, other than the £6-a-day allowance for private nursery places to which some staff are entitled.

Does the right hon. Gentleman not think that it might be an idea at least to consider the problems of many people who have young children yet who also want to be in the House, and so need some child care facility? Just before the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, might not this building catch up with the times by introducing a practice that is fairly normal in

large institutions, and providing a workplace child care facility, so that all people, whether Members or people employed here, could participaté equally in the proceedings in this building?

Madam Speaker: Do I understand that the hon. Gentleman seeks a debate on such matters—or simply an opinion?

Mr. Corbyn: Of course, Madam Speaker, it would be helpful if the children could come and take part in the debate. They might bring some sense of reality to our proceedings, which is clearly missing, judging by what is happening today.

Madam Speaker: I am simply reminding the House that this is an occasion on which we ask for debates.

Mr. Newton: You may also think it right to remind the House, Madam Speaker, that such matters are for the House of Commons Commission, of which you are the Chairman, and for which the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed speaks.

Mr. Corbyn: You are the Leader of the House.

Mr. Newton: And I am a member of the Commission—and I have played a part in bringing about the improvement in provision to which the hon. Gentleman referred, by introducing the arrangements he mentioned. I shall ensure that the Chairman of the Commission has her attention drawn to his remarks.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Gratified though I am to have a walk-on part in the Scott report, may I ask for a debate next week about the streets of London? I realise that the Leader of the House rarely walks the streets of London, surrounded as he is by his fawning civil servants, but if he were to do so, he might see that they are being turned into patchwork quilts by being constantly dug up by deregulated operators, especially the cable companies, who leave them in the most appalling state. That is the sort of thing that really gets up the noses of the people I represent in the east end of London, and I should like the opportunity of a debate, so that I can tell the right hon. Gentleman in far more detail exactly what is going on.

Mr. Newton: I mildly observe that I do occasionally walk the streets of London, usually when accompanying my wife on a shopping expedition. [HON. MEMBERS: "Sexist."] I do not think that there is anything sexist in that. It is an entirely proper thing for a husband to do—and probably a wise one as well. *[Interruption.]* This is going to cause trouble when the news gets back home.

Various efforts have been made in recent years to achieve better co-ordination when streets have to be dug up, but I accept that the hon. Gentleman thinks that we have not yet reached perfection, and I shall draw his remarks to the attention of those concerned.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): May I impress upon the Leader of the House the urgent need for an early debate both on the whole of Senator Mitchell's report and on the infamous decision and action of the IRA in returning to bombing innocent citizens? May I remind the right hon. Gentleman that Senator Mitchell and his esteemed colleagues argued that there was a need for meaningful negotiations, which they hoped would lead to comprehensive change in Northern Ireland? Surely that laudable objective could be helped in a realistic way if all-party talks, to include Sinn Fein, were to take place in the near future.

Mr. Newton: I accept unequivocally that the hon. Gentleman's request for a debate is serious. I think that he will also recognise, as will the occupants of both Front Benches and the spokesmen for the minority parties, that no one would want to do anything, whether in the House or elsewhere, that did not seem clearly to contribute to the prospects of the peace that we all want to see. In that context, I shall bear in mind what the hon. Gentleman said and bring it to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Points of Order

5.34 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will recall the answer that I received from a Minister of the Crown on the granting of a pass by a Minister to a commercial lobbyist. You will also know that last week you twice ruled that you are not in a position to intervene. Who will sort out the problem? A Minister of the Crown provides a pass to a commercial lobbyist, whom he registers as a researcher but who does no research for that Minister. There is an issue—

Madam Speaker: Order. Perhaps I can inform the hon. Gentleman. I think that he is looking at a register that is not current. The Minister of the Crown concerned ceased to employ the gentleman in question in the middle of 1995, and he has not had a pass since that time. I have correspondence on the subject. If the hon. Gentleman would like to come to my office, I shall show it to him, so that he can see all the dates.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I, too, have seen the documentation, Madam Speaker. The pass application was signed on 1 May, yet the person concerned was appointed as a Minister three months earlier. It cannot be possible for a Minister of the Crown to sign a pass for a commercial lobbyist who does not work for him. Something is wrong in the system. I am simply suggesting that something should be done.

Madam Speaker: It is perfectly correct for a Minister of the Crown to employ whom he wishes. That was done perfectly properly. Since last year, the Minister has not employed that person, and he does not have a pass to enter the House. I have records giving me that evidence, and if the hon. Gentleman wants to come to my office, I shall make them available to him.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As you uphold, some may say embody, the dignity of the House, do you share my concern about an article that appeared in *The Guardian* yesterday about the "Mark Thomas Comedy Product", a new Channel 4 programme in which Members of Parliament will be interviewed dressed in the costumes of various animals, especially teddy bears? I am sure that we are grateful to the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes), who declined to be interviewed dressed as a male organ—although some of us might think that most appropriate. Do you not feel, Madam Speaker, that that detracts somewhat from the dignity of this place? Clearly some Members of Parliament will do anything for publicity, and I feel that their attention should be drawn to the matter.

Madam Speaker: I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman that many Members of the House will do a great deal to get publicity. I make no mention of names—just follow my eyes. We must now move on to more serious matters.

Orders of the Day

Broadcasting

[Relevant document: The draft of the BBC's new Charter for the continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation.]

5.37 pm

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): I beg to move,

That the Agreement between the Secretary of State for National Heritage and the British Broadcasting Corporation (Cm. 3152), dated 25th January 1996, a copy of which was laid before this House on 31st January, be approved.

The BBC is a central part of our national life. Virtually all of us watch its television channels and listen to its radio services. None of us is indifferent to it. It is a unique repository of talent and expertise.

The BBC has remained dedicated to its core tradition of public service broadcasting, true to Lord Reith's original vision of 70 years ago. It still serves to inform, to educate and to entertain. It is a benchmark against which other broadcasters are measured. Michael Grade said that it is the BBC that

"keeps the rest of us honest".

Since the present charter and agreement were debated, we have seen rapid change in the world of broadcasting, with cable, satellite and Channel 4, and Channel 5 will soon arrive. Three independent national radio stations have been introduced, as have a new BBC national radio station and nearly 200 independent local radio stations.

I pay tribute to the BBC's determination to stay at the forefront of technology. Over the years, it has adapted in line with changing circumstances and technological advance. Recently, it has played an important part in promoting digital broadcasting, and it introduced digital audio broadcasting last September. We shall discuss that when the Broadcasting Bill has completed its progress in another place.

Internationally, the BBC helps to define the United Kingdom's image and reputation. It was on the BBC that President Gorbachev relied for accurate and impartial news when he was under house arrest. It has the highest reputation as a broadcaster and programme maker at home and overseas.

Today's debate on a new charter and agreement marks the culmination of a three-year process of rigorous consultation and debate. The Government published their consultation paper on the future of the BBC in 1992. I pay warm tribute to my predecessors in office.

I pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) for the original consultation paper, in response to which many thousands of people let us know their views and concerns. I pay tribute to the National Heritage Select Committee, which made a valuable contribution through its 1993 report. The Government and the new Secretary of State responded to that in our White Paper, "The Future of the BBC", for which I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), in 1994. A year ago, with another Secretary of State, the House debated the issues arising from the White Paper.

Perhaps it is a tribute to the BBC and to the concern that hon. Members feel for it that, for all the many issues on which views may change with successive Secretaries of State, there seems to have been great unanimity of view on this subject.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): In between offering those tributes, which I am sure have been richly earned, is the Secretary of State satisfied that the concerns and interests of BBC Scotland are being treated sympathetically by the hierarchy of the BBC in London?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am extremely satisfied on that front. I shall say more about those matters later, but I have carefully considered that issue, as has the BBC governor from Scotland. I hope that, on this as on other matters, the scrutiny that has been undertaken will satisfy hon. Members.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Under present arrangements, Scotland has a national broadcasting council. Does my right hon. Friend recognise the value of the English National Forum and the local radio advisory councils, which are not specially recognised in the charter? I know that she is aware of the issue. Is she prepared to make a more positive statement about that, or even consider amending the charter?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) have reinforced the fact that it is right that the BBC should be answerable, accountable and involved in the various parts of the United Kingdom and the regions of England. I met members of the English National Forum earlier this week, and I hope that I was able to satisfy them, as I hope I will satisfy my hon. Friend, about our earnest intent that their concerns should be properly considered right at the heart of the BBC.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mrs. Bottomley: Impartiality is important in the BBC and, in fairness, I shall take a question from the hon. Gentleman and then make progress.

Mr. Maclennan: It is important to establish the status of the documents that we are debating. The right hon. Lady may know that that autocrat of the breakfast table, Marmaduke Hussey, wrote to several bodies, including that to which the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) referred. On 24 January, he wrote:

"The Government, however, has indicated firmly that it does not wish to amend the documents."

Does it not follow from that that this debate is an utter charade, and that the Government have no intention of amending the documents under discussion in the light of anything that may be said—for example, about the apparent oversight of the position of Gaelic in Scotland? That should be dealt with, either in the charter or in the agreement.

Mrs. Bottomley: The Government are well aware of the importance of the BBC and of the legitimate concerns of hon. Members in its affairs. The agreement must be debated in the House before it can be implemented. There have already been years of consideration of those issues and months of detailed deliberation. It has recently been debated in another place and careful consideration was given to the points raised there. In the same way, after this debate, we will carefully consider the points raised before finally implementing the agreement. It would be unfair not to inform the House of the inevitable concern of the BBC and others that the uncertainty there has been for many months should be brought to an end.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Paragraph 2.2 of the agreement states that the BBC will provide

"two television programme services available for general reception throughout the United Kingdom, which may include regional variations".

Is the use of the word "may" a mistake, and if it is, could it be amended to "must" or "shall"?

Mrs. Bottomley: It is possible that there could be an amendment. I will consider the matter in more detail. I must make progress with the substance of my remarks, because it is clear that many hon. Members want to speak.

Overwhelmingly, the view that emerged from the consultation by the Government, from the Select Committee report and from all the other contributions was that the BBC should continue to be the United Kingdom's main public service broadcaster. That would not always have been the predictable outcome, and it is no small tribute to the advances that the BBC has made in recent years under the shrewd and effective chairmanship of Marmaduke Hussey. He has been chairman of the BBC for longer than any other chairman, and is the only one to have been reappointed. He was the 17th chairman of the BBC, and the House will wish to express its thanks for all that he has done.

Throughout this process, the Government have listened carefully to the views expressed and reflected on them. Our stance has been that of a supporter of the BBC, but not an uncritical one.

The documents before the House today reflect our conclusions. The draft royal charter is the instrument that will continue the existence of the BBC and regulate its constitution until 2006. The charter is granted under the royal prerogative, and is not subject to parliamentary approval. I welcome the opportunity for the House to consider the draft charter in conjunction with the associated agreement, for which, as I have made clear, I seek the approval of the House. It has been debated already in another place, and we have given careful consideration to the points raised there.

The agreement is a contract with the BBC, setting out how the corporation will meet its objects and obligations. We regard the BBC as a strong, independent organisation serving the public. The agreement contains, for the first time, a specific recognition of the BBC's editorial independence. That independence brings with it a responsibility to audiences. Under the agreement, the BBC will be required to produce a statement of pledges for its audiences. That will play a part in improving accountability. It reflects the principles of the citizens charter.

The outline before the House is a first indication of what it will contain. I want that statement to be developed to contain specific detailed promises. The BBC can be held accountable to the public at all levels—local, regional and national. That work is in hand.

[Mrs. Bottomley]

Central to the future of the BBC is the role of the board of governors. It will be for the governors to deliver the BBC that we all want. They are a strong team, with the expertise to oversee the BBC's public service and commercial activities. Under the chairmanship of the new chairman, Sir Christopher Bland, we look to them to promote high standards, to enhance the BBC's reputation, to build on its traditions, and to oversee its strategy for success in the future.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The Secretary of State mentioned the new chairman-designate, Sir Christopher Bland. What sort of confidence can the Opposition have in the independence of Sir Christopher Bland as the chairman of the board of governors, as he is an ex-Tory councillor and has been an active member of the Conservative party? Where is the impartiality there? Is she not replacing one Tory millionaire with another?

Mrs. Bottomley: The new chairman of the BBC has been strongly commended by individuals such as Greg Dyke, Melvyn Bragg and many others, who I was under the impression were thought to be supporters of the Labour rather than the Conservative party.

The role of the BBC chairman is vital, and the greatest possible care was taken to find an individual who had the skill and expertise to lead the BBC forward into the next century. Above all, the governors are the trustees of the public interest. Their duties are clear in the new charter and agreement. They set the overall framework for the corporation, approve strategy, objectives and promises for its services and monitor the extent to which they are being met. They ensure that those who work for the corporation comply with the BBC's obligations. The governors are accountable to the public, and the BBC's management are accountable to them.

The House will be aware that the new chairman, Sir Christopher Bland, has experience both as a regulator and programme producer. He recognises the distinct role of the BBC chairman and governors, at the centre of the relationship between the BBC and the public. To discharge that role effectively, the governors need to draw on informed and specialist advice. The national broadcasting councils are the key to that in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

We have considerably strengthened and clarified the role of the national councils. They are to be responsible for assessing public opinion, developing the corporation's objectives in conjunction with the governors, and advising on the allocation of resources and on the contribution that programme makers throughout the United Kingdom could make to the BBC's programme output. That last duty is particularly important.

From the contributions that have already been made to the debate, hon. Members will be aware that it is our concern that the BBC is not a London, but a British, broadcasting corporation. We said in the White Paper that the BBC should continue to be a major provider of programmes, making and commissioning a reasonable proportion and range of its national output, as well as programmes for local audiences, in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English regions.

The annual report should record progress against production targets in each area. We have included those as requirements in the new agreement. That will ensure that the economic and cultural benefits of the BBC's activities will be shared throughout the United Kingdom.

The English regions also need a direct voice, as I made clear to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson). The charter provides for the continuation of the BBC's regional advisory councils. That is underpinned by a new requirement for public consultation in advance of any material changes for home services. Services meeting the public interest should not be changed without reference to the public. While we have increased the governors' discretion about how they obtain regular advice, we fully recognise the essential contribution made by the BBC's advisory bodies.

Only this week, I met members of the English National Forum. It brings together the chairmen of all the 10 regional advisory councils. Marmaduke Hussey has told me of the tremendous start that has been made in bringing together the voices of the English regions. He has given the strongest public assurance of the governors' support for the forum and its work. Excellent work by the local radio advisory committees represents the views of listeners and viewers at grass roots. I look forward to hearing more about their work directly when I meet them individually later in the year. The chairman and the governors must continue to listen to local voices. The structure of the advisory bodies currently in place is invaluable in providing that input.

Direct accountability to the listening and viewing public will be underpinned by the new "Statement of Pledges". The full statement will detail what the BBC is promising to deliver. The pledges will be a contract between it and its audiences. The House will already be aware of a preliminary version, but the BBC will wish to make headway on those pledges in the light of debate in another place and, indeed, the comments made today.

I know from my postbag the sort of promises that people want—targets on subtitling for deaf viewers, commitments to Gaelic broadcasting for the community in Scotland, pledges on funding for the arts and new music. In developing the statement, the BBC will be taking into account those views and those of Parliament and its advisory bodies.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): The Secretary of State will have received numerous representations praising the good work of the BBC in promoting Gaelic broadcasting in recent years. Does she agree with those representations? It is important for that work to be preserved in the pledges for the future.

Mrs. Bottomley: I hope that I made it clear that the tradition of the BBC to promote diversity throughout the country is extremely important. I hope that it will be possible to develop precisely the concerns that the hon. Gentleman mentioned in the "Statement of Pledges".

As I made clear, it is vital that there is increased accountability to audiences and, as a citizens charter for the BBC as it were, the "Statement of Pledges" will play an important role.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I tabled the amendments on impartiality to the Broadcasting Bill in 1990—they are

included in section 6 of that 1990 Act—and I notice that a new requirement is being imposed on the BBC with respect to enhanced impartiality and a new mechanism. There is also reference to rules to be laid down in a code. My right hon. Friend referred to the fact that there should be accountability. How would that code be enforced? Is Parliament going to have an opportunity to see it in draft before it is brought into effect, bearing in mind the extreme importance of impartiality, which is what the consumer, listener and viewer are often primarily concerned about?

Mrs. Bottomley: As my hon. Friend will discover, I hope to say a little more on impartiality later. We make it an explicit requirement that the governors ensure that the elements are properly enforced. My hon. Friend might want to discuss that matter in more detail when the Broadcasting Bill reaches this place.

We have emphasised the BBC's independence. We have established its direct accountability to its audiences for its programming, but we have not lost sight of the need to reinforce high standards. That is an issue on which the House and I feel strongly. Some argue that violence and sex constitute only a small proportion of television output, but they have a disproportionately powerful effect on impressionable minds. We cannot become complacent on these issues. I discussed that with the chairmen of the BBC and the ITC, and they take it seriously.

To ensure that standards are maintained, we have brought into the heart of the corporation's charter and agreement its responsibilities for taste and decency. The BBC is under obligations equivalent to those on other broadcasters under the terms of the 1990 Act. Our proposals in the Broadcasting Bill for a new broadcasting standards commission will further underpin the work of the BBC governors and of the commercial regulators in maintaining standards of taste, decency and fairness.

One of the fundamental standards that we require of all broadcasters is impartiality, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) referred. As he rightly said, he made an important contribution in the 1990 Act. The BBC is a highly respected and trusted source of news and information. It has a special obligation to the public not to abuse that trust. We have introduced additional requirements that the governors establish an impartiality code giving programme makers clear guidance on the standards expected of them. The governors must ensure that the corporation, its employees and all programme makers engaged by them comply with the codes or guidelines covering programme standards. That is a clear legal requirement on the governors and corporation under the new charter.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): While I greatly welcome what my right hon. Friend has just said, does she recognise—I am sure that she does—that the viewing public's main concern is that the standards being laid down should have teeth? Irresponsible journalists who carry out biased journalism—sadly, that happens in all branches of the media, including, occasionally, the BBC—should be able to be disciplined and held publicly to account.

Mrs. Bottomley: I strongly endorse my hon. Friend's comments. He will have seen a copy of the producers' guidelines, and I refer him to the section on impartiality. There is a copy of the document in the Library of the House. The director general has made it quite clear that those seeking employment in the BBC should explicitly recognise those producers' guidelines, whether they are directly employed or independent producers. A number of other mechanisms have reinforced the seriousness with which the matter is regarded.

Mr. Cash: Now that my right hon. Friend has reached this part of her speech, will she be kind enough to give an assurance that the code—on which the issue of impartiality will ultimately turn—will be presented to the House in draft form, so that we can have the opportunity to consider it? The nuts and bolts will be sorted out in the code.

Mrs. Bottomley: I am not able to give my hon. Friend that assurance, although I can discuss with the governors of the BBC what further steps they will take to ensure that there is absolute confidence in the code that they introduce.

The BBC is highly regarded around the world for its standards and expertise. The standard of its programmes and its independence from political control are very much the foundation of its domestic and international reputation. The reputation of the BBC name provides a great opportunity for the BBC and its independent producers to export programmes and take up other commercial opportunities.

The new charter and agreement implement our policy that the BBC should be able to develop its commercial services. They provide a proper framework. We expect the BBC to re-invest a large proportion of the profit that it makes in UK productions and public service activities to the benefit of the licence fee payers.

The BBC sets the pace. My hon. Friends will be aware of the success of the recent series, "Pride and Prejudice"—10 million viewers watched that programme at home. That has led to the opportunity to sell the programme to 14 different countries, earning £2.5 million. The oscar-winning Wallace and Gromit earned video sales of 500,000 for their first two films, and "Wallace and Gromit's Grand Day Out" was sold to 30 countries. The commercial arm, BBC Worldwide, has licensed Wallace and Gromit merchandising through 35 deals. The pair, via BBC Worldwide, are earning millions, which can be reinvested for the benefit of BBC public services. We want to see more of those successes for the BBC—this is only the beginning.

My right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South called his White Paper "The Future of the BBC: Serving the nation, Competing world-wide" and we do indeed wish to see the BBC competing worldwide. In allowing this development, we are determined to ensure that the BBC's commercial activities are separate, and seen to be separate, from licence fee-funded services. The agreement requires the governors to put in place distinct and transparent accounting, and to ensure that the BBC trades fairly, without cross-subsidy from the licence fee. The Broadcasting Bill, which is not yet in this House, will make the corporation's commercial services subject to licence and regulation by the Independent Television Commission and the Radio Authority.

We have agreed with the BBC that it should focus on those activities that have to be retained in-house, for reasons of cost or to ensure continuing high quality. The

[Mrs. Bottomley]

BBC's transmission facilities are not essential to its public service obligations. We have agreed that, subject to appropriate safeguards, the BBC's transmission services should be allowed to develop in the private sector.

By introducing the new charter and agreement, we have made clear our commitment to the BBC as a public service broadcaster. Privatisation of transmission will bring clear benefits to the licence fee payer by bringing downward pressure on transmission costs and by allowing more resources to be invested in the high quality services for which the BBC is known. The independent broadcasting transmission service was privatised in 1991.

The House will be aware that National Transcommunications Ltd.—NTL—the privatised company, now competes successfully for transmission and telecommunications contracts worldwide. The BBC's transmission staff have built a superb service. It is now time to set it free from public sector constraints to enable it, too, to play a full part in the commercial developments that lie ahead.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Notwithstanding the fact that NTL is a world-beater, particularly in terms of research and development and compression techniques with digital transmission, will my right hon. Friend confirm that the sale of transmission facilities from the BBC will not be open to purchase by NTL? If they were, my right hon. Friend would simply be creating another monopoly.

Mrs. Bottomley: Such matters are subject to normal competition law, and would be open to consideration by the competition authorities.

The charter and agreement set out the future of the BBC. I hope that I have made it clear that the Government's view is that the BBC is highly regarded for its quality, fairness, accuracy and artistic excellence. It is a respected institution here and around the world—that was evident from the responses to our consultation paper. It is not a perfect institution, and some hon. Members will have examples where they consider it to have fallen short of its own high standards. The new charter and agreement set out a clearer framework of accountability to ensure that the standards aimed for remain high. The board of governors is responsible for ensuring that those standards are met.

The BBC's prime function is to serve the nation. At the same time, we are setting the framework within which the BBC can compete worldwide. I expect it to compete vigorously but fairly, and to minimise the call on licence fee funding, while maximising its contribution to the United Kingdom's economy and extending the reach of British culture. The new agreement—with the draft charter—provides the right framework for the BBC's continuance and its development over the next decade. I commend it to the House.

6.6 pm

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): First, may I apologise on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), who has had to return home and is therefore unable to open the debate on behalf of the Opposition? I also apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for not informing you of that fact before you entered the Chamber.

I welcome this opportunity to debate the draft charter and agreement for the BBC, which plays a unique role in our national life and is rightly recognised and praised around the world for the standards that it sets in public service broadcasting. It is right that the House should have the opportunity to debate the service that the BBC provides to us all.

The charter is designed to take the BBC forward, through the turn of the century, to 2006. The broadcasting sector is changing rapidly, so we can expect to see a different broadcasting landscape by the time the charter is considered for renewal once again. We must therefore ensure that we know what we are doing and that we get it right. If we set the wrong framework for the BBC, it will suffer in the years ahead and broadcasting in the United Kingdom will be the poorer for it.

As the Secretary of State said, the Government's proposals were contained in the White Paper published in 1994 and debated in the House a year ago. The drafts of the charter and of the agreement have been laid before us. The charter is to be noted and the agreement is to be approved. The problem is that we can neither add to them nor subtract from them—only approve or reject the whole.

The charter has already been debated in another place. Prior to the debate, peers had an opportunity to question the Minister in that House informally on the contents both of the charter and of the agreement. I know that many of them found that most useful, and it puzzles me that hon. Members here were not offered the same opportunity.

We have been approached by a number of organisations, such as Broadcasting for Scotland, that have made sensible, positive suggestions for minor amendments to the charter and agreement. Sadly, as Marmaduke Hussey, the chairman of the board of governors of the BBC, made clear in his letter of 24 January to the national councils:

> "The Government, however, has indicated firmly that it does not wish to amend the documents. In the face of this, the Governors themselves wish to provide assurances about the way business will be conducted."

It would have been a little more respectful of the views and wishes of the House if the Government had not made their intentions quite so blatantly obvious before deciding to debate the issue. It makes me wonder why we are all standing around debating it. Perhaps the Minister of State will refer to that point in his reply.

Although the Opposition have no intention of voting against either document tonight, we want to register our dissatisfaction with the fact that they are unamendable and that we cannot make any adjustment or fine tuning. We do not believe that this is the proper way for the House to consider such an important national institution as the BBC.

We must also consider the charter and agreement in the context of the Broadcasting Bill that is before another place. Changes in the broadcasting landscape proposed in that Bill, while largely welcome, will alter significantly the outlook for the BBC. Although it is likely that the BBC will remain the broadcaster with the widest reach, it will be in a much wider field with many more competitors.

It is regrettable that we could not first determine the new structure of the broadcasting world and then produce a charter to promote the BBC within it, rather than consider the charter before the Bill.

Labour Members welcome the more explicit statement of the BBC's public service objectives that is to be found in the charter. Those objectives stand beside new freedoms to provide commercially orientated services and are essential at a time of widespread anxiety about broadcasting standards and scope in years to come.

The BBC must be able to expand its output in the digital age and provide a diverse range of services on its multiplex, but we must ensure that the formal public service requirements set down in the agreement are adhered to. The new chairman has already mentioned a subscription sport service on a BBC digital channel. That may be attractive, but it must not be developed at the cost of the exclusion or withdrawal of sport from the free-to-air service.

The Government, too, must reflect on the issue. As they learnt to their embarrassment in the other place last week, public service obligations arouse great strength of feeling in many quarters.

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Gentleman will realise that I am among those who have expressed strong views on the issue. He will also recognise that the Government have always had an open mind on the matter and, as their consultation paper makes clear, they are prepared to listen to representations. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the thorough way in which he has entertained representations from hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Dr. Moonie: I would feel more confident if the Government had not voted against the proposal in the other place last week. Although I fully accept the good faith in which the Government entered into their proposals for consultation, perhaps there was some procrastination on their part in not wishing to be seen to make a decision too quickly. I fully accept that there may be faults with the amendment that was carried in another place last week and that the measure may require further amendment and certainly much greater discussion when we debate it, but there has been a clear expression of opinion and I am glad to say that the Government have suggested that they are prepared to accept the will of the other place.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Will my hon. Friend acknowledge that, if the Government have an open mind on the issue, they discovered it very recently? In June 1994, they rejected out of hand the Select Committee's proposal for listed events to be protected and, as recently as December 1995, Ministers repeatedly wrote to me and others saying that it was purely a matter for market forces and that it would be quite wrong for anyone to intervene.

Dr. Moonie: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Nothing concentrates the Government's mind more quickly than a large number of what they thought were their hon. Friends turning out to be quite the opposite. Had our roles been reversed and the Bill had been considered here first, I suspect that the result would have been exactly the same.

The programme content requirements set out in the agreement are as important as the public service requirements. The requirements to inform, educate and entertain; to stimulate support and reflect the cultural diversity of the United Kingdom; to provide authoritative and impartial news and much more make the BBC unique in its breadth of coverage.

There are still concerns that, in some respects, the requirements are less onerous than those placed on other broadcasters. There is a long-running war of words between the BBC and the Broadcasting Entertainment Cinema and Theatre Union about educational broadcasting. Most recently, BECTU stated:

> "Neither the Agreement nor the Charter provide any requirement that the 'education' objective of the BBC should be maintained at any minimum standard. Whereas the ITV and Channel 4 television companies are monitored by the ITC, there is no adequate monitoring system to ensure that the BBC's Home Services' education output is adequately monitored, evaluated and fulfils proper education objectives.".

That is a reasonable point and the Government should consider it seriously before they finalise the charter. It seems odd that Channel 4 has a minimum number of hours for schools programmes but that there is still no such requirement on the BBC.

To provide the diversity of viewing to which I have referred, the BBC must be able to develop its commercial activities freely. This is not an argument for the revenue from the licence fee to be reduced. The BBC accepts—and the Opposition agree—that, to expand and remain competitive in the broadcasting marketplace, it must generate its own income in addition to that from the licence fee.

It is right that the charter and agreement contain safeguards to provide public subsidy of private ventures, but the Government must not be over-restrictive—as they are with the Post Office at present—just to make a point about private ventures by public sector organisations. I understand that the Government are to review the BBC's capital structure and borrowing arrangements. Will the Secretary of State or the Minister clarify why that was not completed before the new charter was published?

The Labour party has long believed that the role of the governors of the BBC needs to be clarified. The charter is the first to recognise the existence of the director general, his deputy and the board of management. I cannot help thinking that the delineation of responsibility could be clearer.

The governors, by definition, are the "corporation" whose functions have been set out in article 7 of the draft charter, but some matters—such as industrial relations, which appear in article 15 of the charter—that are the clear responsibility of the board of management are still referred to as matters for the corporation. There should be a clearer divide, or I fear that many people will question whether the governors are sufficiently detached from the management of the corporation to play a proper regulatory and supervisory role.

The position of the chairman is particularly important. The recent appointment of Sir Christopher Bland raises a number of questions about independence and accountability. Sir Christopher has a great deal of experience in broadcasting, which I am sure will be of great value to the corporation, and we intend to watch his progress with interest, but it is easy to lose confidence in the Government's good intentions when consultation over the appointment, as requested by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, is refused. The appointment is

[Dr. Moonie]

made by the Queen in Council. It is of great national significance and it must be seen to be made in a scrupulously independent manner. I believe that the Government have failed yet another test of openness and accountability in respect of that appointment.

The BBC's accountability to its audience relies, in part, on its advisory structures—which have been referred to by the Secretary of State and by way of intervention. Those bodies should also be a source of advice and encouragement to programme makers. A number of concerns have been raised about the proposed new structures. In the present charter, the councils in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland control policy for the BBC in those parts of the United Kingdom. In the new charter, their role has been reduced to advising and assisting the governors in that task. I know that many of my colleagues do not welcome that downgrading.

The merger of the English regional advisory councils and the local radio councils has also caused concern, particularly among those with a keen interest in local radio. The BBC must recognise in its new structure that the interests of radio should not be subsumed in those of television.

Mr. Fabricant: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the performance of the local radio advisory councils has been very patchy? While one or two radio stations believe that they have benefited from their input, other stations feel that the LRACs are an unwelcome intrusion. The vast majority of listeners are not even aware that they exist.

Dr. Moonie: I suspect that that is the case with many bodies that the Government appoint to represent our interests. I accept that there are great differences in radio councils' performance levels, but the fact that democratic accountability sometimes fails to meet the very high standards of some hon. Members does not mean that it should not occur. The hon. Gentleman should have regard to that fact: it is a good in its own right.

The BBC must acknowledge the very local interests of many small radio stations. We propose that there should be a council of the English regions matching the national broadcasting councils. Until now, the BBC has had an English regional forum. We agree with the point made by the Voice of the Listener and Viewer organisation that the new draft charter

> "does not specify how many Regions or Advisory Councils there should be, nor does it refer to any form of English Regional Forum, or to any constitutional link with the Board of Governors. Should, therefore, the BBC decide to reduce the number of English Regional Councils or to abolish the English Forum it could do so tomorrow".

If that requirement is not inserted in the charter, we shall seek the BBC's assurance that it will maintain such a body.

The BBC has a range of other advisory bodies—for example, on science and religious broadcasting—and the General Advisory Council. While I do not believe that we should lay down every aspect of the BBC's operations in the charter and agreement, we would welcome an early statement by the BBC as to what advisory structures it will continue to operate.

The BBC has a new requirement under the agreement to undertake public consultation about changes that it makes to programme services. Consultation implies that there is some willingness to accept the views of members of the public. I trust that the BBC now knows, to its cost, how much strength of feeling programming changes can arouse. For example, there is still great unease about "Test Match Special" replacing Radio 4 broadcasts on long wave. FM reception in my area is not very good and I can no longer receive Radio 4. The "Anderson Country" experience must also have proved a salutary lesson.

Mr. Hawkins: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that surveys have shown that the Radio 4 audience increases substantially when the cricket is broadcast on the normal transmission channel? For many millions of people, England's performance in the cricket World cup—which we hope will improve in future—is vital. That programme certainly offers more objective coverage than the "Today" programme.

Dr. Moonie: I also hope that England's performances in the World cup improve—they could scarcely be any worse than the performances over the winter.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): Spoken like a true Scot.

Dr. Moonie: A true Scot who has played cricket for most of his adult life and who still takes an avid interest in the game. However, I find it difficult to find the broadcasts on long wave.

The hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) has missed the point. Radio does not aim simply to attract the largest audience; it aims also to cater for specialist interests. I assure him that the BBC was inundated with complaints from regular listeners to Radio 4 about the changes to its programming. I believe that the views of those who have been loyal listeners for many years should be taken into account when programming decisions are made.

The BBC's accountability to the public and to Parliament depends also on the free flow of information. The introduction of a range of performance objectives to be included in the annual report is a useful step, but we must not risk allowing quantitative measures to overtake qualitative judgments. On occasion, the Government have woefully ignored issues of quality in broadcasting. As evidenced by the current Broadcasting Bill, the Government have not yet learnt from their mistakes. We must not allow that situation to prevail with the BBC.

As I said earlier, we are concerned about many aspects of the Broadcasting Bill, which is inextricably linked to the documents before us. Of particular concern is the proposed sale of the BBC's transmitter network—which has already been mentioned. We will make our feelings about that fully known when we debate the Bill in this place, but I believe that it is worth raising some general issues now as we debate the documents that are paving the way for the sale.

Nowhere in the documents or in the Bill is it stated explicitly that the BBC will be the sole beneficiary of the proceeds of the sale. We have received private reassurances that it will, but we would feel much happier about the Government's good intentions if that were made clear either through a statement or in legislation. We are seeking an assurance that the BBC will retain the money to pay for the development of new services. We are also

concerned that this is possibly the first privatisation measure that does not refer to the employees of the body to be privatised.

In addition, the agreement refers to directions to the BBC to dispose of stations, while the charter's definition of "station" is so broad that many parts of the BBC could be sold at the whim of the Secretary of State. The BBC may be taking a fairly relaxed view of the privatisation proposal, but there are many more questions to be asked and answers to be given about that issue.

I want now to mention radio broadcasting in Scotland—I am sure that hon. Members will forgive me if I make one or two important parochial points. I am sure that hon. Members will have received the communication from Broadcasting for Scotland, which sets out a number of its concerns in detail. It mentions in particular the fact that

"The Governors have also gained the power to select the members of the National Broadcasting Council giving them the opportunity over time to pack the Councils with the timid and the faithful. Selections were previously made by panels formed by the BBC General Advisory Council, now itself abolished, in each country and acting independently of the Governors".

It goes on to suggest the following:

"complete not partially independent selection panels maintained in each country

council right to initiate a strategy and objectives for their country

a council duty to inform audiences in their country of relevant BBC policy effects".

The document refers also to Gaelic broadcasting. That matter was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), who appears to have left the Chamber—I did not say that.

Labour Members are concerned about the lack of status accorded to Gaelic broadcasting compared with the situation in Wales. We believe that, while the BBC is sympathetic to moving towards a national Gaelic radio service, that should be specifically recognised by a commitment in the charter. I am sure that some of my hon. Friends will wish to return to that issue.

Today, I was sent a long and comprehensive document by Wilf Stevenson of the British Film Institute about the archiving of BBC material. I quote the document in the hope that the Minister of State will be able to refer to it in his reply. I am very happy to let the Minister read it if he has not already done so. It states:

"We believe that it is important that the Charter's archival obligations on the Corporation be not only retained but strengthened, in order to ensure that the preservation and accessibility of the nation's broadcasting heritage is secured."

The following points are suggested for improving the situation:

"(a) that the archiving obligations placed on the BBC should be no less onerous than those which apply in statute and licence to the ITV Companies and to Channel Four;

(b) that the Charter should specify that the BBC has an obligation to maintain archives to the commonly accepted standards, and that it can either do this itself or make arrangements to fund the National Television Archive;

(c) that if it is decided to maintain an internal Television Archive, there should be a formal requirement to co-operate with the relevant national bodies, such as the BFI in respect of television and related materials; and

(d) that the BBC should not dispose of any of the contents of its libraries and archives without first freely offering such material for preservation in the appropriate national, regional or national regional collection."

Those are fair points and I hope that the Minister will refer to them when he is winding up.

It has been argued that, at a time of dramatic change in broadcasting, it would have been better to guarantee the licence for the full 10 years of the charter period. The Opposition have much sympathy for that point of view and we can see the logic of the argument, but I can also see the logic of reviewing the licence fee after five years. A decision has to be made to do one or the other. The licence fee is already the subject of widespread public debate due partly, no doubt, to the recent imprisonment case in "Coronation Street".

If the licence fee is to be changed in any way, it must be after a major public consultation in which all the options are explored and which is, if possible, free from the type of debate that can sometimes characterise more general taxation matters. In the past 17 years, the Conservative party has not been a friend to the BBC. Many Conservative Members have attacked and threatened it and expressed the desire that it be sold off. I believe that the BBC has won many of the arguments about its future and the Opposition have consistently supported it. The Government have drawn back and given the BBC a partial vote of confidence.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Was not the hon. Gentleman in the House on a day in the spring of 1994 when my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), then the Secretary of State for National Heritage, announced that it was Government policy to have a new charter? My right hon. Friend said some very positive things about the BBC, which echoed the view of the Select Committee on National Heritage, of which I am proud to be a member.

Dr. Moonie: One swallow, however, does not make a summer.

Mr. Jessel: It was nearly summer.

Dr. Moonie: Absolutely, I must have been away playing cricket at the time.

I do not wish to suggest that nobody on the Conservative Benches has the future of the BBC at heart, or to suggest that Secretaries of State do not do their best to discharge their obligations. I referred to some of the comments that I have heard made over the years by Conservative Members, which certainly do not lead me to believe that the BBC would be safe in their hands in the long term. Fortunately, of course, that is not likely to happen.

The Labour party will continue to give its support to the BBC and to the work that it does at home and abroad. With the reservations that we have expressed tonight, we offer our support for the charter and agreement before the House.

6.34 pm

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in the debate, because I was employed in broadcasting by both the BBC and ITV for many years before I came to the House. We have heard quite a bit about Scotland and it is high time that Wales was mentioned. Before I come to that subject, I shall refer to the situation generally.

[Sir Wyn Roberts]

The BBC's charter renewal for a further 10 years comes at a time of enormous change in the broadcasting world. Not only do we have the development of cable, satellite and wire services—all of which will offer a wider variety of services to the home than have been available through the traditional house or set-top aerials—but we are approaching the period of digitisation of the analogue channels. That will open up the possibility of an amazingly wide spectrum of choice for viewers and listeners. There will be so much choice that the recipients will probably be very grateful for some guidance on the plethora of programmes and services available. I understand that the BBC is already considering providing that guidance. The Broadcasting Bill, which is currently in the other place, deals with the problems of digital services, but those matters cannot be far from our minds as we discuss the new charter because the shape of future services is likely to be moulded during the decade ahead.

In passing, I shall pay tribute to the work that the BBC has done on digital services. It has established the first digital audio broadcasting service and the sound quality is superior. The BBC has also shown that it can translate its existing analogue services to digital wide-screen receivers, but it has expressed the opinion to the Government that

"analogue terrestrial transmission is still likely to be the only distribution system offering universal coverage of all homes for at least the next ten years."

The increasing multiplicity of services becoming available and the increasing competition for viewers, listeners and resources of all kinds is the cyclorama against which the BBC charter is being renewed. That it should be renewed is not a major issue. The days when some thought that the BBC had a too dominant and too pervasive position in British broadcasting and was insufficiently challenged are going, if not gone. Our major current concern is to conserve the best of the BBC and to ensure that it is in a sufficiently strong position to continue to provide the public services of the very highest standard that we have come to expect.

We are all fully aware of the important role that the BBC has in portraying Britain to the world and there is a new emphasis on that aspect in the charter and in the ancillary agreement.

In its worldwide operations, the BBC faces powerful competition backed by truly vast resources, and there is a very real fear that the BBC, in meeting that competition, will somehow be diverted and may reduce its efforts at home. That is why in the briefing for this debate—I am sure that we have all had a copy—there is a representation from the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union which highlights the BBC's proposals to reduce television programming for schools by 20 per cent. and radio broadcasts to primary and secondary schools by 37 per cent. However, that is simply evidence of the concern about the Home Services, and that concern is also expressed by the National Consumer Council. It would like the governors to have

"a clear and independent regulatory role, quite separate from the BBC's Board of Management."

I am sure that the fear that the Home Services will be sacrificed by the BBC lies behind the worried comments that have reached us, especially from the national regions of Wales and Scotland—which have expressed grave doubts about the new description of the role of their national councils.

I want to stress how important are regional services to the people of the regions, and those provided by the BBC have a new premium attached because of the takeover threat posed to ITV regional companies by their larger brethren. In the regions, the public are not reassured by promises made by distant predators that they will maintain local programme output. They may observe the letter of their promises but the programmes will not be locally inspired.

Mr. Fabricant: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there was considerable fear in Staffordshire—in particular, in Lichfield—when it was announced that London Weekend Television would be acquiring Central Television? However, as there are in effect two independent licences with the Independent Television Commission, Central's coverage of local news and current affairs has not decreased but has been enhanced by that larger amalgamation.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am glad to hear of that enhancement, but it cannot be guaranteed that such a thing will happen every time. There is considerable fear in some regions that although promises will be respected to the letter, nevertheless the regional character of programmes will be lost. The BBC and the Government have tried to combat that foreboding by writing into their agreement that the two television services that the BBC undertakes to provide may—as the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) emphasised—include regional variations. To the House, the word "may" means that that undertaking is discretionary. Hon. Members who represent the regions would much prefer the word "shall" in that context.

We cannot believe that the Department of National Heritage did not mean to confer discretion. If it were otherwise, I know that my right hon. and hon. Friends would not have used the word "may". As the agreement is surely amendable, I hope that the word "shall" can be used instead. The use of "may" is sending out all the wrong signals to the public.

The BBC has committed itself to doubling the amount of drama made in Scotland, in Wales and in Northern Ireland by 1997-98, and to doubling music and arts productions in the regions within four years. That is all very fine and welcome, but it is not tantamount to providing regional services. Neither is the requirement in paragraph 3(2)*(h)* that Home Services

"contain a reasonable proportion and range of programmes for national audiences made in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and in the English regions outside London and the South East."

That is merely a commitment to more network productions from the regions. Although such productions are welcome, they could be made anywhere and need not reflect the region's character.

It must be obvious to the House that I distrust the metropolitan outlook and the domination that it spells, the coterie that shares it and the dominance that it has over our press and media. Life in the United Kingdom is the poorer because of it.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The distinction is made between shall and may because the measure will also

cover BBC2, and it is unlikely that it will be involved. As to BBC1, in effect the meaning is "shall", but "may" appears in the documentation because it covers a range of channels. I hope that that thoroughly reassures my right hon. Friend.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that assurance. I accept her explanation and commentary implicitly. It may be that members of Labour's Front-Bench team will not do so, but I trust my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Maxton: In the matter of the word "may", the right hon. Gentleman has to trust not the Secretary of State but the future governor of the BBC. He may not find that easy to do.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I find it easier to trust my right hon. Friend because I read in one of the BBC's commentaries that it interprets the word "may" as "shall". Nevertheless, we have an assurance from my right hon. Friend as to the meaning of the word. As she gave it on the Floor of the House, I am sure that others will respect her interpretation.

I was being critical of the metropolitan domination, which means that nothing that happens beyond Watford can possibly be of any consequence. That is a cardinal tenet of the pseudo-intellectual caucus that adheres tenaciously to the metropolitan view. No wonder the provinces feel deeply slighted. The BBC may lose out from the dilution of its regional identity. I hope that it does not allow that to happen. The regions are the nursery for future broadcasters and programme ideas.

That is the context in which the national broadcasting councils appointed by the governors of the BBC are to advise those governors on the attainment of objectives in their countries and on any significant change in the corporation's resources in a country, by making representations to the corporation. The councils' role does not seem significant. They will not have the power to control programme policy and content, as they do now. At the moment, in Wales, that function must be performed

"taking into account the culture, language, interests and tastes of the people of Wales."

It is a pity that those words are to disappear, because they are meaningful in the Welsh context. I hope that that obligation, and the spelling out of it in those terms, can be retained in the subsidiary documents.

The charter's dominant theme is centralist, which is understandable when one takes into account the challenges facing the BBC. However, those challenges are diffuse and hydra-headed in their profusion—and they are likely to become more so as digital services come on stream. Just as the main networks in the United States have been undermined to some extent by local, thematic and special interest services, the same thrust to achieve viewership in particular spheres may develop in the UK. I warn the BBC to be on its guard against any abandonment of its regional interests and audiences.

As one would expect, the BBC will have the power to run subscription, pay-per-view and other commercial channels. I hope that the Government will not shy away from granting similar powers to the Welsh S4C authority, subject to similar accounting safeguards, so that S4C may supplement its Welsh language programmes with English programmes—bought, produced or commissioned—to replace programmes lost from Channel 4 when it is separately available in Wales after digitisation. There is already the BBC example, where in special circumstances a similar statutory body is allowed to produce programmes commercially and to transmit them. That privilege should be granted to S4C.

6.50 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): I am obliged to the Secretary of State for National Heritage for her tribute to the work of the Select Committee on National Heritage. The two bases of the documents that we are discussing—the new 10-year charter starting this year and that the BBC be funded in that period by the licence—were first recommended by the Select Committee in its report, published on 9 December 1993. As the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) said, since then, the whole television landscape has changed. The Select Committee warned that it would in its report, and its recommendations were made in the context of that anticipated change. I have consistently repeated that warning.

There are now—and there were not when the Select Committee reported—not four, but 39 television channels available in this country. Terrestrial Channel 5 is due to start on 1 January next year and eight new Granada satellite channels are due to come into operation in October this year. So soon we shall have 48 channels, and there are many more to come—this is just the beginning. Digital compression, referred to by the right hon. Gentleman, on-demand services and interactive services have not begun yet, but they will become increasingly dominant in the television scene.

Already the BBC's share of the television audience has fallen to 43 per cent. Cable and satellite now account for 10 per cent. of viewers. The country's streets are being dug up by cable companies. Satellite is expanding the whole time. There is no doubt that the audience for terrestrial television will fall and that the audience for the newer technologies will rise. Even Mr. Birt, Director-General of the BBC, has claimed that the BBC will have no more than 30 per cent. of the television audience by the end of this century, which may be an optimistic claim.

The new television scene is demonstrated by the fact that all attention in television competition is now focused on the rivalry not of the BBC with ITV, as was the case until recently, but of all terrestrial television—Channels 1 to 4—with satellite and cable. My hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) referred to last week's House of Lords vote on listed events. The controversy over such events and the discussion about the supply of news to Channels 3 and 4—whether it shall continue to be provided universally by ITN or whether BSkyB shall have an opportunity to make some, if not all, provision—demonstrate that the shadow of the newer technologies looms over the increasingly antiquated technology of terrestrial television.

After all, what recourse will terrestrial television have if, with reference to the argument about sporting events, satellite or cable television companies, with their large sums of money—cable companies are backed by immensely rich transatlantic conglomerates—decide to emulate Ted Turner in the United States of America, and

[Mr. Gerald Kaufman]

buy a Premier League football club or a major rugger club and obtain exclusive rights to the televising of their games?

In that new environment, with choice proliferating and with the BBC audience share becoming ever smaller, as we discuss these documents, we must ask ourselves what claim the BBC has for the special consideration provided by this agreement, especially in relation to licence funding. The BBC is in no doubt. Its bosses claim that they are the custodians of public service broadcasting and that that is why the BBC is special.

There is no doubt that the BBC invented the concept of public service broadcasting. It was emulated by ITV and by reputable broadcasting organisations throughout the world. The concept of public service radio and television is a priceless legacy created by the BBC's founders and the people who were then in charge of the BBC over several decades. The question is whether the present-day BBC is worthy of the public service legacy that it created. I doubt it more day by day.

Although the BBC arrogates to itself the benefits of the public service broadcasting legacy, especially total access to licence funding, I fear that there is accumulating evidence that that legacy, which is precious in terms of standards, is being wantonly frittered away and that, more and more, the BBC is becoming just another broadcasting organisation, jeopardising quality standards in the quest of the fool's gold of audience ratings.

Let us consider some examples—for instance, the "Panorama" interview with the Princess of Wales. I am not among the people who criticise the BBC for obtaining and transmitting that interview—it was a legitimate broadcasting initiative. That interview, however, had nothing to do with public service broadcasting and had everything to do with seeking and obtaining an opportunistic scoop. It could just as appropriately have been broadcast on ITV or on the Sky One, Sky News or UK Living satellite channels.

That interview could just as appropriately have been printed in any of this country's tabloid newspapers, which would have loved to be able to print it exclusively. Tabloid journalism has never claimed to operate on public service criteria. It meets what it regards as popular demand. That is not what the BBC should be about.

Let us consider the transmission on Saturday evenings of the lottery results. That transmission could appropriately appear on any other television channel, terrestrial or otherwise. It would more appropriately appear on one of those channels because it is a huge commercial for Camelot—it provides millions of pounds' worth of free publicity for a commercial organisation.

Mr. Maxton: Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is true of the BBC—that it is not only a public service broadcaster, but a broadcaster of entertainment? "EastEnders" could equally be shown on ITV or on Sky. So what? What point is my right hon. Friend is trying to make?

Mr. Kaufman: I am trying to make the point that entertainment of a high standard is also public service broadcasting. My hon. Friend's implication that only the solemn and boring programmes are public service broadcasting is inaccurate—high-quality, popular entertainment reaching large audiences is equally public service broadcasting, and "EastEnders" is a good example. Providing popular entertainment, watched by millions, is different from departing from the concept of public service broadcasting.

The BBC is becoming a vehicle for massive exploitation by commercial organisations. For example, it is providing free publicity to companies that sponsor sport. The Select Committee on National Heritage examined those issues and it made recommendations, which the Government unwisely rejected and about which they will have to think again. The Committee was told by corporate sponsors that they would prefer the events that they sponsor to be transmitted by the BBC because the audience—and, therefore, the free publicity that they obtain—was, for the time being, much greater than that provided by the BBC's non-terrestrial rivals.

There is no doubt that the recent deal that will enable the BBC to televise future series of Olympic games has nothing to do with public service broadcasting, but everything to do with the wish of the International Olympic Committee—an increasingly tawdry commercial body—to obtain the largest possible audience for its many sponsors. The BBC may reply that, in television, it is simply responding to the compulsions of current conditions—if that is so, it proves my point. The BBC might add that its public service ethos is safeguarded on its radio wavelengths. Last month Mr. Duke Hussey, the BBC's chairman, said the following in relation to BBC Radio:

"It is the most distinctive part of the BBC and the BBC must be distinctive to justify the licence fee."

Mr. Patrick Thompson: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way, particularly as I was not present for the earlier part of his speech. Does he include Radio 1 as part of the public service element of the BBC?

Mr. Kaufman: Yes, I do. Popular entertainment of a proper standard that is aimed, in particular, at young people—whether it is Radio 1 or Radio 2—can be a good example of public service broadcasting. However, that does not mean that it must necessarily be a good example.

I agree with Mr. Hussey that BBC radio must be distinctive in order to justify the licence fee. However, BBC radio is not as distinctive as it ought to be, and it is becoming less distinctive. Therefore, according to the criteria laid down by the chairman of the BBC, it is justifying the licence fee less and less.

Radio 4 still has many high standards—it has not yet been ruined—but constantly its standards are reduced or assailed. It has an exceptionally loyal audience. However, I know from correspondence that I receive that that audience is regularly affronted by what is being done to Radio 4.

Mr. Fabricant: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Maxton: Your right hon. Friend?

Mr. Kaufman: I look for friends in the House wherever I can find them. I wish to complete this section of my speech before I give way. Paragraph 3.3 of the agreement states:

"The Corporation shall transmit an impartial account day by day prepared by professional reporters of the proceedings in both Houses of Parliament."

That is a sine qua non of the agreement, yet an account of debates in the House is now only partly available: at night it is broadcast only on long-wave; the morning account, far from being an impartial account of the proceedings, has become the equivalent of a journalist's parliamentary sketch rather than a report; and it is not available on FM. That being so, I believe that the BBC is not maintaining the standards that are required by the document.

Many other changes are being made to reduce the standards of Radio 4. For example, the team at "Gardeners' Question Time" has had to seek refuge on Classic FM. There has been a huge reduction in the audience of "The Financial World Tonight", and it has been sent on to the trunk tundra of Radio 5. Other changes are being made, and are deeply resented by the loyal audience of Radio 4.

Mr. Gale: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) first.

Mr. Fabricant: The right hon. Gentleman talked about how loyal audiences of Radio 4 have diminished and he made comparisons between popularism and public service broadcasting. Does he therefore welcome—as I do—the introduction of Paul Gambaccini on Radio 3, who is increasing the audience and widening its age group? The right hon. Gentleman's arguments are very interesting. Does he suggest that if the BBC is not a public service broadcaster, it ought to be privatised, given the financial and technological changes that are taking place?

Mr. Kaufman: I shall refer to the latter part of the hon. Gentleman's question later. With respect to the former part of his intervention, I can immediately respond to it. However, I have to dispel the false impression that the hon. Gentleman has given, that the programming to which he referred has increased the BBC's audience. Indeed, when the Select Committee asked the BBC about that, it claimed that it had no figures one way or the other. The hon. Gentleman is an apologist for facts that are not available.

What has happened to Radio 4 is nothing compared with what has been done to Radio 3—it was once the epitome of high standards, which were copied throughout the world. During the Christmas recess I visited Prague, which has a wavelength called Classic FM modelled on BBC Radio 3. I then went to Jerusalem, which has a wavelength called the Classic Voice, also modelled on Radio 3. Unfortunately, those stations are not modelled on Radio 3 as it is, but Radio 3 as it was.

Radio 3 was once the epitome of high standards, which were copied throughout the world, but is has been so debased and vandalised that it is scarcely worth transmitting. It has been turned into a famous composer's latest hits wavelength. For the first time ever, this year a majority of its hours will be devoted to commercial compact discs instead of live or in-house recorded music. Last year, 49 per cent. of Radio 3's output was on CD and 51 per cent. was in-house and live music. This year, 55 per cent. of the output of Radio 3 is commercial CDs. Mr. Nicholas Kenyon has sent a letter to Ms Gillian Reynolds, the radio correspondent of *The Daily Telegraph*, saying that the BBC's objective is to maintain a peak of 46 per cent. of live and in-house music—that is, there will be 54 per cent. commercial CDs. Radio 3's first six hours every weekday are now devoted to disc jockey music.

At the same time, the BBC's patronage of live British performance shrinks. Figures that the Select Committee had to force out of the BBC show that for the money spent on the hour-long weekday disc jockey programme introduced by Paul Gambaccini, the entire repertoire of Scottish Opera, Opera North and Welsh National Opera could be broadcast live each year. Would not that be a better way of dealing with the regional issues to which the right hon. Member for Conwy referred—fostering and assisting our great regional opera companies instead of putting on a disc jockey programme?

At present those excellent companies hardly get any broadcasts. Mr. Gambaccini gave the game away in an interview in last week's *Radio Times*:

"I had a specific mission to invite Today listeners to stay with the BBC rather than go to Classic FM".

That is not what Radio 3 is about or what BBC radio ought to be about.

The BBC ought not to use Radio 3 as a marketing tool instead of as an entity of intrinsic worth. I am sorry to say that it is time for Nicholas Kenyon, the controller of Radio 3 and a very nice man, to be removed from a position in which he has done great damage. If it is not halted and reversed, that damage may prove irreparable.

The more one examines what is happening to the BBC, the more it is clear that what was once a unique and precious institution is now becoming just another broadcasting organisation—with a great past, certainly; still with a considerable number of high spots, indubitably. Partly the change is due to a deliberate abandonment and degeneration of standards; partly it is due to circumstances beyond anyone's control —the development of worldwide multi-channel communications. That is a trend that the BBC not only cannot resist but would be unwise to resist.

The BBC is changing fast and I am in favour of the changes that it is making in television. It already has two major satellite channels that broadcast to millions abroad. BBC Prime is a subscription service; BBC World is funded by advertising. In today's press it is reported that, on BBC World, the BBC has signed its first television sponsorship deal and is to put out a programme sponsored by Air Canada. That is the way broadcasting is moving. Those two BBC channels are no longer solely BBC channels; they are conducted in partnership with major commercial organisations, including Pearsons here in Britain, the huge conglomerate of Cox Communications in the United States, and Nissho Iwo in Japan.

There are further plans for satellite cable services to the USA. In a letter yesterday the BBC gushingly told me that

"subject to the successful conclusion of current negotiations with a substantial well known media player, we will be launching some very exciting new broadcast and multi-media developments before too long."

They will be for the United States.

The BBC claims that those services are financially ring-fenced and not funded by the licence, but that is nonsense. On BBC Prime, as with the BBC's participation in the United Kingdom satellite channel UK Gold, many

[Mr. Kaufman]

of the programmes transmitted are past or present successes funded by licence payers. On BBC World, the news material is provided by BBC's worldwide news staff, again funded by the licence.

I do not criticise the BBC for that development. Indeed, it is inevitable as the boundary between the BBC's licence-funded and commercially funded services begins to disappear. But those developments do raise questions about the BBC's future. On the one hand, its share of the domestic audience is falling and will continue to fall—the director-general admits as much. On the other hand, the BBC's commercial activities are increasing, will continue to increase and should continue to increase.

The BBC is no longer solely a publicly funded public service broadcasting organisation. It is an increasingly commercial organisation which, with decreasing justification, lays claim to public funding through a regressive tax which—as my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy pointed out—is increasingly the subject of public debate and controversy. Regardless of whether licence funding is appropriate, I do not see how Labour can indefinitely defend a regressive tax which has its greatest impact on the poorest and which results in a disproportionate number of women on low incomes being prosecuted, fined or sent to gaol.

The day must inevitably come when the payers of that tax will rebel and when the BBC's commercial activities will first erode and then remove its claim to be a publicly funded organisation.

Mr. Maclennan: I am following the right hon. Gentleman's line of thought with interest and attention. His vision of the decline of the quality of the BBC may be starkly realistic. Is he coming to the conclusion— I suppose he will tell me to wait for it—that the decline is irreversible? Does he believe that the mere removal of Mr. Nicholas Kenyon would stand against those ineluctable forces of history? Or does he think that something can be done by way of the language of the charter or the agreement, to sustain and support the standards of quality that he so realistically states are being eroded?

Mr. Kaufman: I believe that there are two parallel trends. The first, which I deplore, is the trend towards the deliberate degradation of some of the BBC's output. That could be stopped if the BBC had the will to stop it—it is an internal decision of the BBC. I fear that these documents of themselves can do nothing about the problem, because the BBC, unlike the ITV companies, is wholly unaccountable.

At the same time, I believe that the technological trend is irreversible. Nothing can be done about it; but I do not think that the technological trend inevitably involves a degradation of standards. Properly organised, the high public service broadcasting standards for which the BBC has stood for more than 70 years can be protected within the technological changes that are under way.

The day may come when the BBC's presence in the public sector will become anomalous and possibly difficult to justify. What is more, the BBC's loss of audience will mean that it has to struggle for its place in the communications market. That is why I have long advocated that the BBC should forge partnerships with major players in the national and international communications arena. With Pearsons, the BBC already has a worldwide partnership. I am conceited enough to point out that it is a partnership that I began advocating long before the BBC moved in that direction, so I am delighted about it. But I believe that the organisation should cultivate other partnerships too—with the ITV companies, for instance, because, as relatively small franchise holders on one terrestrial channel, they are increasingly vulnerable.

The BBC should consider partnership with BSkyB, with which it already shares coverage of, for example, Premier League football. Above all, the BBC should cultivate the possibility of a partnership with BT. Given that United States-owned cable companies are allowed to poach BT's telephone subscribers, the Government's failure to allow it to participate in television transmission is unacceptable. The Government's failure to remove legal restrictions on BT as a broadcaster is an act of purblind folly.

Mr. Maxton: Is it not an even greater disgrace that, in some areas, American cable companies are refusing to supply television channels unless the subscriber takes a telephone as well?

Mr. Kaufman: At the same time as imposing such a restrictive agreement, those cable companies are whining and wailing at the conditions that BSkyB imposes on them, because they want to broadcast the channels that BSkyB—risking huge losses—pioneered. Cable companies want the best of all worlds, whether in comparison with BSkyB or with our own British telephone company BT. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has therefore pledged that a Labour Government would remove the restrictions on BT.

The BBC as we have known it for more than 70 years is bound inexorably to change—probably beyond recognition. To maintain and to rescue the public service broadcasting standards for which the broadcasting world is indebted to the BBC, it must change and grow, but, at the same time, it must preserve the public service ethos created for it by its great founders.

The agreement is weak. As I said to the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan). unlike ITV, which is tightly regulated by broadcasting legislation and will be further regulated by the Broadcasting Bill when it is enacted, the BBC is subject to no real regulation at all. The agreement commits the BBC to

"the maintenance of high general standards in all respects",

but it contains no mechanism whatever to prevent those standards from being debased, as I regret in some respects they are. The Secretary of State talked about the pledges being a contract between the BBC and its listeners. I would be much more confident about a contract if it were between the BBC and the Government, who provide its funding with great largesse.

Once the agreement is passed by the House, those in charge of the BBC can do whatever they like with the organisation. They can treat it as their toy and plaything, as Mr. Kenyon of Radio 3 certainly does. We are approaching the end of a period that has generously assumed the BBC to possess a sense of responsibility,

which it does not always show now as much as it should. Soon, the BBC will become subject to the much tighter control of the marketplace. I very much hope that the new chairman, Sir Christopher Bland, will be the right man to steer it safely into that marketplace.

Meanwhile, we need to examine the agreement and decide on it, taking into account the fact that it may be the last BBC charter that the House will be asked to approve.

7.23 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): I declare an interest as a member of the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union, the National Union of Journalists and the British Actors Equity Association.

I am saddened that the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) is not present. I happen to know that there has recently been illness in his family. I hope that that is not why he is not here, but if it is, I would be grateful if the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) would give him our good wishes.

Between now and 31 December 2006, when the charter will end, there will be enormous changes in the communications industry. There will be the change from analogue to digital picture transmission, changes in the installation of cable, changes from the delivery—I suspect—of programmes by satellite as programme services to delivery systems, the introduction of electronic newspapers into our homes that will give us fully interactive services, wider screens, and much more.

That process of change will be quite difficult to manage. I suspect that, between now and 2006, we will have to introduce a communications commission to take over the regulation of what is rapidly becoming an integrated industry. It is vital that, between now and 2006, British broadcasting has a firm cornerstone. That is why I am so pleased that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and her predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Dorrell), together with—I acknowledge its contribution—the National Heritage Select Committee, have put together a package that goes a long way towards meeting the likely needs of the next 10 years of change.

The BBC is regarded as a benchmark for excellence worldwide, and notwithstanding some of the criticisms that have been levelled and some that I shall level myself, that reputation has justly been not only earned but maintained. As a public service broadcaster, the BBC provides universal coverage, which no other company in this country provides, and it provides it free-to-air. It provides two excellent television services and five radio services.

I rose to challenge the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), because I was sorry to hear him refer to the "tundra" of Radio 5 Live. I always understood him to be young at heart if not in body. His hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and I are engaged in a monitoring process as part of a monitoring panel for Radio 5 Live. I happen to be a regular listener, anyway. I criticised the introduction of Radio 5 Live, because I did not believe that it could work. I am not sure when the right hon. Gentleman last listened to it, but it offers a multitude of varied programming that is worthy of anything that the BBC has ever done. It is a very good service, and I commend it to him.

One should not, of course, omit BBC local radio services and BBC Worldwide Television. The former BBC World Service established the BBC's worldwide reputation for honesty, integrity and editorial soundness. BBC Worldwide embraces BBC Radio—the former World Service—BBC publishing, BBC learning, BBC World television, which, as the right hon. Member for Gorton said, is the BBC's 24-hour international news service, and BBC Prime, carrying entertainment throughout Europe. That is a very impressive tranche of programming.

BBC World also transmits an Arabic television channel. Some of us were privileged a couple of weeks ago to go to the BBC and watch a simultaneous translation of BBC world news international television into Japanese—a quite extraordinary feat, which I am absolutely convinced will be of immense value not only to the reputation of the BBC in the far east but to UK Ltd. for the service it provides to many potential Japanese investors in this country. That whole world service generates about £72 million a year, of which £53 million goes back into programming and £19 million is invested in the further development of BBC Worldwide.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend share my disappointment that the far eastern BBC service is no longer being broadcast by a satellite transponder to the People's Republic of China?

Mr. Gale: My hon. Friend knows me extremely well, and anticipates my next move in this chess game.

One of the reasons why the BBC has such a reputation is that it has never, like Mr. Murdoch, sold out editorial control. I happen to be a journalist, and I believe that all reputable journalists would, if necessary, probably die for editorial control. I find it despicable that Murdoch, to get Star Television into the far east, has effectively said to the Chinese, "You take my programmes and you edit them how you like. I don't care, as long as I make the money."

The BBC has never acted in that way, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) has rightly said, it has paid a price. For the moment, it is excluded from an area of the world. It is, however, our hope and the hope of the BBC that, before long, the company will be able to renew that service and to broadcast into China as it can broadcast to the rest of the world.

I have expressed a couple of times the importance of the BBC's editorial integrity. That is underscored in the agreement, and, to some extent, in the charter. The charter says that one of the duties of the BBC is

> "To collect news and information in any part of the world and in any manner that may be thought fit."

I have some slight reservations about that. Given modern journalists' practices of electronic eavesdropping, telephoto lenses and the like, I seriously question whether we should say to any journalist—I am a journalist—that journalists should be able to use any manner that they think fit. That opens up a potential Pandora's box.

Far more significant is the reference to editorial control. Under the heading "Programme Content", the document says that the BBC shall

> "keep under review the Home Services with a view to the maintenance of high general standards in all respects and in particular in respect of their content, quality and editorial integrity".

[Mr. Gale]

I say with some sadness that I believe that Auntie's slip is showing. I fear that we are witnessing a gradual decline into fundamental editorial dishonesty within the BBC.

I say that with great sadness, because I believe that most journalists working within the BBC are people of considerable personal integrity. However, the pressures of modern journalism and the voracious appetite of the media to get the story on air—

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gale: Not at this point: I will in a moment.

The need to fill the programme, to get the story and to yank out the soundbite, is leading to the practice of taking what people say completely out of context. Not a single hon. Member present this evening has not experienced that personally. All qualifications are removed from what people say, and the material is broadcast in a manner that fits the pre-ordained nature of the story that the editor has determined. That is not honest journalism.

Mr. Thompson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I quite understand why there was some delay in his giving way. I appreciate the fact that he has given way, because he is making an important point. Does he agree that the cause of what he describes is that the BBC has it in mind that, for some reason or another, it has to compete with commercial television? My opinion is that it should not have even to think about competition. Is that not the problem?

Mr. Gale: Journalists and programme makers are competitive by nature; never mind that they are competing with the commercial services: they are competing with each other. Journalists are as good as their last story, or as their last programme in radio or television. If journalists are not as good, there are a lot of keen young men and women coming right up behind them who want their jobs.

If one wants to make a name for oneself, one has to blaze a trail, and be sensational. That is part of the problem, and that is why I opposed televising the House. What we often have is "Match of the Day", with edited highlights. Almost everything is taken out, and we are just left with the sexy bits. It gets worse than that.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): Will the hon. Gentleman reconsider his criticism of the standards in BBC journalism and in broadcasting journalism generally? He will surely accept that, as a generalisation of the way in which BBC journalists work, what he has said is a gross distortion of standards. If he wishes to make that claim, which may occasionally be true, he should cite examples and be specific. He must recognise that what he said, which was a generalisation, was appalling, and an unjustifiable slur on the quality of radio and television journalists.

Mr. Gale: That is an excellent soundbite, and I am sure that it will be used on "Today in Parliament" and "Yesterday in Parliament", because the BBC will like it. Unfortunately, it is not the truth. The truth is—the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) knows it—that he stands like a moth in front of a candle on College green, he has a television camera pointed at him, he records a three-minute interview, and eight seconds is used. That eight seconds is taken totally out of context and without qualification. It may or may not reflect what he said or intended to say, and he knows that as well as I do.

The hon. Gentleman wants chapter and verse; I will give him chapter and verse. Three weeks ago, I conducted an interview for the BBC with one of its own people. That interview was sanitised, criticisms of the BBC were taken out of it, and the last question and answer were hacked off completely. It was an interview recorded as live. The convention is that, if one records that way, the piece is broadcast in exactly the form in which it was recorded, without editing.

Mr. Kaufman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gale: No, I will not.

The agreement was—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central asked for an example, and I am giving him one.

The agreement was that the piece was recorded as live and would be broadcast as such. Not only was the piece sanitised, and not only was the end cut off, the front cut off and a bit taken out of the middle, but my final question was removed from the end of the interview and inserted in front of a question to which it did not relate in the middle of the interview.

I respectfully suggest that that is dishonest broadcasting. It will not surprise the hon. Gentleman to know that I have made a complaint to the Director-General of the BBC; I made it immediately. What may surprise him—it surprises me—is that I am still waiting for a reply.

Mr. Kaufman: The hon. Gentleman declared his interest at the beginning, and said that he was an experienced broadcaster. Frankly, I am astonished that he was fool enough to submit himself to such treatment, which is habitual to the BBC which, if it records anything, has a great tendency never to broadcast it intact, but to chop it about to suit itself. That is why some of us will never do any recorded work for the BBC.

Mr. Gale: I agree with much of what the right hon. Gentleman says. We all know that we do recorded interviews. Increasingly, people in industry, people in the trade unions and people in this House say exactly what the right hon. Gentleman has said—it is a sad comment. They say, "I dare not allow this to be recorded. I will only do it live."

We tend to find that programme makers—this is not a party political comment, for heaven's sake—are interested fundamentally in controversy, because that is what makes good broadcasting. The dishonesty creeps in when the fixer rings somebody up and says, "Will you take part in this?" One says yes, but one is not told the context in which one will be interviewed or details of the person or people who will suddenly be sprung on one.

What I say to the House—and, more particularly, to the BBC—is this. I have worked for the BBC; I spent many happy years working for an organisation for which I still

have tremendous admiration. I have already said that the British Broadcasting Corporation is a benchmark for editorial integrity and quality throughout the world.

I want Auntie to remain that way, and that is why I believe that the editor-in-chief—the Director-General of the BBC, John Birt—must address his editorial standards now, before the cancer takes root too deeply to be rooted out. With the advent of digital editing, it is technically possible literally to make anybody say anything. We have to know that the public service broadcaster in the United Kingdom is above and beyond any form of possible reproach.

I touch fleetingly on the word in the charter that nobody has yet mentioned—"research". We should pay tribute to the immense research work that BBC technicians have done in the past, and are doing now. Way back in the mists of time, there was the radiophonic workshop and all that. Coming to the present day, the BBC was first with digital audio broadcasting. It is pursuing, and will pursue, the broadcast of digital terrestrial television. It is pursuing multi-media services, including educational CD-ROMs. I could go on, but I do not need to. We should not overlook the immense value, not just to the corporation, but to the country, of the BBC's research and research engineers.

Again, I touch fleetingly—not because I do not value it highly, but precisely for the reverse reason—on local radio. Somewhere in the documents, there is a reference to the BBC providing a number of "local sound services", and that is it—it is kicked into touch. However, for many people in this country, BBC local radio provides a genuine public service alternative to commercial radio stations.

Commercial radio stations do a first-rate job in the context for which they were created, but BBC speech-based local radio is undervalued and underfunded. It has always been, and still is, the training ground for many of the BBC's best reporters. It is where they cut their teeth and make their mistakes. We all know that from personal experience. That is where I cut my teeth and made my mistakes, and I was shouted at by people like me for doing so. I believe that we should all value that service highly. I say to the BBC management: "I do not believe that management values the service highly enough."

Radio 4 long wave has been mentioned in this debate. I understand the predilections of those who prefer normal programming to cricket, but I do not share them. The charter clearly separates the home service's broadcasts to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Channel islands and the Isle of Man, the territorial waters, ships and aircraft, and the World Service's broadcasting to the Commonwealth and to other countries.

Radio 4 long wave is a home service, and is intended for home consumption. There is no question about that. However, there is a large expatriate community and an increasingly large number of business travellers and tourists throughout the European Union who rely heavily on Radio 4's long wave broadcasts to keep in daily touch with home, with their bases and businesses. The BBC has fought that battle once and lost, and I hope that it will not fight it again. It would be very unwise to remove or tamper with that service.

Regional broadcasting has been mentioned in the debate. Some hon. Members here tonight have heard my views in the BBC General Advisory Council. I have nothing whatever against regional broadcasting. The BBC has excellent network production centres in Manchester, Newcastle, Birmingham, Bristol, Belfast and north of the border, which have established reputations for specific services.

For example, I doubt whether there is a broadcasting organisation in the word that is capable of producing the type of natural history programmes that have come, and continue to come, out of Bristol. It makes eminent sense to keep that programming there. However, I cannot understand the burning desire to pick up a team of actors and take them from Shepherd's Bush—where they have probably been rehearsing anyway—up to Glasgow, Manchester or Birmingham, or down to Bristol, simply to make something in a studio there and pretend that it is a local production. That is not what regional broadcasting is about.

Mr. Maxton: I specifically asked John Birt, when he recently appeared before the Select Committee, whether that simply meant uprooting people from London and taking them into the regions. He assured me that it did not, and that regional production in Glasgow meant using actors and staff from Glasgow to make a production that would then be shown on the network television.

Mr. Gale: I have no quarrel with that at all; the hon. Gentleman and I are at one. I am saying that we need to be careful. We all want to avoid expensive tokenism. It is very costly to pick up a team of London-based actors and actresses and move them somewhere else simply to try to pretend that we are filling those studios, particularly if a local production company has been contracted by the BBC to make programmes. I can only say good luck, because regional broadcasting is not about the token shifting of people.

I am taking slightly longer than I had intended to, but I have given way several times. I should like to mention the licence fee, for which I have fought.

I am pleased that the BBC will continue to be funded by the licence fee, because it is the most sensible way to provide money for this peculiar animal. Paragraph 42 of the White Paper said, I think absolutely correctly:

"Few dispute that the licence fee is an oddity."

One must have a licence to pay for all United Kingdom services, but in fact it pays only for the BBC. It goes on:

"Viewers must pay the same, irrespective of their means or whether they want to watch BBC programmes."

I find nothing wrong with that, except that it is unsophisticated. As we move into the next generation of technology, it will be possible to pay the licence fee—not pay-per-view, please, or subscription—to watch television at home by smart card. That will prevent the nonsense of imprisoning people for the non-payment of licence fees. I am not suggesting that those people should have a free ride, and I have never believed that anyone should be able to watch free television at the expense of someone else. In those circumstances, that would be straightforward evasion.

Once we have smart cards, other things will become possible. I should like the Minister to consider that possibility for the future. It is time for the House seriously to consider, in the light of new technology, licensing every receiver. I do not mean licensing just every television, but also every video recorder.

[Mr. Gale]

The licence fee, give or take a few pounds, is £90 a year, which is very cheap for the viewing and broadcasting enjoyed. On a unit cost of £30 per receiver, since the average modern household probably has two television sets and one video recorder, that would be £90 a year. The old-age pensioner who has only one television would pay only £30. The mugs in the House—I am one of them—who have more receivers of various types dotted around the place, would pay much more, as we should.

One would obviously have to create special provision for hotels, guest houses and other places that need multiple receivers. The basic principle of having a lower unit cost but charging per unit can and should be considered in the light of the potential for encryption.

Mr. Fabricant: I have some doubts, as does the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), whether the licence fee can be sustained indefinitely. I should like to ask my hon. Friend how his system of licensing every television set and video recorder would be enforced. A television detector van can detect one or possibly two television sets working in a house at any time, but it cannot easily—I would argue that it is physically impossible—detect a video recorder.

Mr. Gale: I did say, in the light of modern technology. In the next 10 years, every new television will have an encryption box built into it, with a common interface. It will be possible to plug a card into that common interface to provide any one of many services, one of which should permanently turn the television set on or off.

It is now possible individually to address every receiver by signal, and the receivers will know whether the licence—the pay-per-view, if one likes—has been paid. Also, people who cannot afford to pay a lump sum down payment might be able to pay their licence fee in weekly or monthly instalments. The BBC does not like that possibility, because it believes that it might create uncertainty about how much revenue it will receive. I do not believe that that would happen, but it is a possibility.

The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) asked why the Government voted against the sports proposals tabled by the Opposition in the other place. There are two answers to that, both of which are absolutely straightforward.

The first is that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage has made it plain that she wants to go out to consultation and to listen, not only to one vested interest—the viewer who wants his televised sport free—but to another interest, the sports providers. She wants to try to find a pathway through that maze before reaching a conclusion. The other place was therefore not the place to table the amendment. The second answer is that the amendment was badly drafted and misunderstood, which is why their Lordships voted against it.

I passionately believe that the solution is what the BBC has dubbed "unbundling". It is necessary to create four categories of auction: the first would be for live transmission; the second for full repeat coverage rights; the third for highlights; and the fourth—this is very important and has been overlooked—for radio. Radio rights are terribly important for those who are blind or sick, for travellers and for others who cannot physically watch television sets.

Once the live rights have been sold, what happens if they go to an encrypted channel? That does not necessarily mean Sky, because in a couple of years' time we could well find Carlton premium digital broadcasting terrestrially, so it means any subscription or pay-per-view service. The House has the right to say that, if the live rights go to one of those, the immediate full repeat rights shall be sold by auction to the highest bidder, which may be ITV or the BBC, but which must be a free-to-air, universal-coverage terrestrial station. The edited highlights could be sold to anyone else in precisely the same way.

The only criticism of that proposal that I regard as serious involves the question of how the technology is to be provided. The answer is that the physical coverage of the event, whatever it is, can be provided in precisely the same way as the European Broadcasting Union provides coverage of winter sports, skating, the Eurovision song contest and so on. The original owner of the rights—the Football Association, Aintree racecourse or whatever—contracts with a broadcaster—the BBC, ITV, Sky or an independent broadcasting company—to cover the match, and those who use the rights thereafter can put on their own commentary.

I am afraid that the listed events system has had its day. It has never seriously worked. One man's pleasure is another man's poison. What Labour Members want to watch I may not want to watch, and I may not even want to watch what people on the Government Front Bench want to watch, either. It is not possible to satisfy everybody. However, it is possible to create arrangements whereby everybody has the opportunity at some point to watch the event free to air. Surely that is what we seek to achieve.

I shall make three quick final points. First, the charter mentions violence, and it is right to do so. The BBC has said that it supports the idea of a 9 pm watershed, not a 9 pm waterfall. However, given the introduction of video recorders and time-shifting, the watershed is effectively no longer reliable, so it is much more incumbent upon the broadcasters to ensure that whatever they broadcast, at whatever time of the day or the night, does not offend standards of taste and decency, and is not violent.

I should like to put down a marker for the Minister. I hope that, when we are dealing with the Broadcasting Bill, he will seriously consider the perpetuation of the "must carry" regulations for terrestrial broadcasting on cable. As more and more people acquire cable, they will increasingly receive their programming by cable alone, without an aerial or satellite dish of any kind. At that point, it will be vital that the public service channels—certainly the BBC; we can argue later about whether "must carry" should apply to independent television too—be perpetuated on a free-to-view basis on cable television.

Finally, concern has been expressed on both sides of the House about the lack in the pledges of a definition of the provision for children's programming on television and radio, and for education, especially schools services. The charter says that the BBC must provide

"a high standard of original programmes for children and young people".

Such programming is most important, on two counts. Both schools and people at home have relied heavily, and will continue to do so, on a high standard of public service

broadcasting specifically created for children and young people. Those young people will be the viewers and radio listeners for the BBC of tomorrow. We need to look after them.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before I call the next Member to speak, I must point out that, although I have no power to limit speeches, unless Members are willing to limit their speeches voluntarily there will be many disappointed Members left at the end of the debate.

7.53 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) cares a great deal about broadcasting, so it is understandable that, on one of the rare occasions—it may also be a formative occasion—on which we can discuss the BBC, he wants to adopt a somewhat encyclopaedic approach. Although I speak for my party as its sole contributor to the debate, I shall try to be a little more brief. That is partly because, although we are debating what is called a draft agreement, I believe that the die has already been cast. I understand that the motion before us is to approve the agreement, and if the House does so, it appears to me that that will be the end of the matter. If the Minister wishes to intervene to clear up that question now, I shall be happy for him to do so.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said that this could be the last occasion on which we debate a charter and an agreement. I hope that that is true. In the world into which we are moving, I do not believe that that will be an appropriate way in which to legislate for the BBC.

The present mode of legislation grew up in an age in which there were great concerns about the impartiality of television. It was felt that the power of the BBC was such that it was appropriate, and constituted a safeguard of its independence, to adopt the solemn procedure of the charter. That is inappropriate now. We need the opportunity to make provision for a much more detailed framework for public service broadcasting, which will provide much closer control and accountability than the present three tiers of accountability—the charter, the agreement and the pledges.

When an independent television or radio station breaks the terms of its agreement or the programming code, the Independent Television Commission can take punitive action against it, ranging from a formal warning, through the imposition of fines to, in the most extreme cases, the revocation of the company's licence. Those powers have been used—for example, in December 1994, the ITC fined Granada Television £500,000. The radio authority has similar powers, and has fined several radio stations for breaking the programme code. No such sanctions, however, can be applied against the BBC. Although the rules have the status of a legal agreement, the BBC cannot be fined because in effect that would be to fine the licence payer.

If the BBC's qualities, which are evidently, and almost universally, recognised to be in decline, are to be sustained in the face of the competition that is growing at an exponential rate—digital broadcasting, multi-channel choice and new information technology—the frail framework now provided will not do.

I find the failure to define the role of the governors adequately, and to recognise the primacy of their role as public trustees of the BBC's impartiality as set out in the charter, one of the most disappointing of the many disappointing aspects of the process of re-establishing the BBC with a new charter. There was an opportunity to distinguish clearly between the role of the governors as regulators and trustees of the public interest, and the responsibility for strategy and management, which should properly fall to the aptly named board of management, in close collaboration with the national broadcasting councils. Clear thought should be given to the role and powers of the board of governors, acting as regulator, to deal with matters such as one of the more disgraceful episodes over which Marmaduke Hussey presided.

It is hail and farewell time, and I say farewell to Marmaduke Hussey with scarcely a tear in the een. I refer to the "Panorama" programme—not the one with Princess Diana but the one in which the BBC, three days before the local elections in Scotland, decided to interview the Prime Minister. That showed a notable absence of sensitivity not only to Scottish general opinion but to the opinion of its own broadcasting council in Scotland. The governors should have intervened, but they did nothing about it.

In collaboration with colleagues in the Labour party, we had to take the BBC to court because the governors had so failed in their duty to sustain impartiality. We took them to court and, of course, we won. That shows the need for greater clarification of the regulatory role of the governors It is highly undesirable that something as fundamental as the impartiality of the BBC should have to be challenged in court to sustain it.

The new structure of BBC broadcasting described in the draft agreement sets out some provisions on programming that are far from going in the direction pointed out by the former Secretary of State for National Heritage in the previous debate on the matter. He, understandably, advocated that there should be much greater precision about duties and that performance should be measurable. That framework has scarcely been provided for in the agreement.

Attention has been drawn by more than one hon. Member to the inadequate statement in the agreement about regional broadcasting and the not wholly convincing response from the Secretary of State. When she speaks of paragraph 2.2 of the draft agreement providing for two television services

"which may include regional variations",

she really means that one service "must" or "shall"; the other does not need to. It is a distortion of the plain meaning of the language. I hope that that will be attended to by the BBC, but if the matter were ever to be tested in a court, I cannot see that there is any ambiguity about it. The Secretary of State's reluctance to accept amendments to the charter and agreement is an inappropriate inflexibility.

When these matters were discussed in another place, it was said that the views of the upper House would be considered and weight would be given to what was said. Are we to understand that what is said in this House is not to be given any weight?

[Mr. Robert Maclennan]

There is a plain error in paragraph 2.2(c), which refers to

"an additional sound programme service for general reception in each of Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively and two additional sound programmes for general reception in Wales".

Scotland has two services for general reception, Radio Scotland and Radio nan Gaidheal, which is the same allocation as for Wales. The BBC has pledged, in this rather ephemeral document, to retain those services and their frequencies but there should be a requirement that they be protected against any future change in commitment.

It seems almost impossible to get the issue of programme making clear in the minds of those responsible at the BBC. The statement of pledges goes no way towards meeting the general feeling in the House the last time that we debated BBC matters that it was appropriate that all parts of the United Kingdom should make programmes for viewing by the rest of the country. In fact, the whole approach of the BBC has been to treat regionalism as being about the provision of core local programmes covering such matters as local news and local parliamentary affairs. It does not recognise that it is important that drama made in all parts of the country should be seen on the network or that sport in all parts of the country should be available on all parts of the network. Comedy and other programmes made in different parts of the country on many other aspects of our multi-cultural society should be carried on the network. At present, not even lip service is paid to that. It should have been inherent in the new structure.

In the debate on 9 February last year, the then Secretary of State quoted this passage from the White Paper:

"It is important that the BBC should make and commission a reasonable proportion and range of its national output, as well as programmes for local audiences, in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland and in the English regions. An undertaking to do this should be included in the new Agreement, and an analysis of hours and range of output made in different parts of the country for broadcasting locally and throughout the United Kingdom should be included in the BBC's Annual Report."

He then commented:

"I expect that the BBC will want to include some precision about the nature of that understanding in 'Promises to Audiences', so that there are yardsticks against which the audience and Parliament can test its delivery of the general principle that will be set out in the agreement signed between the Government and the corporation. "—[*Official Report*, 9 February 1995; Vol. 254, c. 479.]

Since that aspiration, which I endorsed and strongly supported, was expressed, we have had the BBC's response in its illustrative statement of pledges of November 1995. There was nothing quantitative about it. It said virtually nothing about those matters, although it referred to dedicated programmes of regional journalism, regional television news summaries, weekly current affairs programmes and so forth. I do not know whether the BBC is disingenuous or whether it has a strong centralist impulse—it is probably the latter—but it falls far short of what the House would regard as an appropriate part of public service broadcasting. It will be to the great detriment of broadcasting in Scotland if that is not recognised.

The role under the charter of the national broadcasting councils of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland has been to control policy in their countries. That power is felt by many to be the foundation of their authority. It is not granted to them under the charter that we are considering; instead, they are required to advise and assist. That is a significant change and powers similar to those missing from the national broadcasting councils turn up in article 7(1)(d) of the new charter, which requires the governors to consult the national broadcasting councils on any issue concerning funding, programming and resources and to take due account of any representations that they receive.

That transfer of a power to the governors establishes for the first time a direct constitutional link between them and the national councils and relieves the problem of conflict of interest for the national governors—they no longer have to represent the board of governors and their council. It places the initiative firmly in the lap of the governors and does not require them to incorporate any representation from the national council. The draft charter requires amendment to give national councils the power to initiate a strategy and objectives for their country.

On the question of advice and consumer input, under the current charter, the General Advisory Council forms panels to select members of the national broadcasting councils. The draft charter abolishes the General Advisory Council and transfers the power to select members of the national broadcasting councils to the governors. Once again, that would seem to enable the governors to fill the councils with compliant appointees and to take away from consumers, the regions and the nations a truly representative nominated membership. That is another area in which the charter ought to be amended before it reaches its final form.

The Minister of State, who is to reply to the debate, told the House on 9 January 1995 that England would have 10 regional councils and that, together with their chairmen, they would constitute the English Regional Forum. Many people understood him to be saying that that organisation would effectively become the national broadcasting council for England and be given constitutional status within the charter, but that is apparently not the case. Clause 13.1 of the draft charter states:

"The Corporation shall appoint in each area of regional television output in England a council to be known as the Regional Advisory Council."

It does not mention the English National Forum, which has already been established by the BBC. With no constitutional status, the forum is powerless and England is bereft of a national body within the structure of the BBC. That is not fair to England and can only encourage the continuing centralisation and the metropolitan character of the BBC. That ought to be attended to before the charter is given effect. The draft charter, rather than strengthening the regional voice of the BBC, seems carefully constructed to draw power to the centre. If it continues in its current format, it will prevent the BBC from achieving the goal of effective regional and national decision making and programme producing.

The structural weaknesses are probably the single most serious feature of the complex documents that we are considering. There is still time to change them and, for that reason, I have concentrated on that issue. Although a general debate on the BBC could encourage one to embark on many other matters, I shall mention only a couple more.

At this time, the question of the independence of the BBC is important. I was not pleased by the manner in which the Secretary of State appointed the new chairman of the governors, Sir Christopher Bland. I understand that she looked into the precedents and decided that it was appropriate for her to make the appointment without consultation. Undoubtedly, she appointed someone who has great qualities and experience of commercial broadcasting, which will be of great service to the BBC. I also believe that there is no reason to fear that Sir Christopher will not be entirely objective—in a political sense—in the way in which he conducts himself in his new role. In a position of that kind, however, it would have been sensible to have reached some agreement, and consultation should have been held before the appointment. It would have strengthened the position of the governor from the beginning.

A second matter is the position of the arts and the BBC's role as a sponsor. The corporation spends about £300 million per annum and there are huge pressures on it to reduce its funding of orchestras, for example. I profoundly hope that those pressures will be resisted. I would have liked the fundamental documents to have done much more to spell out the BBC's commitment to the live arts and to new art. That commitment has played a distinguished role in the past and been a major contributory factor to the BBC's worldwide reputation.

I share the views of the hon. Member for North Thanet about the inadequate provision of production targets for the BBC in education. If Channel 4 can operate against targets on quality and duration, I see no reason why the BBC should not similarly be prepared to do so.

This is a significant turning point in the history of the BBC. Its control of the airwaves is slipping away from it, its hold on the licence fee is loosening and it is clearly torn between broadcasting to a mass audience and broadcasting quality programmes to a small audience. It does not always satisfy those conflicting challenges. Sometimes, I do not even think that it knows where it is going when dealing with those questions. In spite of all that, the BBC still commands the support of many people in this country and is admired in other countries, as it develops its image through commercial collaboration abroad. I wish it well and hope that, in the time that is left, the Secretary of State will strengthen the accountability structures and provide much more precise measurement yardsticks to ensure that the quality that we have valued is retained—I think that the Minister hoped for that when he last spoke on the subject.

8.16 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) kept his word. His speech was briefer than that of my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale), who took half an hour. The hon. Gentleman took only 23 or 24 minutes. He and I were in the same college 40 years ago. He was serious then; he is still serious 40 years later. I could not cheer him up then and I do not think that I can do so now. Why on earth cannot he be a little more full of zest and enthusiasm?

There are some wonderful things going on. The Secretary of State mentioned the brilliant BBC series, "Pride and Prejudice". With it I would bracket the brilliant "Middlemarch" production two years ago, which related to a similar period. The producer, who is my near neighbour—he lives about 300 yds away—Dr. Louis Marks, is chairman of the Hampton Court Green residents association. The BBC produces a plethora of superb travel programmes, features of all sorts, music, plays and more. By and large, it continues to uphold its very high standards.

I do not share the pessimism of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) about the condition of Radio 3. He talked as though it had come out of some golden age and was getting worse. I agree with him in that I, too, do not like to hear an announcer with a transatlantic accent, an oily voice and a mental age of 12 introducing Beethoven. I prefer a more dignified announcer on Radio 3, but that just happens to be my taste. I greatly resent the removal of "Composer of the Week" from 9 am, when I was able to listen to it in my bath, to 12 o'clock, when I can hardly ever hear it, which I deplore. The BBC promenade concerts constitute a marvellous festival of first-class music which is second to none in the world. They are broadcast live on Radio 3 every night in the summer season.

I wish that we could have more live broadcasts of orchestral concerts at other times of the year, as we used to. They have gone out of fashion. They have been largely replaced by discs. No doubt cost has something to do with that, but live concerts, with the audience clapping and coughing, have an electric feel about them that one cannot quite get from a recording.

We should be enormously proud of the BBC's achievements. However, I share the view expressed in the Select Committee on National Heritage's report of November 1995, in which I took an active part, as did the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton)—I hope that he might catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I believe that this will be the last 10-year charter.

The right hon. Member for Gorton mentioned that there are now 38 channels, that there will be 49 by the end of the year, and that the share of the four—to become five—terrestrial channels is diminishing with the arrival of the large number of cable and satellite channels, but he did not mention that, in five or 10 years, or perhaps even sooner, people will be able to dial their telephone, receive any video on cable and have the cost put on their telephone bill. The notion of a daily menu of four or five fixed channels provided by the authority and from which the viewer chooses one, will wither away. People will choose what to have, much as they do now with videos through the possession or borrowing of a cassette, but in future the video will be able to come along a wire.

I do not see how the BBC will be able to retain its present audience share, however good it is. Its share is bound to diminish and, when it does, the public will not wear paying a licence fee of the order of £100 when most of them are not watching it. That change is bound to occur, and so I believe that this will be the last 10-year licence.

I welcome the reference in the document to the BBC's impartiality, which is important. I know that the BBC is enormously proud of it and that it tries hard at election time to treat the political parties fairly. The "Today" programme falls short of that aim, which is due to the BBC's tendency—to which my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet referred—to try to keep up its audience ratings. One way to do that is to create artificial

[Mr. Toby Jessel]

personalities for the interviewers, question masters or programme introducers. They are almost encouraged to try to build up their own public. The interviewer then begins to think that he is nearly as important, or even as important, as the person being interviewed. The "Today" programme employs the appalling practice of fading out whoever is being interviewed whenever the interviewer wants to ask another question. That is extremely annoying, it is bad behaviour, and it shows bad taste on the part of the BBC. It should be stopped forthwith.

While I am on the subject of impartiality, Opposition Members have mentioned the appointment of Sir Christopher Bland as chairman. The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland referred to it. Opposition Members have gone a little over the top on the subject. We should not forget that the deputy chairman of the BBC is Lord Cocks who, for many years, was a distinguished Labour Chief Whip and much respected in all parts of the House. That was his life—he is far more of a political animal than is Sir Christopher Bland.

I was a member of the Greater London council from 1967—the year that Sir Christopher Bland was elected to it. In 1967, there was a political landslide. A Labour Government had been elected with an increased majority in the spring of 1966, but by the spring of 1967, when the Greater London council election took place, one of the periodical and sudden sea changes that take place in British public opinion had occurred and there was an enormous swing to the Conservatives. The GLC was elected to consist of about 80 Tory and 20 Labour members. The swing was so unexpected that, about two months before, in February or March 1967, Ladbroke had offered odds of 500 to one against a Tory majority on the GLC of more than 20. Two months later, the actual Tory majority was 60.

Christopher Bland was a young man aged about 28 or 29 who stood in Lewisham and Deptford, which was a multi-member constituency. He could not have expected to be elected, but there was a totally surprising massive landslide and he was elected for three years. He took his position seriously and became chairman of an education sub-committee of the Inner London education authority. I believe that, since ceasing to be a member of the GLC in 1970, he has taken no active part in the politics of any political party. One would hardly expect intelligent people in their 20s not to have some sort of political opinion. The combination of Sir Christopher Bland and Lord Cocks will be politically impartial.

Dr. Moonie: We are not questioning the impartiality or otherwise of Sir Christopher Bland. We are questioning the wisdom of the Government making such an appointment without consulting the Opposition parties. Were we to do the same thing in a few years' time and, hypothetically, appoint Lord Banks of Newham, a former Labour councillor, to the head of the BBC, I suspect that the hon. Gentleman might rant and rave about it.

Mr. Jessel: I do not think that that will happen. I respect the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) for his intelligence and wit. He was a colourful chairman of the GLC about 15 years ago, but I do not think that he would expect to become the chairman of the BBC. He is a totally different sort of personality from either Lord Cocks or Sir Christopher Bland.

I welcome the Secretary of State's reference to the "taste and decency" provision in the document. I do not mind a bit of vulgarity on television or radio programmes as long as it is funny, but the vicious violence that has become so common in the news and other programmes is bad for children. I am glad that the charter and the associated document are likely to curtail that.

I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for your patience and I shall now sit down to give others the chance to speak.

8.27 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I much enjoyed listening to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel), but it would have been even more enjoyable to hear him perform, with all his customary brilliance, as a musician. As he knows, I hold his skills and achievements as a musician in high admiration.

As a member for many years of the BBC's General Advisory Council, it may be thought by some that I have an interest to declare in this debate. But there is no payment for membership of the GAC. Indeed it could be argued that to give that form of public service is to incur costs, not to inflict them. Nevertheless, the experience is seen as eminently worthwhile by those, from all walks of life, who have had the honour of serving on a council set up to advise the best public broadcaster in the world. So the only interest I need declare today is the public interest.

In intervening in the debate, my purpose is to assert the public interest in common access to sport. Majorities have rights as well as minorities and love of money must not be allowed to take precedence over the love of sport. Over 30 million people cannot see Sky, but they ought not for that reason to be excluded from access to sporting events that are an undoubted and unquestionably important part of our national heritage.

In particular today, I want to move the debate on access to sport forward from the victory achieved in another place on 6 February by my noble Friend, Lord Howell, in protecting access for mainstream broadcasters to such major sporting events as the FA Cup final, the Wimbledon finals, the Grand National, the Derby and the rest of the "Crown jewels" of British sport, as they have become known.

While none of us wants to understate the importance of that victory in the Lords, which I am sure this House will soon confirm, all of us must accept that the future of the "Crown jewels" is not the only issue of importance in protecting common access to sport. There is also the critical issue of "unbundling" and the question of what is loosely called, 'Must Carry'/'Must Offer'/'EasyFind'. The new charter establishes the BBC as a licence fee funded universal service. In future, however, cable or other delivery systems could start excluding BBC services if they wished to give more weight to commercial cable broadcasting. This would damage the BBC's position as a universal broadcaster and undermine its new charter.

To avoid that happening, we must now ensure that, where a subscription channel such as Sky Sports holds all rights to a sporting event that is not among those listed in the Lords' "Crown jewels" amendment of 6 February, the right to TV or radio highlights are not hoarded by that channel. All of us know that sports bodies want to maximise their revenue, but that need not mean excluding sporting events that substantial numbers of people want

to see from being shown live on mainstream channels or in highlight programmes like "Match of the Day", or perhaps from being heard on live radio.

As of now, where there is a strong media player in the field, with bottomless pockets and a virtual monopoly, they are in a strong position to say to the sports bodies what they will and will not offer and to insist on all rights for that amount. That is why we need regulatory adjustments to open up sport to all viewers and listeners. The BBC suggests—and I agree—that where a subscription channel has live rights, the rights for highlights or for radio transmission will have to be sold on to other channels with a universal audience.

The ITC should have responsibility for regulating this and it could be done in the conditions it imposes by the terms of its licences on subscription broadcasters. Moreover, the ITC could be made responsible under the Broadcasting Bill also for regulating the BBC, should it come to have a minority subscription channel in the future, as much as BSkyB. So it will not be a case of preferring one channel to another. Similarly, the Radio Authority could regulate the radio channels while the Director General of Fair Trading would have the ultimate sanctions. I am not suggesting that these changes should be retrospective. Thus there will be no question of existing contracts being hit.

What I propose would help sports bodies by creating a new set of secondary sporting rights. There would be live rights on TV; there would be recorded rights and rights to highlights; and there would be live radio rights. No large media owner would any longer be able to tell the sports rights holders that he would negotiate only if all rights were sold to him. Sports bodies would be able to negotiate in different markets and achieve the best price in each.

As well as working in the interests of sports bodies, the revised system would be more viewer/listener friendly and take away from all broadcasters rights to claim exclusivity in transmitting events of national interest. That is the best long-term bet to stop monopolies emerging. While it would be nice to believe the market would protect sports bodies and viewers and listeners alike, sadly we already have cases where satellite channels refuse to sell rights on to more mainstream broadcasting like, for example, the Ryder cup.

Lord Howell in the Lords debate on 6 February exhibited the exclusive contract agreed between Sky Sports and the golfing authorities for last year's Ryder cup in which are written the words:

"For the avoidance of doubt, there shall be no BBC broadcast of this event",

thus excluding tens of millions of people. That is the writing on the wall in terms that could hardly be more stark or more serious. It says it all.

The arrival of sports channels on satellite and cable television widens opportunities for viewers of sports events. Increasingly, however, major sporting events are no longer available to be shown on terrestrial television, which the viewers who are excluded see as abuse of power by a fortunate minority. Excluding the majority has clear implications for the future of British sport. If sporting events are available only to a small minority of viewers, fewer people will be motivated to become actively involved in sporting activities and, as every Member of this House knows, there will always be a significant minority of people who will not be able to afford subscription services. That minority includes young people who will be increasingly denied access to the role that sport can play in the encouragement and development of skills.

I turn now to the issue of 'Must Carry'/'Must Offer'/'Easy Find'. The new charter establishes the BBC as a licence fee funded universal service. In future, however, cable or other delivery systems could start excluding BBC services if they wished to give more weight to commercial cable broadcasters. This would damage the BBC's standing as an universal broadcasters.

Over the next 10 years, as new distribution stems fragment the audience, the BBC's future as an universally available public service broadcaster will become increasingly dependent on its ability to reach audiences through all available distribution systems. This issue is not dealt with in the Bill, but I hope that the Minister will address it in winding up today's debate.

If all audiences are to be guaranteed access to core, licence-funded BBC services over the life of the corporation's new charter, the digital world will need to guarantee 'Must Carry' status to those channels on wire-based systems and 'Must Offer' status through satellite conditional access boxes. 'Must Carry' and 'Must Offer' regulations would ensure that, in the multi-channel environment, publicly funded channels were available as a matter of course via all delivery systems, and without the need for viewers to buy additional equipment. It is important for the Government also to recognise, just as the United States Government have now done, that public service networks must be given a prominent placing on any future electronic "programme navigation" system.

Much more will have to be said about these issues when the Broadcasting Bill comes to the House, but today's debate must not conclude without a clear response from the Government to the concerns they arouse, not only on both sides of the House, for happily this is not a party issue, but all across this country.

8.37 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris). He was right to say that many such issues are not party political. That is clear in the National Heritage Select Committee, where divisions of opinion are never on party lines.

We have the opportunity today to discuss the BBC agreement. Let us take a brief opportunity to look at the BBC as it exists at present. Some 95 per cent. of United Kingdom households watch or listen to the BBC for at least two hours a week. The average United Kingdom household watches or listens to BBC programmes for 48 hours a week. The BBC is the biggest producer of programmes in Europe, with half a million hours per year of home grown programmes on television and radio. BBC television broadcasts more than 13,000 hours of programmes in the United Kingdom every year.

However, nothing stands still. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) who said that technological advances ought to lead to the establishment of some form of communications commission—rather like the Federal Communications Commission in the United States—to examine all forms of electronic communication. In future there will be a

[Mr. Michael Fabricant]

greater overlap than exists at present between text, picture and other information which travels downline to computers, and what we know today as broadcast television. The two will become indistinguishable.

For that reason, I disagreed with my hon. Friend when he said that modern technology would lead to a licensing system for each television set and video recorder in the home. I argue that, by the time televisions and video recorders are fitted with such a device, it will become irrelevant. I am drawn more to the argument put by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman).

Mr. Maxton: The other right-winger.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman may refer to him in that way. The right hon. Gentleman said that the licensing position will become unsustainable—and it will. The BBC maintains that it will be able to hold on to about 30 per cent. of its audience in 10 years' time. I do not agree—not because of any fault on the part of the BBC, but because technology is changing and there will be a plethora of other broadcast as well as narrowcast media. In those circumstances, the BBC—or any other organisation—will be unable to retain a large chunk of the audience. For that reason, the right hon. Member for Gorton is correct: the licence fee will be unsustainable.

That fact was reflected in the report of the National Heritage Select Committee, which said that, although some hon. Members view privatising the BBC as a very attractive proposition, it would be impossible at present. The Committee heard evidence from representatives of Independent Television, Channel 4 and independent local radio stations. They said that, if the BBC were to try to raise even part of its £1.8 billion income from advertising, it would destroy existing commercial radio and television stations. That is absolutely correct.

With regard to transmission facilities, I am pleased to see that site sharing will continue—whether the BBC operates its transmitters or whether it is done through another privatised authority. That is tremendously important. One of the great advantages of terrestrial broadcasting in this country is that our transmission is broadcast on 625 lines and in PAL. That is far superior to the American system, which is broadcast on 525 lines in accordance with the National Television Standards Committee. The joke in the broadcasting industry is that NTSC stands for "never twice the same colour".

The French system is called SECAM and, apart from the French, it has been adopted only by the Algerians and the Russians. I am not sure what SECAM stands for in French, but in the broadcasting industry it is said to stand for "something essentially contrary to the American method". In this country we have the PAL system, which means not only "phase alternate line" but "peace at last". The point is that PAL and 625-line television is the best form of non-high-definition terrestrial transmission. It is made even better by the fact that, because of site sharing, one needs only one small UHF aerial directed at a single point to pick up all transmissions. I am pleased that site sharing will be maintained.

I flag the point that I made by way of intervention to the Secretary of State earlier today. I should be very disturbed if BBC television transmitters were sold lock, stock and barrel to National Transcommunications Ltd. There is nothing wrong with NTL—as I said earlier, it is a world leader in research and development in digital terrestrial and digital satellite transmission. I like to think that I was possibly the person who transformed the Independent Broadcasting Authority's engineering division—before it was privatised and became NTL—into a commercial operation.

At that time, I was running a company called MBI Broadcast Systems, which was based in Brighton. We had a factory in Cornwall and an assembly plant at a lovely village called Small Dole in Sussex. We tendered to build and design radio studios in Uganda, Indonesia and other countries. For the information of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton), BBC radio stations in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Inverness and Stornoway were equipped by my company before I sold it. That reminds me that I should declare an interest in the debate, as I have an ad hoc relationship with the BBC through a technical and marketing consultancy.

Although we supplied that equipment, we did not have expertise in studio-to-transmitter links. I approached the engineering division of the Independent Broadcasting Authority, which decided to enter into an arrangement with my company. It was decided that, if the company won the contract, the IBA would get a fee. We won the contract and the IBA received a fee—which I think was its first commercial venture before it was later privatised and became the NTL.

Rightly or wrongly, some ITV and independent local radio contractors argue that NTL's prices are a little high. They would be bound to say that. If there is to be competition, there must be at least a duopoly—the privatised BBC organisation competing against the NTL. As I said to the Secretary of State, whether or not there is a Monopolies and Mergers Commission, there should be an amendment to say that when the BBC transmission facilities are privatised they cannot be acquired by NTL.

Dr. Moonie: How does the hon. Gentleman propose to get a duopoly operating when the two organisations share 75 per cent. of the transmitters?

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman is incorrect. They do not share the transmitters: they share the transmitter sites. That is very different. They are two separate organisations and they rent from each other. I shall not bore the House with the mechanism by which the system operates at the moment. It is irrelevant whether the BBC transmission engineering department, which is based in Warwick, is owned by the BBC or whether it is a privatised organisation as it would continue to operate in the same way. However, it would be in competition when leasing out transmitter facilities at the transmitter sites.

The agreement is very brave in the way that it approaches the BBC digital multiplex. It would have been easy—and rather facile—to say that the digital multiplex could provide six, eight, 10 or 12 channels. There have been developments in the past few months and we know that as many as 16 or even 32 channels can be provided on one multiplex. It is good that the issue remains open.

It is also encouraging that the BBC is obliged to carry its existing terrestrial services on the digital satellite multiplex. The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) referred to the difficulty of receiving Radio 4 on long

wave. We should not forget that some parts of the country have difficulty receiving terrestrial BBC or ITV. That is a particular problem in Scotland and in Wales, where it is difficult to get universal coverage—although about 98 per cent. of the population is covered by terrestrial television.

I am also pleased that there is a commitment in the agreement to continue the BBC research and development department. I visited its headquarters at Kingswood Warren in Surrey only recently. The BBC is a world leader in television and radio research. I especially wish to commend the team who are working on a system called dynamic chromakey. If you thought "Jurassic Park" was good, Mr. Deputy Speaker, watch this space. Incidentally, the television and computer equipment which generated the graphics for "Jurassic Park" was made in Reading. Although Spielberg is based in the United States, much of the hardware for film, radio and television is manufactured in the United Kingdom and shipped out to the United States.

Many hon. Members have spoken about sporting facilities and listed events. The Labour party was rather cynical when it brought forward its recommendations in the House of Lords. The Labour party brought the question of sport into the debate very early, when the debate was really about developing digital technologies and other opportunities. A vote was forced even while there was consultation under way.

Dr. Moonie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fabricant: I shall not give way as I have been told to hurry up. I am sure that hon. Members will be heartened by the fact that I am dropping a lot of the pages of my speech on to the Bench.

The right hon. Member for Gorton was the only Member to mention another important point. The agreement is a fine document, but in my opinion much of it is unenforceable. It leaves many of the powers to the governors of the BBC. The governors are fine, decent, upstanding men and women, but I do not believe that that is enough. As with the Scott report, if I may mention that, justice must not only be done—it must be seen to be done.

I know, because I have friends in the corporation, that when people make complaints to the BBC they are treated very seriously, but the complainants do not always know that. We now have a golden opportunity. The National Heritage Select Committee has recommended that the Broadcasting Standards Council and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission be merged, and that will now be done. I am pleased that the Broadcasting Standards Commission will be formed, but it must also be made ultimately responsible for controlling the BBC. I know that no serious argument against that has been proposed in the Department of National Heritage, either by officials or by Ministers. One argument put forward concerns symmetry because the BBC already has a board of governors. That is nonsense because the Independent Television Commission supervises ITV and the Radio Authority supervises independent radio. Yet we still say that the Broadcasting Standards Commission should be a last resort for complaints. The same should apply to the BBC.

At the moment, the Broadcasting Standards Council considers matters of taste and any viewer can make a complaint. The Broadcasting Complaints Commission deals with unfairness, but a particular viewer must make a complaint. The situation should be widened so that the Broadcasting Standards Commission not only considers both areas but anybody can make a complaint. The tired old argument from the civil service that the new body will be flooded with complaints is fatuous and non-philosophical. The body that deals with newspapers was not flooded with complaints, although newspapers are far greater offenders than the BBC or ITV or independent local radio.

I shall sit down now—red in the face, but confident that my hon. Friend the Minister is not like the Labour party which, like the Trustees Savings Bank, likes to say yes, but like the Midland Bank, which likes to listen.

8.58 pm

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): I wish to make some quick points about the Scottish situation. I found the Secretary of State's response on regional television extremely unconvincing. If she intends that one BBC channel should have a regional element and the other not, that is how the clause should be written.

I agree with my hon. Friends the Members for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) and for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) about Radio Nan Gaidheal. I also agree with what has been said about the Scottish Broadcasting Council and the need to revise and make the council's powers much clearer. I am not happy about the governors appointing the council. Although it has been said that they will consult various organisations, the charter does not actually state that—and I believe that it should.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy will agree that once we have a Scottish Parliament, after the next general election, we shall expect the Scottish Parliament to have a say in the appointment of the council. I also expect it to have a major say in the appointment of the national governor for Scotland. It is totally wrong to have a national governor for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland, but not for England. There should be a governor appointed as the national governor for England in addition to the other governors. Otherwise, the implication is that all the governors are English governors and the national governors are tagged on at the end. That is not right.

On the question of sport, there is an argument which says that sporting bodies have an absolute right to market their sport for the maximum price that they can get from television. That is a perfectly valid argument. However, if that happens, the sporting bodies cannot turn round and say to Parliament and the Government that they want money from the taxpayers to fund their sports. They cannot have it both ways. They cannot take enormous sums from BSkyB and show their sports to only a tiny section of the community and then expect the rest of the community to fund their sports through the lottery or the tax system. If the taxpayers fund sport, they are entitled to a say in how that sport is shown on television. The solution is as simple as that, and we must endorse it.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) made an important point. It is extremely sad that Members on both sides of the House have talked about the next 10 years being the last 10 years of the BBC and, however good we think it is, we are looking at its end. The BBC is the best broadcasting company in the world. I have 60 channels on my cable at

[Mr. John Maxton]

home and I spend 95 per cent. of my watching time, which may be limited, watching BBC. I very rarely watch cable; if I do, I watch old films, sport or, of course, old BBC programmes which are regurgitated by the cable companies.

The BBC is best. If one wants to watch good television in the United States, one tunes to the public service channels, which broadcast BBC programmes. They show ITV as well, but those programmes are good because of the quality of the BBC. Our job is not to destroy a national asset over the next 10 years, but to preserve it. That is the job of any responsible person who believes in the future of broadcasting.

Everyone accepts that there will be major technological change. My wife, children and friends would say that I am a techno-nut. I am the person in our house who knows how to work the computer and video—it is not the kids. I go for every gimmick and gizmo that comes out: I love them—I think that they are wonderful. However, people confuse the development of technology with its accessibility and use, which are on a much longer time scale. There are people in this country who, because they cannot afford anything else, still watch the black and white television that they bought 30 years ago. Some parts of the country cannot receive NICAM transmissions. Other rapid technological developments will take time to be taken up. The consumer will say, "I can see that the picture is a bit better, and I accept that I could receive 200 channels—but that will cost me £300 or £400 a year; I may also have to pay monthly for the channels that I want, and I am not prepared to pay that much." The time scale will be longer even than 10 years before terrestrial television as we know it disappears completely. Many people, particularly poorer members of society, will continue to require it.

I disagree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton about the licence fee, when he questions why poor people should pay it. It will be poorer people who will continue to watch BBC terrestrial channels. I disagree also with my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy because I do not think that it is right to impose a five-year limit on the fee: it should last 10 years—for the full period of the charter—and be renewable thereafter. One thinks of the quality of the BBC in terms of its public service commitment and of the entertainment and drama that it produces—not just series such as "Pride and Prejudice", but "A Mug's Game", "All Creatures Great and Small" and "Last of the Summer Wine".

Mr. Fabricant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maxton: I would rather not. I have only two minutes left.

One cannot separate the BBC's high quality programming from the licence fee. The two are inseparable. Independent funding that has nothing to do with the marketplace allows the BBC to concentrate on quality programming, rather than on selling itself in the marketplace—as it would have to do, if it relied on the market for funding. Get rid of the licence fee and you get rid of the BBC and the high quality entertainment to which not only this country has become accustomed but which increasingly perceptive audiences in the United States, Australia, New Zealand and other English-speaking countries want. The BBC must retain a funding system, such as a licence fee, in one form or another, although there may be different methods, as the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) suggested.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton that it was a mistake not to allow BT to be a broadcaster, and that we ought to combine the BBC and BT into a broadcasting company. The difference between us is that my right hon. Friend sees such a venture as being in the private sector, whereas I see it in the public sector.

Mr. Fabricant: Old Labour.

Mr. Maxton: Absolutely.

9.4 pm

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I will impose a ten-minute rule on my speech.

Mr. Maxton: Less now.

Mr. Thompson: Then I shall have to impose an eight-minute rule. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak, albeit briefly.

Earlier, it was said that the subject of the debate does not appear to follow party lines. I found myself agreeing with part of almost every speech. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) will be astonished to know that I was able to agree with him and, at the same time, with the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), although I am not sure how that was achieved. It makes the point, however, that this debate has not been conducted along party lines. As time has gone on, I have realised that the key word is the "agreement"—on which we are voting tonight, if I understand it correctly—between the Government and the BBC, but we are allowed also to comment on the draft charter.

One thing has disturbed me—I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to assure me on this. I will support the motion with a little reluctance because I have the feeling that there will be no change in the draft as a result of the debate. If we have open government—if that is not an issue today, what is—it is important that the Government listen to such debates.

Irrespective of the time that I have to make any points, hon. Members have made many good points, with many of which I, as a non-expert, agree. My first plea to my hon. Friend the Minister, and to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is that they assure the House that it will be possible to amend the charter as a result of those good points, even though, in statutory terms, that does not have to happen.

I want to refer to two issues. One was raised indirectly by the hon. Member for Cathcart when he referred to the Scottish Broadcasting Council. As I made clear in an intervention on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, I am concerned about local consultation.

One of the reasons why I wanted to speak in the debate even though I am not a member of the Select Committee on National Heritage is that, in the longer term, the media and communications are the issues confronting the country. All hon. Members have strong views about the

media because we deal with or run away from them so much—we either confront them or not, but they are the issue. Therefore, although we are discussing only the BBC, the question of the media is vital to Parliament. That is my other excuse for wanting to participate in the debate.

In my early years, I was brought up in Writtle in Essex and I therefore have a link with the BBC. It may be in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale).

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): Not quite, but it is close.

Mr. Thompson: Very close. I was born in Writtle, which has a link with Marconi, with the BBC and with Freddie Grisewood. I am old enough to remember him. I am not sure how many other hon. Members do. I get enthusiastic about such characters. I was brought up with the great BBC tradition and the fantastic reputation that it had over the years, and still has. If I make some critical comments, as some of my colleagues have done, that should not override the BBC's good reputation down the years. That shows the wisdom of the people involved in it from 1926, when it all began.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) spoke about local radio and television. I support his remarks. More resources should go into that. We have our own local station, BBC Radio Norfolk, which does a good job with its talk shows and with interacting with the public. I pay tribute to local radio and television stations.

We are debating the draft charter and the agreement. Listen though I might, it has been difficult to tie the debate to those agreements. I have read them. I am not a lawyer and, after 12 years in Parliament, I am as baffled by the language of these things as I was 12 years ago. I agree with the comment on that subject. I have no idea whether all this is enforceable.

The charter and, I think, the agreement talk about the BBC being an independent public service. I support hon. Members who have said that the BBC must maintain its independence. That is important.

I support those who say that the public service element is vital to any debate about the BBC—that is where I found myself sympathising with a great deal that was said by the right hon. Member for Gorton. It is all very well to write the public service into the charter, or into the agreement, but we are not debating that element of the BBC. Until the 1970s, we all knew what was meant by public service. We then had the Annan report, which was the beginning of liberal pluralism. I do not have time to develop that theme. However, for those hon. Members who are interested, I recommend a book written by James Curran and Jean Seaton entitled "Power without Responsibility". Liberal pluralism is still with us, and it means that broadcasting should cater for a full range of groups and interests in society, rather than offer moral leadership. That debate has not yet been resolved.

Because of the time constraints, I shall not embark on the section of my speech that deals with moral leadership. If I had, I might have been tempted to talk about the Church of England, the family, politicians and the Nolan report. We must continue the debate about public service. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet has pointed out, these days high standards do not always prevail in journalism. I support everything that he said in that regard. It is a problem and we shall have to talk about it—I note that no one is sitting in the Press Gallery—until people sit up and take notice.

I refer briefly to the issue that I raised with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State at the beginning of my speech: the local consultation process. I support the concerns that have been expressed by various speakers, but we seem to have national councils for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and regional advisory committees for England. I do not think any work has been done on this: someone has forgotten to get it right. It is deliberate Government policy—I hope that my hon. Friend can give a good explanation for it. We currently have a perfectly good English Regional Forum, but it is not in the charter or in the agreement. The local radio advisory councils—perhaps they should include television, but that is a pedantic point—should be in the charter because they are doing magnificently good work. I know of people who serve on those bodies.

My hon. Friend will know the arguments because they have been debated in the other place and they have been referred to tonight. I have not been reassured by the debate. The Government are doing a good job in relation to the media generally—I am happy about the Broadcasting Bill and about a great deal else that they are doing. However, the charter and the agreement are not being done properly.

I hope my hon. Friend will reassure me on the question of local accountability and local consultation, because I am not satisfied on that point. I also hope that he will reassure us that the points that we have made will be considered and, if necessary, the charter will be redrafted.

9.13 pm

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth and Kinross): A number of hon. Members have mentioned Scotland in passing. I shall address the extent to which the BBC is currently meeting—or not meeting—the needs of Scottish listeners and viewers. A number of obvious fundamental truths emerge when we look at it from this perspective. I shall start with centralism in the BBC, which has been mentioned. The BBC is essentially a deeply centralist organisation. For example, before the White Paper was published, the BBC centralised control of its technical resources in a London-based resources department. That took no account of the different circumstances facing Scotland and Northern Ireland, where access to resources outside those of the BBC is somewhat different from that of London. The result of that exercise was the closure of BBC Scotland's design, wardrobe and make-up departments, with a loss of more than 80 jobs—and, equally importantly, the loss of a significant resource base.

Most of my criticisms tonight will be directed more at the central body of the BBC than at its outlying organisations. At present, the BBC makes only 3 per cent. of its programmes in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—areas inhabited by 17 per cent. of the United Kingdom population. I know that the Government have recognised that as a problem, but thus far nothing concrete has been done to redress the balance. The BBC has promised that broadly one third of its programmes will be made outside London. That is a shallow promise, since various categories of programming—news, parliamentary reports and sport—are excluded.

[Ms Roseanna Cunningham]

The net result is that only an extra six hours a week of television programmes will be made outside London, taking the network contribution of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland from 3 to 4.2 per cent.—not a remarkable improvement.

When attempts at decentralisation are made, they often fall foul of the deeply ingrained southern-centred management. The Derek Jameson show on Radio 2 relocated to Glasgow, but only in so far as the principals of production and presentation commute by shuttle. That is not what most people would regard as real decentralisation.

At this point I should remind the House, in case anyone is unaware of it, that the BBC raises more in licence fees in Scotland than it spends there—dare I say it, a form of tartan tax. I note that clause 2.2(a), already mentioned several times this evening, of the BBC agreement says that the two television services may include regional variations. I would certainly echo the view of others that the word "may" should be altered to "must" or "shall".

Notwithstanding the Secretary of State's assurances given in the House, she must know that what will be held in law to be binding will be what is in the agreement, not what has been said here. Ultimately, what is said here is regarded as fairly irrelevant in any court. If that is not true of the English courts, it is certainly true in the Scottish courts.

The centralisation of the BBC gives serious cause for concern in the important sphere of news and current affairs. At present, 97 per cent. of news and current affairs seen on the BBC in Scotland comes from London, where there is clearly a great struggle to come to terms with the four-party system that has operated in Scotland for almost 30 years. That is not to mention the apparent ignorance of—or possibly deliberate indifference to—the fact that in Scotland local elections frequently take place at different times from English ones—hence the debacle of the "Panorama" row last year, which resulted in the BBC being interdicted by a Scottish court. In London, it has probably been forgotten that Scotland has a different legal system too.

While I am on the subject of ignorance, I might also point out that clause 2.2(c) says that the BBC will provide one sound service in Scotland. Which service will that be—Radio Scotland or Radio nan Gaidheal? Or did someone forget that there are two services in Scotland? Perhaps, on the other hand, this is laying the ground for a future change of policy at the BBC. The difficulty for the Secretary of State is that what is actually said in the agreement is what will be relied on in future.

Under the current charter, the national broadcasting councils have a policy control function, but under the new charter their powers are redefined as "to advise and assist". This is yet another centralising move that effectively takes power out of the hands of broadcasting councils and gives it to the governors. As the governors also have the power to appoint the broadcasting councils, I am afraid that the suspicion arises that this move is intended to remove the possibility of any radical voice being raised. It also confirms the governors' power over those councils.

I support the recommendation of the Broadcasting for Scotland campaign that three things should be included in the charter. First, a completely independent selection panel for appointments should be established in Scotland, and, indeed, there should be panels for Wales and for Northern Ireland. Secondly, broadcasting councils should be given the right to initiate a strategy and determine policy and objectives within each of their countries. Thirdly, broadcasting councils should have a duty to inform audiences in their country of BBC policy and it effects. England should have its own broadcasting council as well.

In the slightly longer term, no successful broadcasting company can operate without the control of its own schedule and finances. Until that happens, BBC Scotland will struggle to represent honestly the Scottish viewer and listener—not only in Scotland but in the wider world. Speaking as one listener of Radio Scotland who rates it very highly, I feel that some of the doom and gloom of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) about the radio services in the United Kingdom might be moderated if he were lucky enough to live within transmission range of Radio Scotland, which clearly he is not.

I understand that the BBC's motto is that nation should speak unto nation. The UK is not one nation but several. I want the voice of Scotland to be truly heard.

Mr. Maxton: The hon. Lady represents the Scottish National party, which believes in Scotland becoming an independent nation. Does she therefore believe that Scotland should have a separate broadcasting corporation from the BBC?

Ms Cunningham: Frankly, I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should doubt that that is what we want. Of course we do. I see that some hon. Members are smiling. I wonder whether they would smile at or mock so much other small countries with their own broadcasting capabilities such as Ireland and Denmark.

BBC Scotland has excellent staff and it retains the vestiges of audience loyalty, which may, for all I know, be disappearing in other parts of the United Kingdom. I insist that it needs management, financial and scheduling autonomy. Those demands for autonomy are shared by a wide range of groups in Scotland, which is by no means confined to those of my political persuasion.

Three immediate changes would assist that desired autonomy. First, the BBC news and current affairs could agree to BBC Scotland having its own 6 o'clock news, taking only what it wants, and indeed only what is relevant or of interest, from the London-based service, and ignoring what is irrelevant. It is not parochial to say that much of what we see on the 6 o'clock news is news for south of England viewers.

Secondly, BBC Scotland could empower the controller of Scotland to schedule and finance his own operation from licence fees. Thirdly, the Scottish national governor could be given power to have an effective governing body, nominated from Scotland and with effective control of BBC Scotland's policy. BBC Scotland should be allowed to serve those whom it understands best in the way that best suits them.

Obviously, from my point of view, only independence can provide the ultimate and best solution. In the interim, profound change is needed, but there is no sign of it in the flawed charter and agreement, which seem only to be attempting to reassert London's control.

9.23 pm

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): I have listened carefully to the debate and I thank those who spoke immediately before me for shortening their remarks in order to give me an opportunity to participate. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), I found something in almost every speech with which I could agree, but I did not expect that the speech with which I would most agree would be that of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman).

I suspect that there is almost universal agreement among hon. Members that we are fortunate because our television companies produce some of the finest programmes in the world. The standard by which they are judged was set by the BBC and it remains the case that the quality of television around the world is judged against the benchmark set by the BBC. That is not to say that the BBC is beyond criticism—and I intend to say one or two critical words. Nor is it automatically true, as the BBC sometimes appears to think, that the licence fee is a bargain no matter what level it is set at, but it would not be right if I did not make it clear that I am an admirer, and regular viewer and listener, of the BBC.

Some have argued in the past that the BBC should be forced to earn its living in the private sector in the same way as many other state-owned companies have been forced to do. My support for the principle of privatisation is second to none. I strongly believe that it is not the business of government to own and attempt to run commercial enterprises engaged in the supply of products for consumers, be they television programmes, motor cars or telecommunications, but the BBC is primarily not a commercial body. Its remit is not to make a profit come what may, but to broadcast public service programmes. The yardstick by which it should be judged should not be popularity, but quality. Its objective should be to expand the choice available to the viewer and listener beyond that which has mass popular appeal. That can be the only justification for a state-owned and publicly subsidised broadcasting company.

The company should concentrate on providing programmes that would not be available on commercial channels; it must genuinely be a public service broadcaster. Some might think that that is not an especially controversial view—indeed, some might regard it as a statement of the obvious. It is not. Many in the BBC regard it as absolutely heresy. They have been brought up in the belief that the BBC has to offer something for everybody and that it can justify the licence fee only by ensuring that all those who own a television set find something in the BBC schedules that they want to watch or listen to.

The result is that award-winning dramas and documentaries are interspersed with soaps and game shows. "Panorama" and "Middlemarch" share a channel with "Neighbours" and "Pets Win Prizes". I believe that the view of many in the BBC is deeply flawed. Public subsidy is legitimate if it is used to broaden choice through the purchase and production of programmes that are not obviously popular. Public subsidy should not be used to finance a ratings war with ITV.

I am not, of course, saying that the BBC should set out deliberately to broadcast programmes that the majority will not wish to watch, but its focus should be on its public service obligation and not on beating the competition. Sadly, all too often, the reverse has been the case. Every year, we have seen the BBC and ITV trying to outbid each other for the Hollywood blockbuster that will enable one of them to win the battle for Christmas day. Perhaps the best example was the competition for the right to screen the result of the national lottery. Using licence fee payers' money, the BBC was determined to secure the rights, no matter what the cost. It is difficult to see how that fits the description of public service broadcasting, especially as there can be no doubt of ITV's willingness to screen the result if it had not been outbid.

The schizophrenia is not confined to BBC television; it is just as great in BBC radio. When Radio 3 was the only national classical musical station, it was right to concentrate on the more popular classical pieces, but Classic FM has proved that a station offering Beethoven and Elgar rather than Tippett and Schoenberg can operate commercially without public subsidy. As a result, Radio 3 should not try to compete with Classic FM, but concentrate on lesser-known works and more difficult composers who would otherwise never be heard.

The same point applies equally strongly to Radio 1. In London and the south-east, commercial channels offering popular music now include Capital, Capital Gold, Heart, Virgin, Country, Kiss FM, Jazz FM and many more. Outside London, there are numerous local stations. As each one came on air, it was inevitable that Radio 1's audience would decline, but, despite the editorials in *The Sun*, that should not be a cause of criticism or concern. Instead, it allows Radio 1 to offer a platform for new bands and other forms of popular music, such as acid house, rap and heavy metal. [*Laughter.*] I am not declaring an interest.

In both radio and television, spectrum scarcity and the consequent limitation on the number of channels have meant that the BBC has had to take account of mass popular taste and audience demands but, with the advent of satellite and cable, with a fifth terrestrial channel in sight and with the prospect of an explosion of choice, the BBC must concentrate more and more on its prime responsibility—public service broadcasting. If it does not, but wants to compete for ratings like everyone else, it should do so on an equal basis with the private sector.

The second issue that I should like to mention is that of political bias. I welcome the fact that the new agreement incorporates the section on impartiality in the Broadcasting Act 1990. It is clearly sensible that the BBC should be bound by the same provisions as Channel 4 and the ITV companies, but I am still concerned about how that provision can be enforced.

It is easy for politicians to complain when they feel that a story on the "Today" programme has been unfair or unbalanced. News and current affairs must remain balanced and impartial because broadcasters know that Central Office and Walworth road will be timing politicians, to the very second, to ensure that coverage is fair. I am concerned that bias is present in other spheres of programming that is more insidious and, therefore, more damaging.

I had intended to give examples but, unfortunately, time does not permit me to do so. I shall just say that I welcome the provision in the new agreement to extend the requirement of impartiality, but I have some cause for concern because the agreement states:

"The Corporation shall:—

[Mr. John Whittingdale]

(a) draw up, and from time to time review, a code giving guidance as to the rules".

I had hoped that the rules would be clear, but we have instead an agreement that talks about a code giving guidance as to the rules. That sounds far too imprecise to me. My first hope is that, as soon as a code is drawn up, it will be placed in the Library so that we can scrutinise it, preferably in good time before the House debates the Broadcasting Bill.

I have had one or two words of criticism of the BBC, but I shall end by repeating that I believe that it is one of the finest broadcasting organisations in the world and that its strengths are many. My aim is to ensure that its present high standards are maintained.

9.31 pm

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): This has been a welcome and interesting, if short, debate on which there has been considerable agreement among hon. Members about some aspects of the BBC. The BBC is an extremely important part of our national life and our media, and it is crucial to the quality and the range of public debate. According to an Independent Television Commission survey, probably more than 70 per cent. of people use it as their main source of international information. It is important to our cultural life and as our voice abroad. The BBC is also present in an expanding area of the world's economy, and it is important to the economy of this country.

There is general agreement on those aspects of the BBC, and the Secretary of State made many of those points. We welcome that, but in the past few years the Government have had a funny way of showing the support and enthusiasm for the BBC that the Secretary of State mentioned. I welcome what I took to be her conversion, because every year in the past few years the Government have cut funding to the BBC and to the World Service, and it has happened again this year.

The Government have squeezed the editorial staff of the BBC and raided the offices of BBC Scotland to seize the Zircon tapes. There has been a general hostility, if not scepticism, from the Government and from many Conservative Members. If the Secretary of State has had a conversion and has a new attitude towards the BBC, we welcome that. This debate is a good test of the quality of the new charter and of the genuineness of the Government's avowed enthusiasm for the BBC.

The Government must accept some of the dissatisfaction that hon. Members have expressed about the status of this debate. The Secretary of State said outside the House that she will take hon. Members' views on the charter into account. Some hon. Members have also quoted the letter of the chairman of the BBC, Marmaduke Hussey, in which he made it clear that the Government have said that the charter is unamendable.

The two statements cannot be reconciled. If the charter is unamendable, the views expressed by hon. Members in this debate will not be taken into account, which tends to reduce its significance and importance. The Minister may say—he may give an assurance—that at least the BBC, in its ability to amend its statement of pledges and contract with the public, will take into account the views of hon. Members. That would be welcome, but the Government have made it clear that they will not take into account those views in the wording of the charter, and they have not put themselves in a position to do so.

As hon. Members of all parties have said, these are important matters because we are entering an important period—one of new competitors, cable television and, from next year, Channel 5. Alongside new technologies there will be changes in society. They will be very important years for broadcasting, and we must get things right. Unless we have the right structure, the right charter and, especially, the right quality of programmes, we shall not be able to respond to those changes.

Much has been said about the quality of programmes. In view of the debate in another place a few weeks ago, there has inevitably been much reference to the significance of listed events. This may be a small issue, but it is a resonant one and it reveals the balance between the involvement of the BBC, the market and the pricing of programmes that have to be bought in.

I hope that the Minister of State will tell the House whether the Government intend to accept the will and intention of the other place, if not the exact wording of the relevant amendment. Most of us agree that the amendment was not perfectly drafted—my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) said that—but I hope that the Minister will say that the Government intend to find a way to amend the Broadcasting Bill themselves. Will they withdraw their previous statements, given to my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) and others, that this is simply a matter for market forces? It clearly is not, and I hope that the Minister will make it clear that the Government recognise that fact.

When the Government draft a better amendment, perhaps they will consider the experience of a country such as Australia, which has handled the matter much more successfully, wittily and constructively. There are other ways to reconcile the market and the public interest. The Government still have a little time—but not much—to come up with an Australian-type model or some other solution.

Behind much of today's debate lay the question of public service broadcasting and what we mean by it. The hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) discussed it. What we mean by public broadcasting is a difficult topic and it changes over time. There are tensions between the size of audience, the size of public investment and the quality and popularity of programmes.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton is right to say that a public broadcaster, receiving money from taxpayers and licence payers, must be a generalist broadcaster and be as concerned with high quality in popular entertainment, comedy, soaps or game shows—there is a big difference between the best of those and the lazy, sloppy and unthinking ones—as it is with high quality in the specialist programmes.

The hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale) made an interesting speech. It was good to hear from the Conservative Benches an intelligent speaker making a clear statement in favour of what the BBC can contribute to specialist broadcasting. I believe, however, that he was wrong to push it so far and to say that that was to the exclusion of a more populist and generalist approach. The two can be reconciled. There is

room in an organisation such as the BBC—in its national, regional and local programming—to supply the specialist needs, which the hon. Gentleman rightly said are important, and to show a wide range of the highest quality popular entertainment programmes. That is not a contradiction, and it cannot afford to be. I believe that the BBC now understands that, and it is important that it should.

There are other ways of testing public service broadcasting. We have not yet dealt thoroughly with the BBC's contribution to education. Most of us think that we are lagging behind our competitors. There will be an enormous premium on skills for the next generation, and the contribution of the BBC, as the universal broadcaster, will be crucial. The right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) rightly alluded to that fact.

The Government must acknowledge the fact that education investment for the BBC is going down. Next year, new television education programmes are to be cut by 20 per cent., from 113 hours to 90 hours, and new radio education programmes are to be cut by 37 per cent., from 144 hours to 88. For night-time schools transmissions, new programmes are to be cut from 37 hours to a ridiculous five hours.

Can the Government and the BBC be serious about our universal national broadcaster contributing to skills and quality? They are missing something if we are to cut the hours of educational broadcasting. That is wrong. Will the Minister answer my questions tonight, and respond to the education debate? He must realise that there is something seriously wrong.

The Minister must also realise that serious reservations have been expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House about regionalism. The right hon. Member for Conwy rightly drew the distinction between the words "may" and "shall". Although he raised the issue, he was rather easily satisfied on the point, and backed off rather quickly.

The hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale), in a different way, raised other real problems concerning the genuineness of regionalism, which my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) also questioned. It is no good taking a broadcaster to Manchester from London to do a programme. That is not regional broadcasting.

The figures cited by the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) were stark and correct, and they bear repetition—85 per cent. of network programmes are still made in London. The BBC says that it is serious about regionalism and about Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but that figure shows that something is wrong.

It is ridiculous that, although 17 per cent. of the population live and pay their licence fees in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, only 3 per cent. of programmes are made there. There may not have to be an exact correlation between the two, but that is too great a discrepancy. The people of our islands who live in those nations have a right to be aggrieved.

The extremely imprecise commitment that the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross mentioned—that broadly one third of programmes are to be made in the regions—is not good enough for a universal national service. What do the Government intend to do about it? Will the Minister of State make a note, and respond to that question? Is he satisfied with the speed, the commitment and the genuineness of the BBC's move towards regionalism?

Something else that we have not talked about tonight, which constitutes an equally good test of the quality of public service broadcasting, is the World Service. Everybody agrees that it is a jewel, and a huge international influence, but if that is so, why have the Government cut its funding? The Voice of America and Radio Moscow are our competitors. If the Government are serious about getting our voice across in the developing world, cutting the funding makes no sense.

That is not simply a cultural matter but has economic repercussions. We get contracts where our voice is clear and strong and our influence is felt. The Government are fools to themselves to cut investment in the voice of Britain abroad, and a service for which we are trusted and known throughout the world. What they are doing is crazy.

The universal service is also reflected in the quality and range of public involvement in the charter and in the actions of the BBC. We have not paid enough attention to that. The present situation is far from satisfactory, so I hope that the Minister will answer a few of the following questions.

Why has the BBC abolished the General Advisory Council? Why is it merging the regional advisory councils with the radio councils? We do not yet know how many regions there will be. The Minister of State said a year ago in the House that there would be 10, but that has not yet been confirmed. Is that the right figure? If not, how many will there be? What will their role be, and what is to be the role of the English National Forum?

I repeat the question that my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy asked: why are the members of the national broadcasting councils to be chosen by the governors and not, as in the past, by the General Advisory Council? As the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross rightly said, that is a different form of centralisation, and is undesirable and unwelcome. The BBC is a public corporation, and it should be seen to be involving and responding to the public. One way of doing that is through the advisory structures, but the tentacles through which the BBC can listen formally to the public are being slimmed down. That cannot be right. The structural changes mean that it will listen less. Hon. Members, regardless of their political persuasion, will not consider that satisfactory or desirable.

Hon. Members agree that broadcasting is entering a new age and that society is changing. In both respects, the charter, though welcome, is modest or even timid. It is fine as far as it goes, but it is not likely to last. Is it really the framework for the broadcasting future? How will it respond to change when we are settling the agreement before we have settled other broadcasting structures in the Broadcasting Bill? It is being done the wrong way around. How will the agreement respond to new commercial structures when there is no review of the capital structures? If the BBC is to be expected to live in a more commercial world, that makes so sense. It is ridiculous that we should not even discuss the restrictions on borrowing, which will remain as they are.

Why, if the BBC is going into a new broadcasting world, will it do so with fewer skills? It is reducing, and has reduced dramatically, its investment in training. What

[Mr. Mark Fisher]

other employer entering a new technological world would slash its training as the Government have forced it to do over the past few years?

Will the charter be responsive to a changing society? Our society is changing its views on our nations, the regions and our identity. We are more multi-cultural than we were when the previous charter was written. We are falling behind on education and training. Those are big social changes and none is reflected positively in the charter.

We welcome the charter because, at times, it has seemed that it might have been a lot worse, but the Government must demonstrate tonight and over the next few months that they are not complacent and that they will take an intelligent and imaginative view. There are questions to answer and the Government must demonstrate the commitment and support that they have said that they will give. If they do not, the BBC is not, as it should be, safe in their hands.

9.46 pm

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I welcome the support that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) gave in the midst of the qualifications with which he rounded off his speech. I appreciate the general support, and some qualifications and criticisms, from both sides of the House. In the short time left, I shall answer as many points I can. I do not object to having only a short time to answer, because it is important that as many hon. Members as possible should contribute to such an important debate.

I shall start with the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), who made a point that was also raised by the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie)—that is the fifth different pronunciation of the name of his constituency that he has had to suffer. They asked about the status of the documents that we are considering.

The first, the royal charter, is not amendable by either House of Parliament, but had any criticism of deep substance or a proposal for change emerged in the other place or from tonight's debate, it would have been possible for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to include it in the charter. We shall consider what has been said about the charter—I shall come to the agreement in a second—and decide whether any changes should be made.

As regards the agreement, there is a most extraordinary parliamentary convention, which I must admit makes sense to me thanks only to the good offices of the House. When the agreement was debated in the other place, it was a draft agreement, but it could not have come back to this House under Standing Order No. 55 as a draft agreement. It had to come back as an agreement or contract and a contract has to be signed. It was therefore signed a week after the debate in the other place. It came back to this House in a state where an amendment could have been put down, but it would have been up to my right hon. Friend and me to take it away again and bring it back to the House. It is a peculiar status. We shall consider that and decide whether there is anything that would justify the House being asked again to run through this interesting debate, which is itself the end of many other debates such as those on the White Paper. Anyway, that was really just to help the House.

I thank the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy for the real courtesy with which he always puts his points. It is much appreciated on Government Benches. He rightly discussed the changing landscape of broadcasting. That is what is behind everything that we are debating and discussing tonight. It is indeed changing. As the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said, we are not having the licence fee for the full 10 years of the charter, but merely for five years because things may change so much that it would not make sense.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) mentioned the tremendous changes in technology—in a technological passage of which I could not understand the detail, although the strategy was very clear—saying that, within a few years, one could find out whether anyone was using a video recorder or a television set.

The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy mentioned the important matter of television sporting rights. The House will understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State put forward the document "Informing the Debate" precisely because we want a debate, we want it to be informed, and we want to discuss the matter when the Broadcasting Bill returns to the House.

I heard the arguments with no surprise, because they have been aired many times, not least between the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) and myself. I told him on 20 November that I wanted the matter to be discussed during the passage of the Broadcasting Bill, which is the proper place to discuss it. That is what I said and that is what will happen. As everyone who has the interests of sport at heart will realise, there are important arguments. People who have been used to watching sport "free-to-air" want to go on doing so. On the other hand, the sports governing bodies get a tremendous amount of money from television—90 per cent. of funding for cricket, I think. Of the 32 rugby league clubs, 26 are pretty well insolvent. If it were not for the money that comes from television, they would be in a serious position. A difficult series of arguments have to be balanced.

Mr. Hawkins: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Sproat: No, if my hon. Friend will excuse me. He is as knowledgeable as anyone in the House on the matter, but I have only nine minutes in which to wind up the debate. I pay tribute, however, to the assiduousness with which he has pursued his views on the matter.

A number of hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) and the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy, mentioned the English regions and the English National Forum. We are suggesting this to the BBC: we believe that it should be independent and independence means that one does not tell it what to do all the time. As far as the English regions are concerned, we believe that it is right to go that far down the road of saying, "Here is the way in which we think you ought to structure it." There is an English National Forum, and if the BBC in its wisdom decides that it wants to keep it as a kind of equivalent to the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland national councils, it

may do so. If it wants to keep the radio councils, as my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North wishes to do—

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Sproat: If my hon. Friend will excuse me, I have only a few minutes and he has made his argument powerfully. The BBC can keep the radio councils if it wants. That is what independence means and that is why we did it.

On the appointment of the new chairman, Sir Christopher Bland, I fully understand that the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy did not impeach or impugn his neutrality. I am sure that most hon. Members understand perfectly well that Sir Christopher will be absolutely apolitical as chairman of the BBC. A number of hon. Members made the criticism that we should somehow have consulted the Labour or the Liberal Democrat parties and that it was discourteous of us not to do so. The fact of the matter is—I checked this out—that the appointment of the chairman of the BBC has never been the subject of consultation. I do not necessarily rest my argument on that as a matter of principle, but it is certainly a matter of practice.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts), who probably has more experience in these matters than anyone else in the House, spoke from that deep experience; he spoke powerfully of the importance of regionalism. All that I can say without going into details is that we entirely agree and there is nothing in the agreement or the charter to prevent the BBC from doing exactly what my right hon. Friend wants. When the statement of pledges is finally produced, I hope that there will be pledges covering many of his points.

We already have an outline statement of pledges—I totted them up and there are currently about 88. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I do not regard those as sufficiently specific—they are not yet good enough—but we expect the BBC to come forward with specific pledges. One of the most important duties of the governors, which has been made specific for the first time in the charter and the agreement, will be to monitor the situation—and I do not mean monitor and then do nothing. In the annual report or another similar document, they will say, "Here is what we promised last year; here is what has happened over the previous 12 months. We have succeeded or we have failed—if we have failed, here is how we shall put matters right." There will be an increase in accountability—we must see how it works. I hope that all hon. Members will accept that it is a powerful new way of pinning down the BBC.

I know that many hon. Members in the debate have said that many splendid promises are being made and there are good intentions and aspirations, but they have questioned whether they can be guaranteed to happen. They cannot be guaranteed, but if the BBC says, "Here is what we intend to do," at the beginning of the year and "Here is what we have done," at the end of the year, viewers and listeners, as well as Members of the House, will be able to see exactly what the BBC has achieved.

The right hon. Member for Gorton said that he feared that the BBC was becoming just another broadcasting company without much distinction from any other commercial broadcasting company. I agree with him to the extent that that must not be allowed to happen. The BBC's first duty is to be a public service broadcaster. I accept entirely the right hon. Gentleman's slightly visionary—I use the word in an admiring sense—and accurate view of the future. I remember that that view appeared, valuably, in the first paragraphs of the Select Committee report. We are entering into a new world of commercialisation and the BBC can benefit greatly from commercialisation. From memory, I recall that it currently generates £300 million a year from its videos, books, magazines, merchandising and cassettes. With BBC World, BBC Prime and the joint ventures that are to come, much more money can be invested in the public service broadcasting side of the BBC.

I agree that in any such accountancy transactions, there will always be matters of transparency, which must be rigorously audited—they will be. For the first time, a strict requirement has been placed on the BBC governors to ensure that that auditing is right, transparent and accurate—they have the legal responsibility for it. Hon. Members may say that the governors have always had that responsibility in one sense. Yes, in one sense they have, but we are nailing it down for the first time. Incidentally, it is the first time that the independence of the BBC has appeared in the charter; we have always assumed it, but now we are going to make it an imperative.

In an extremely powerful and well-informed speech, my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) criticised some of the BBC's editorial practices. He gave the absolutely shocking example of when one of his questions was transposed in a programme, so that it became the question to another answer. In the latest 1993 issue of the BBC's "Producer's Guidelines", every producer is specifically required to have regard to what the BBC calls "straight dealing". If my hon. Friend can prove that what he said happened, it is entirely contrary to the "Producer's Guidelines".

My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale) asked about the rules. "Rules" is a slightly misleading description of the "Producer's Guidelines". Mr. Birt says in his introduction that there are not many rules in the "Producer's Guidelines". However, a copy of the present guidelines is in the Library of the House of Commons and as soon as the new code is produced—which I do not expect before the Broadcasting Bill—I shall place a copy in the Library. My hon. Friend and all those who mentioned taste, decency and impartiality should know that we shall have the opportunity to discuss those issues in the Bill when we discuss the new Broadcasting Standards Commission.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Agreement between the Secretary of State for National Heritage and the British Broadcasting Corporation (Cm. 3152), dated 25th January 1996, a copy of which was laid before this House on 31st January, be approved.

Housing (Hyndburn)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

10 pm

Mr. Greg Pope (Hyndburn): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the issue of housing in Hyndburn. I am also grateful to the Minister for being here to reply to this short Adjournment debate.

There is no doubt that housing is the most important issue facing my constituents, and I welcome the opportunity to highlight their growing needs. On the surface, my constituency must appear a good example of the ideal of a home-owning democracy, as more than four out of five of my constituents are owner-occupiers. However, the issue is not the level of home ownership, but the quality of those homes. The sad fact is that many houses have become sub-standard, or even unfit for human habitation, for a number of reasons.

First, most of the housing in Hyndburn was created during the industrial revolution. Although it served its purpose at the time by providing a rapidly expanding work force with roofs over their heads, it was built with an eye on the clock and on the purse. Inevitably, corners were cut.

Much of the original housing still remains today, along with the growing associated problems. Some 18,000 of the 35,000 properties in my constituency were constructed before the first world war. Poor original construction has led to widespread problems that are evident in much of the old, terraced housing. The problems include subsidence, due to poor or absent foundations.

The Minister can imagine the difficulties, given the hilly Pennine terrain. The houses suffer buckle walls due to old heavy stone guttering, leaning chimneys and sagging roofs that cause the structures to move out of square. The latter problem has created particular difficulties that can affect entire terraces and make individual action impossible. In addition, structural problems have undoubtedly been compounded by financial restraints.

The relative prosperity created by a thriving cotton industry in Lancashire in the 19th century meant that many people could buy their own cheaply built house for the first time. That must have seemed ideal for many lower-income families who could purchase their own homes and avoid the grip of the rent man. Now, as then, low pay is endemic in east Lancashire. Although most people are more than able to meet their mortgage repayments and other outgoings, few could have foreseen the amount of money that is required to make the essential repairs to properties that are rapidly deteriorating.

My constituents are rightly proud of their properties. When I raised the issue in the House on a previous occasion, the leader of the Conservative group on my local council accused me of insulting people's little palaces. That kind of patronising remark does not take us any further forward. I am not criticising people's home decorating—the home owners are not at fault. I am criticising the structures of those buildings. The longer that essential repairs are left undone, the more serious the problems will become, and the more expensive they will be to remedy.

The decay of the properties was unavoidable, and private sector housing in Hyndburn is in a mess. Some 9,500 homes in my constituency require statutory intervention, as they are considered unfit to live in. A further 5,500 properties require assistance in order to prevent them from becoming unfit for habitation. In all, 15,000 houses require urgent attention. In 1996, 15,000 families in my constituency are living in unfit or sub-standard housing. That is nothing short of a disgrace and a scandal.

Every week in my surgeries, I meet people whose housing situation is desperate. They are unable to remedy the problems themselves or to receive assistance from the local authority. The link between poor housing and poor health is apparent. As Florence Nightingale noted more than 100 years ago:

"The connection between health and the dwellings of the population is one of the most important that exists".

That was true then, and it is equally true now. Hundreds of millions of pounds must be spent in order to repair defects to about 15,000 properties and to ensure that my constituents have decent housing.

No one—certainly not me—expects that amount of money to be made available. However, the fact remains that the funding and resources available to the local authority have been cut in the past few years. Hyndburn borough council now receives only a tiny fraction of the resources necessary to redress the problem. It is clear that many of the 15,000 properties will no longer be standing by the time the council receives anything like the money it requires to repair them.

The Government have placed Hyndburn council in a dilemma. Until now, local authorities have had a mandatory duty to pay housing improvement grants to owners whose properties fail the fitness standard. If one's house is unfit for habitation, one must receive a grant by law. It is not legal for local authorities to institute a queuing system.

However, that does not address the problem in areas such as Hyndburn where the resources do not match the call on those resources. There is no doubt that many people could take the local authority to the ombudsman and force it to pay the mandatory grant. However, the council cannot pay out money that it does not have. If it sought to do so, I am sure that the Minister and other Conservative Members would be the first to complain, and the council would face a surcharge. It is a no-win situation, in which the real losers are my constituents.

The Government are in the process of extricating themselves from the mess by attempting to remove local authorities' mandatory duty to provide home improvement grants during the passage of the Housing Bill, which is presently in Committee. That is all well and good for the Government, but I think that I am entitled to ask where it leaves my 15,000 constituents. They cannot get a grant from the local authority when they are legally entitled to it; how on earth will they get such a grant when that legal requirement is removed? It is important to raise the subject, as something must be done before it is too late.

Some housing is already beyond repair, and houses have been demolished. It is obviously cheaper to repair and extend the life of existing properties than to demolish them and attempt new build.

The local authority is doing all it can. With the money that it has received in recent years, it has launched two successful projects, one in Scaitcliffe and one in East Accrington. The council has shown some ingenuity in progressing its urban renewal programme. The East Accrington renewal area has received priority status since the scheme's inception and considerable improvements have been achieved in the East Accrington area. Many properties have been improved and provided with modern amenities, satisfactory water supplies—there is a problem in east Lancashire with lead pipes—and many other improvements to the structures. Funds can now be freed to target other areas and that is a tangible success.

In some instances, however, the housing is beyond repair. In those circumstances, clearance is the only option. Due to lack of funds, the council cannot afford to do that on the scale that is required. That has caused some areas to become seriously neglected and many houses stand empty. That is a genuine problem, which I hope the Under-Secretary will address.

Some people are caught in a trap. They cannot sell their property, which is falling into disrepair for structural reasons that they cannot afford to remedy. It is impossible for them to sell. In areas earmarked for clearance, clearance blight shows up on any search that is done when the property is put up for sale. People are trapped in decaying properties, and that is a growing phenomenon in my constituency. Privately owned homes are simply abandoned, deserted, and left to fall into rack and ruin.

Hyndburn is an innovative local authority, and it recently submitted a bid for a demonstration project, in partnership with the Portico housing association, which would have provided money for improvements, demolition and new build on vacant land. Sadly, that bid was not successful. Tomorrow, Hyndburn council will submit another bid, in partnership with the Bradford and Northern housing association. If successful, that will provide funds to tackle the growing problem of deserted, empty, privately owned properties. I urge the Under-Secretary to support that scheme when it is submitted tomorrow.

As I said, the vast majority of properties in my constituency are owner-occupied. Council housing forms only a small percentage—less than 12 per cent.—of the total properties in the borough. Many of those council houses are suffering problems. Some improvements have been made, and we have had some successes with the estate action programme, which has now stopped.

In passing, I wish to express my gratitude to the Department of the Environment via the Under-Secretary for the estate action programme in Trinity street in Oswaldtwistle, which has upgraded properties. I also pay tribute to the work done by the residents who campaigned for estate action money, and to Councillor Sheelagh Delaney, who worked tirelessly on that programme.

We still have 850 council houses that require a substantial investment to reach a minimum standard. It will obviously cost of lot of money to ensure that they are brought up to standard and the money is desperately needed. The Government have given no sign that they will be of any assistance. The Government are seemingly content to deprive my constituents of the basic right to live in modern and acceptable housing.

It is a self-evident truth, to anybody who visits Hyndburn or considers its problems, that it faces an extremely serious housing problem which will continue to deteriorate unless measures are taken quickly. Despite the best efforts at renewal, the number of unfit and sub-standard houses is putting an intolerable pressure on the funds of Hyndburn council. The limited resources mean that houses will deteriorate faster than they can be repaired. Eventually, the only alternative to the short-sighted policy of not providing resources now will be large-scale clearance and demolition.

The problem is not unique to Hyndburn, although it is to east Lancashire. Hyndburn and its neighbouring authorities of Blackburn, Pendle, Burnley and Rossendale are special cases, resulting from a higher percentage of home ownership, history of low earnings and a poorly constructed housing stock, with the majority of properties having been built before the first world war. Those factors taken together should indicate to the Department that east Lancashire is a special case, which I hope the Minister understands. Decent housing should be available to all, and that right is currently denied to many of my constituents.

10.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): The hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) has raised some important issues relating to housing generally and to Hyndburn in particular. I am pleased to have the opportunity to explain Government policies to assist with the problems that the hon. Gentleman described.

There are a number of policies relating specifically to housing renovation grants, including proposed reforms, that will be of assistance in meeting some of the problems that the hon. Gentleman outlined.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's concerns about the condition of private sector housing stock in Hyndburn, given the historical context. There is a long tradition of owner-occupation in Hyndburn, as elsewhere in north-east Lancashire, and the numbers of people owning their homes are significantly above the regional and national averages. Home ownership in Hyndburn is about 80 per cent. The majority of those homes were built before 1919 in Hyndburn's industrial heyday, to house workers employed in local mills. Those properties were built with one eye on the clock and one eye on the purse. It is not surprising that many are deteriorating. That is the legacy of Hyndburn's industrial past.

While it must remain a fundamental principle that home owners are primarily responsible for repairing and maintaining their own properties, there is a long-standing tradition of Government assistance for private sector renewal in particular, for helping owners whose houses are unfit and who cannot afford the necessary repairs. The Government remain committed to that principle. The forthcoming Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill seeks to create a grants framework within which the work of renewing areas of unfit private housing can take place. We are certainly maintaining our commitment to the tradition of helping private sector home owners of the type that the hon. Gentleman described.

The stated aim of the Government's housing policy is to bring a decent home within the reach of every family. In view of the hon. Gentleman's comments, I draw his attention to our plain commitment to do so in last year's White Paper "Our Future Homes", which took stock of how far we had progressed towards that aim and set the context for the next decade.

[Mr. James Clappison]

We can take the availability of housing capital resources as a starting point. They remain substantial, and housing investment programme allocations for 1996-97 will amount to £1.217 million, which is a good outcome for housing under the current financial constraints. There are a number of other sources of grant for local authorities. They will be able to bid for £30 million under the housing partnership fund, which is aimed principally at bringing empty properties back into use, and £60 million is available under cash incentive schemes to help tenants move from social housing to owner-occupation.

In addition, in 1996-97, local authority housing will benefit from £260 million for estate action programmes—the hon. Gentleman fairly drew attention to the assistance that housing in Hyndburn has received from the estate action scheme—and £89 million is available for housing action trusts. Both housing action trusts and the estate action scheme are part of the single regeneration budget.

In addition to those sources of grant, in 1996-97, more than £1 billion is available to housing associations under the Housing Corporation's approved development programme. Public resources alone will be unable to cope with the ever-increasing demand for capital investment in housing, and, increasingly, local authorities will have to be innovative in seeking to attract additional resources into housing, principally from the private sector.

The Government are committed to the continued provision of social rented housing at affordable rents. "Our Future Homes" emphasised the Government's continuing commitment to improve the condition of social rented stock and to diversify its ownership through voluntary transfer to new landlords. That positive process has resulted in many improvements, especially for tenants.

The Housing Bill includes measures to introduce new types of social landlord, who can bring in private finance to improve their estates and to keep rents affordable. That will enable a wider range of non-profit landlords, such as local housing companies, to provide social housing. Local housing companies would offer a new way for local authorities to attract private investment into social housing, and they could take on existing social housing through transfers.

As I have said, transfers provide clear benefits to tenants. Their new landlord is in the private sector. Unlike local authorities, that landlord can borrow outside the constraints of the public sector borrowing requirement. Investment in repairs and improvements can be made while rents remain affordable, because the price paid for the properties by new landlords takes account of both their present condition and the investment that is needed. Repairs can be carried out and the debt repaid within affordable rent levels.

Hitherto, most transfers of the type that I have described have been in shire districts, although most "problematic" estates are in urban areas. A new estates renewal challenge fund has been established to help specifically to improve large-scale, poor-quality council estates by facilitating their transfers to housing associations and to other new landlords such as local housing companies.

Such transfers may be difficult without additional financial support to offset negative valuations that require an injection of capital through the housing authority or direct to the new landlord to enhance the value of the stock, so that it is a long-term, viable proposition, or to offset poor asset cover where the value of the property is insufficient to provide cover for the borrowing that the new landlord would need to take on. Some public investment may be required before or after transfer.

The new fund is substantial. It will be worth £314 million over the next three years. Local authorities have been invited to bid for resources in 1996-97, and, although that timetable may be too short for some authorities, I ask them to consider working up bids for future years. In addition, I urge all authorities, as part of the annual housing investment programme bidding process, to consider whether the estates renewal challenge fund might help them to deal with their problematic council estates.

The hon. Gentleman drew particular attention to the problem of serious disrepair and unfitness in private housing stock. As I have said, much of Hyndburn's housing is characterised by rundown terraced housing built many years ago, sometimes to dubious standards. According to the local authority's own figures, some 9,500 properties are statutorily unfit for human habitation—about 30 per cent. of the total private stock in Hyndburn. That leaves some owners unable to repair and maintain their homes. Clearly, in those circumstances, the case for selective clearance needs to be carefully considered by the local authority.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned two renewal areas in Hyndburn, first in west Accrington and more recently at Scaitcliffe. Those renewal areas have encouraged a comprehensive and focused attempt to deal with rundown housing. Both areas demonstrate the benefits of proactively targeting resources to specified capital grant on an area basis, rather than responding reactively to unsolicited applications for grants pepper-potted around an area.

There must be realism about the resources that will be available to deal with these issues.

However, the public purse is limited in what it can afford. There is no ducking the conclusion that demand for grants under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 has far outstripped the available resources. Hon. Members should consider that that Act introduced and promoted a strategic and an area-based approach to investments and to improvements. In particular, it promoted the creation of renewal areas that local authorities, such as Hyndburn, have established where possible.

The Act instituted a coherent range of grants aimed at inadequate housing occupied, in the main, by poor people. It also introduced a grant to give systematic help to disabled people. These provisions have provided a considerable amount of help to poor people and to disabled people. Most importantly, they have offered local authorities help to implement renewal strategies for targeted areas to ensure that the available resources achieve impact and give value for money. Judging by the description that the hon. Member gave of some areas in Hyndburn, this approach could be valuable.

Practical experience of operating the regime has, in some respects, been less than a total success. It has provided local authorities with a good range of tools for tackling renewal. However, mandatory grants have proved difficult to control and predict. That is the feature to

which hon. Members should pay particular attention. The applications for grants have come from all areas, not necessarily the target area within which the local authority is seeking to achieve results through concerted action.

Individual grants have often led to a pepper-potting of improvements, to a loss of impact and, most crucially, to an undermining and slowing down of progress on area-based activity by pre-empting limited specified capital grant resources. Because of the inability to direct the flow of applications, some authorities have attempted to prioritise them.

The Government's commitment to helping poor people in inadequate housing to repair and maintain their homes is undiminished, but the regime within which that process takes place has to recognise that resources are necessarily constrained, and that there is an overriding need that it should support area-based renewal. In other words, local authorities must have the flexibility and freedom to use resources to best effect without being hampered and frustrated by unsolicited demands for grants that, by law, they have to meet.

That is the background against which I invite the hon. Gentleman to see the Government's proposals. These proposals seek to reform the renovation grants system for home owners and landlords in a way that will leave local authorities such as Hyndburn free to act strategically in key areas.

Mr. Pope: I am concerned about the Minister's argument about local authorities being hampered by people making unsolicited applications for home improvement grants. No one wants to see a return to pepper-potting, which was a waste of public money. However, a mechanism must be put in place for people who live in terraces that are in an appalling state of disrepair but do not fall within the renewal area. I am all for targeting resources, but I hope that the Minister has something positive to say to thousands of my constituents who do not live in renewal areas but live in poor housing.

Mr. Clappison: The new system has been widely welcomed, and it will enable local authorities to act strategically. The Government propose to simplify the rules to the group repair schemes, which will allow the flexible implementation of them. The rules will also apply to flats. Local authorities will also be able to continue to give help for minor repairs, improvements and adaptations through home repair assistance to the elderly, infirm and those on means-tested benefits. That will simplify and replace the minor works assistance scheme.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the competitive scheme in Hyndburn. However, he will be aware that £3 million has been allocated to Lancashire through that scheme. The Government propose a number of policies and programmes that will specifically be of assistance to his constituents and will deal within the constraints we all face with the problems he described. Local authorities will be able to act strategically and to help many private sector owners, particularly those who are poor or disabled, to meet the needs for repair that the hon. Gentleman has described.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 16 February 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Noise Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.35 am

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

First, I must explain that immediately after speaking I shall seek the good will of the House and yourself, Madam Speaker, as I need to leave for my constituency for the funeral of my friend and constituent Philip Lawrence at 10.30 am in Ealing abbey, for whose family the Abbot of Ealing and I have collected a fund of £112,000. In my absence, my hon. Friends and sponsors of the Bill, the hon. Members for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) and for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), will keep a watching brief. Upon my return, I will pick up from them the points that have been made. Further points can be dealt with in Committee. I hope that that is acceptable to the House.

It is a great honour to present this Bill. I am glad to be able to tell the House that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has said that he would be agreeable to the Bill's provisions being extended to Northern Ireland. I am sure that all hon. Members will be pleased about that.

This is a Bill

"To make provision about noise emitted from dwellings at night; about the forfeiture and confiscation of equipment used to make noise unlawfully; and for connected purposes."

It is my intention that the Bill will curb and, I hope, eradicate the intolerable problem of neighbourhood noise. My right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) said in a ministerial reply in March last year:

"Inconsiderate noisy neighbours can cause extreme distress and suffering to many."—[*Official Report*, 27 March 1995; Vol. 257, c.469.]

I express my most sincere thanks to two newspapers that have aided me in my campaign against neighbourhood noise—the *Evening Standard*, for allowing me to use the newspaper to communicate with people to ascertain upon which issues they felt strongly; and, secondly, *The Mail on Sunday* for its long campaign against noise nuisance. That newspaper stated on 18 September 1994 that neighbourhood noise is

"an intolerable tyranny imposed on many by a thoughtless few. And—unchecked it can lead to violence, even murder."

Hon. Members are aware of the problems caused by noise nuisance and no doubt such matters have been brought to their attention over many years.

I refer to a case in my constituency to highlight the plight suffered by quite innocent people. Clare road in Greenford is a residential road that would not be out of place in any typical suburban constituency. It is characterised by a peaceful and diverse community. Last July, a substantial deputation of people from that road came to my surgery to voice their complaints about intolerable noise from one house, in a row of hundreds, and the fact that the local council was failing to assist them to deal with the problem.

The residents' right to a peaceful existence had been cruelly shattered by the selfishness of one household. In the problem house, music was blasting out until the early hours, noisy parties were commonplace most evenings, and the sheer volume of people using the house caused a mighty and intolerable racket for the good residents of Clare road. Following a concerted effort by those residents and myself, the noisy tenants were finally removed last week—some seven months on. For more than six months, the residents of Clare road were subjected to an intolerable tyranny of sleepless nights and anxious days. They dreaded going home after work—think of it. My Bill will solve that problem. Had the council been empowered with the ability to impose on-the-spot fines, or the even stronger powers that my Bill will confer, I am certain that there would have been a swifter end to the whole affair.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his success in extending the Bill to Northern Ireland. Does he accept that authorities which have said that the Bill is a knee-jerk reaction have not been living in the real world and dealing with their constituents?

Mr. Greenway: The hon. Gentleman, who is sponsoring my Bill, is absolutely right.

The Noise Bill creates a new offence in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to deal with excessive noise from domestic dwellings at night. The Bill introduces for the first time an objective level against which noise can be assessed. It also clarifies powers to confiscate equipment causing severe noise, under either the Bill or the statutory nuisance regime in the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Enforcing the statutory nuisance regime can be time-consuming and can lead to the dissatisfaction of the local authority and complainants. Concerns about the effectiveness of the existing controls and the rising number of complaints, especially about noise from domestic premises, led me to realise that there was a need for additional legislation. That was also very much the conclusion of the Department of the Environment's review of the effectiveness of neighbour noise controls.

The Bill aims to make it easier for noise complaints made during night hours to be resolved quickly and effectively, but recognises that not all local authorities have the same problems and so might not be able to justify providing a night-noise complaint service for so few cases. Clause 1 therefore allows, but does not require, the local authority to adopt the new offence. I hope that most authorities will adopt it, and I believe that the London borough of Ealing plans to do so.

Where district and unitary authorities have adopted the provisions, clause 2 puts a duty on them to take reasonable steps to investigate complaints of excessive noise from a dwelling house between 11 pm and 7 am. That is an duty additional to the requirements placed on all district and unitary authorities to investigate

[Mr. Greenway]

complaints made under statutory nuisance legislation. If a local authority officer considers the noise excessive and that it exceeds or might exceed the permitted level, he may serve a warning notice. The officer should decide whether the noise may exceed the level and whether to measure it. The permitted noise level is covered in other clauses.

Clause 3 provides for the service of a warning notice. Where possible, the notice must be served on the person responsible for the noise. However, where the person cannot be found, the notice can be served by leaving it at the dwelling where the noise is being emitted. The notice will warn that any person responsible for noise emitted from the dwelling, including its garden, may be guilty of an offence, which can come into effect not less than 10 minutes after the serving of the notice and is valid until 7 am the following morning.

Clause 4 sets out the new night noise offence. Where a warning notice has been served and the noise exceeds the permitted level in the period of the notice, the person responsible for the noise is guilty of an offence. A person found guilty of an offence can be fined up to level 3 on the standard scale, which is currently £1,000.

Clauses 5 to 7 provide the technical basis for the objective standard and its measurement. Clause 5 enables the Secretary of State for the Environment to give directions to determine the permitted noise level. I am clear that the level should be based on the World Health Organisation guidelines, which in 1980 stated:

"a level of less than 35 dB is recommended to preserve the restorative process of sleep".

An objective test is necessary because it enables the offence to be proved more easily and quickly than the statutory nuisance offence. The raising of the standard also represents a reasonable objective standard that would confirm a serious neighbour noise problem and be likely to cause sleep disturbance.

Clause 6 ensures that the equipment must be approved by the Secretary of State, which is very important. Clause 7 requires verification that the noise has been measured in accordance with any specified conditions and with an approved machine. Clauses 8 and 9 allow a local authority to operate a fixed penalty notice for an offence committed under clause 4. The fixed penalty sum is set initially at £40.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Hear, hear.

Mr. Greenway: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support.

The sum may be varied by order of the Secretary of State. Anyone who receives a fixed penalty notice has 14 days in which to pay, otherwise he or she will face prosecution. The fixed penalty will be especially helpful to local authorities since they will not have to take every offender to court. It is not, however, appropriate for gross or persistent cases, where prosecution is more suitable.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that a £40 penalty is derisory and must be increased considerably when—we hope—the Bill becomes law?

Mr. Greenway: Although I accept that, £40 is a reasonable starting level and we should see how it goes. I am looking for a much tougher fine of—perhaps—about £100.

Clause 10 and the schedule give local authorities the power to seize noise equipment used in the emission of noise that leads to an offence. If entry to the premises is refused, the local authority may apply to a justice of the peace for a warrant. The schedule provides for the retention of noise-making equipment and allows the court to order forfeiture of equipment. The clause also clarifies the basis of confiscation and forfeiture of noise-making equipment by local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland where that equipment has been used in the commission of a noise offence that is a statutory nuisance under the Environmental Protection Act. I am sure that the Bill will be very welcome for that alone.

The remainder of the Bill is mainly technical. Clause 11 provides definition and enables regulations to be made. Clause 12 provides protection from personal liability for local authority members, officers and persons authorised to take action under the Bill. Clause 13 relates to financial matters, and clause 14, the short title, deals with commencement and the extent of its jurisdiction.

At present, local authorities handle complaints about excessive noise by using the statutory nuisance controls of part III of the 1990 Act. Domestic premises are the largest source of complaints about noise, accounting for two thirds of all complaints in 1992-93. It is important to note that, between 1983-84 and 1992-93, complaints about noise from domestic premises more than trebled; the problem is worsening every day.

Having stated that the Bill is primarily concerned with domestic noise, it is necessary to distinguish further what type of noise I hope the Bill will address. Although, potentially, all types of neighbour noise at night could be investigated, the major source of complaints is noise made by amplified music and—perhaps—parties. The Bill is necessary because the existing statutory nuisance regime is regarded by many noise sufferers as too lengthy and uncertain a remedy, which is undoubtedly the case.

The number of complaints about noise, especially domestic noise, and public concerns expressed through organisations such as the Right to Peace and Quiet Campaign, the media and public correspondence is growing. In 1993-94, there were 131,153 complaints about noise from domestic premises.

It is vital to balance people's rights to carry out activities in their own homes with the ability to protect those who are affected by the noisy and sometimes inconsiderate action of their neighbours. It is also necessary to underline that the Bill is not intended to be a killjoy. Obviously, tastes vary, and one man's music is another man's noise.

Hon. Members might be asking themselves why the Bill applies solely to noise emitted from private dwellings and not noise from pubs, audible bird scarers, church bells, and so on. The simple answer is that statutory nuisance legislation will still deal with noise from all those sources. The additional offence is intended to provide a more immediate response to the problems of domestic noise.

All hon. Members will recognise that music systems are much louder and cheaper than they were 10 years ago, and therefore more pervasive. I remind the House that the type of music that is now most popular is very different from the music of 10 years ago. I am talking about dance music, which is characterised by a heavy, loud, repetitive bass drum beat. Not only is this music almost invariably

played at an excessively loud volume, but the beat has a strong reverberation which passes easily through neighbouring walls in houses and neighbouring ceilings in flats. Is this music a passing trend that will not be with us in a year's time? No. The music is played widely in clubs around the world and, as a genre, is now indisputably the nation's favourite. It is so popular that different branches of the music have been developed, including jungle, handbag, hard core and techno. [*Laughter.*] One has to have some knowledge of these things. This music and a sophisticated hi-fi operated by a selfish soul are a devastating combination.

It was that combination that led a Mr. Purbrick, as reported in The *Mail on Sunday*, to knock on his neighbour's door to complain about the volume of the music being emitted from that dwelling. Mr. Purbrick was greeted by a hail of punches and kicks, eventually being thrown down a full flight of stairs. He died 12 hours later from massive internal injuries. Mr. Purbrick's brother said:

"I believe that if there had been a quicker response to my brother's complaints about the constant noise he had to put up with, he'd still be alive today. John paid the penalty for making a basic human request for some peace and quiet—with his life."

It is as serious as that.

The powers incorporated in my Bill are purely adoptive ones—that is, local authorities are not compelled to adopt the recommendations of the Bill. However, I very much hope and believe that my Bill will be widely adopted if it becomes law.

Hon. Members may be wondering why the benchmark has been set at 35 dB. Thirty-five decibels is typical of night-time noise levels in bedrooms with single glazed windows fronting busy suburban roads. In addition, information derived from the national noise incident survey carried out by the building research establishment in 1990 suggests that 90 per cent. of the population of England and Wales is expected to experience noise levels of less than 35 dB inside rooms on the front aspect of their dwelling at night. That, combined with the advice supplied by the World Health Organisation, shows that an objective standard of 35 dB is a fair and just benchmark.

The message of the Bill is clear; noisy neighbours will be prosecuted. I want the Bill to help to eradicate the problem of noisy neighbours, but I do not want there to be any unjust prosecutions. Let us consider a case in which the problem is in the construction of the dwelling. There will be a defence by which people can show a reasonable excuse to explain why they were unable to reduce the noise below the specified level. People will have to give a proper explanation, but that could help them.

We must also consider whether the new offence will create a benchmark for all noise cases and so make it difficult to prosecute statutory nuisance cases where the noise is lower, but is still causing a nuisance. To that point, the simple answer is that the criterion for the new offence is quite different from the existing statutory nuisance provisions.

It is not my intention that the general public should have to know when the noise levels have been exceeded. It is for an environmental health officer to assess the noise against the suggested standard for 10 minutes after being summoned by a noise sufferer and, if necessary, to request the noise maker to stop. The general public need to be aware of the noise that they are making and its effect on others and, where necessary, to turn it down.

What happens if the standard does not work? To answer that, I stress that there has been some research by the building research establishment that suggests that one can devise an objective test to substantiate judgments of nuisance from amplified music. Some trials have been carried out on the proposed standard, and further work is planned. Different procedures may be needed for the assessment of noises that have significantly different characteristics from those of music, such as the noise that may result from some do-it-yourself activities. That is an important point, bearing in mind that the Bill will apply not only to dwelling houses, but to the gardens of dwelling houses. The Bill is the first step in establishing a standard; the Secretary of State will have the power to vary the standards set.

A further case brought to my attention by *The Mail on Sunday* is that of Mrs. Edwards. She would roam in a park near her home to escape the sound of a stereo blasting from the flat above her until 5 am every night. After sitting out in the cold and rain for several nights, she died from a combination of pneumonia and despair. Jeffrey, her husband of 22 years, said:

"We would walk for hours in all weathers to get away from that noise. It broke her heart not to be able to live in her own home."

Mr. Edwards called in the environmental health officers 20 times in 18 months and three noise abatement notices were issued against a 22-year-old neighbour, who has since moved out. She was charged with playing music too loudly in defiance of the orders, and given a conditional discharge by magistrates later in the year. Mr. Edwards spoke later, and his words endorse the Bill. He said:

"The authorities need tougher measures. It could be a matter literally of saving lives."

That dramatic and deeply tragic case is an example to us all of the fact that the existing legislation is insufficient to deal with the ever-increasing problem of noise nuisance. My Bill will further address that problem, and I commend it to the House.

9.55 am

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I touch first on the reason why the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) has to leave the debate. I am sure that all hon. Members would like him to take our deep condolences to the family of Philip Lawrence. He was a courageous teacher and gentleman who was brutally murdered. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that all of us feel as deeply as he does about his constituent.

I fully support the Bill and congratulate the hon. Member for Ealing, North on presenting it. Whatever part of the country we represent, we all know that noise has become a real and more complex problem. Clause 1 deals with night noise, and clause 2 refers to the night hours—11 pm to 7 am. During that period, excessive noise from music or from parties causes utter hell not only for people who live adjacent to the noise, but for people in a wide area. Noise travels, so many people, sadly, suffer from the problem.

We now hear a great deal about road rage. I believe that, although that problem is serious, noise rage is a far greater problem, which is suffered by many more people; we know that the problem exists. Road rage can be seen to take place. Noise rage cannot be seen, but people suffer from it and the consequences are often worse in terms of

[Mr. Tom Cox]

the length of suffering. Whichever part of the country we represent, we all have constituents who come to our surgeries in utter despair about their problems.

All of us have spoken to constituents who say, "I am in utter despair. I have been to the police, but they are not interested." That is one of the sad problems. The general public feel that the police can do something about noise, and I am sure that the police often try, but—

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that among the most intransigent problems that we encounter during our weekly or fortnightly surgeries and advice bureaux are neighbour problems, which often stem from noise nuisance?

Mr. Cox: Without a doubt. The hon. Gentleman has hit the nail on the head. As he says, we often feel that, if only the problem could have been resolved quickly and politely, both sides would have benefited. But, sadly, as the hon. Member for Ealing, North said when he explained why he was presenting the Bill, that does not happen.

We have all heard people in our advice surgeries say, "I saw the police and I thought that they would help." We ask, "Did you call them?" The complainant replies, "Oh, yes, they came—and the person creating the noise said apologetically, 'I'm sorry, officer, I didn't realise that we were playing the music so loudly and disturbing people. Of course we'll turn it down'." And they do—for a few moments. Then off go the police and, because of their many other duties, they do not have the resources or the time to go back. But they feel, "At least we have been." That is where the Bill will be so useful.

Like the promoter, and like many hon. Members, irrespective of which side of the Chamber they sit, I want the Bill to become law, and I hope that it will be made absolutely clear that local authorities, with their new powers, will be able to do something about stopping that continuing problem.

The hon. Member for Ealing, North touched on another aspect of the problem that many other hon. Members, including myself, have come across in their constituencies—as was confirmed by the intervention by the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman). One goes politely to the person creating the noise and asks, "Could you kindly turn it down now?" What is the response? Abuse and threats, and one walks away. At that point the complainant realises that, because the people making the noise are so aggressive, he has lost, and thinks, "Well, okay, what can I do about it now?"

The people who make the noise will live in the same area, and they will get to see the people who have complained, and may find out their names and where they live. Constituents of mine have had their windows broken and their flowers ripped up in their gardens. They cannot prove anything, but they know that, shortly after their polite request to "turn the music down please"—not off, just down—they suffer not only the abuse with which they were initially met but damage to their property. They may not be able to prove anything, but they know that it happened, and often who did the damage.

One accepts that legislation already exists, but, as the hon. Member for Ealing, North explained, much of it is not working, and does not do the kind of job that our constituents expect. That is why they look to us for added support, and that is why I warmly support the Bill.

The Library produces many excellent reports on many issues, and in November 1995 it produced one called "Noise nuisance and anti-social neighbours". The introduction says, on page 5:

> "For three decades complaints about noise have been steadily rising, and in 1993/94, complaints about noise from domestic premises rose for the seventh consecutive year, to a total of 131,153 complaints".

It then mentions a problem that I have already raised, the confusion of the general public about the responsibilities of the police. I shall not comment further on that.

The research paper continues:

> "Some widely publicised cases have highlighted the misery that can be caused by a noisy neighbour. Often noisy actions are accompanied by other forms of inconsiderate or intimidatory behaviour, which in some cases have driven individuals to violent retaliatory action, even murder and suicide; one newspaper report has listed 17 deaths which have allegedly resulted from noise disputes".

That confirms what the hon. Member for Gillingham said in his intervention.

Clause 2 defines night hours as those between 11 pm and 7 am. I understand that times must be specified, and that many people may say that noise before 11 o'clock at night is not too bad, but I question that. If people are trying to get their youngsters off to sleep, loud noise is absolute hell. We also know that many people are shift workers and work varying hours. So to ask for restrictions from 10 pm to 7 am is not unrealistic.

I do not suggest that music should not be played at all. The Bill would simply restrict its volume during the night hours. If I happen to serve on the Standing Committee, I shall seek to amend the time, because the period between 10 pm and 7 am is not an unrealistic goal.

Clause 4 specifies a maximum fine, which I fully support, but I agreed with what the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) said about a £40 fine. In this day and age, that is ludicrously low.

When we consider the financial effects of the Bill, I start to get worried. We know that with major legislation—in my view, the Bill will fall into that category—the key issue that determines whether it will succeed not only in the House but in being properly implemented in the country, is its cost.

I listened with interest to what the hon. Member for Ealing, North said about seizures and the disposal of equipment. Nevertheless, many hon. Members here who have been in the House a while and have served on Committees will know what happens when a Bill gets into Committee. The Government—I do not single out the present Government; all Governments do it—say, "Yes, it is a wonderful Bill and basically we support it, but there are the costs, and we do not know whether we should get too involved with it." I hope that such an attitude will not delay the Bill's real effects.

I have found another problem in my constituency, and I am sure that, wherever our constituencies are, we can all tell similar stories. Properties in my constituency—generally lived in by young people—have been sublet, and I have been told that some of the youngsters play music hour after hour at the highest possible volume. A neighbour may have been to see them, but, frankly, they do not want to know. But if the neighbour knows either the owner of the property or the person who is officially renting it, he may try to take it up with them.

I have been involved in five such cases in three months, and have written polite letters either to the landlord or to the person who has sublet the property. Some, to their credit, do reply, but they are neither interested nor sympathetic. Their attitude is, "Look, it may be a problem, but I do not live there and I do not suffer from it. My relationship with the tenant is very good, and I am not going to get in the tenant's bad books. I am sorry, but I am not interested in doing anything." One can politely ask a person to turn his music down and be greeted by abuse. In those cases, one has lost. Sadly, in cases where landlords fail to act, one has lost again. We must look at that issue in detail in Committee.

The hon. Member for Ealing, North referred to the role of local authorities. The House of Commons research paper on the subject, which produced a great deal of valuable information, says:

"Local authorities in England and Wales do indeed vary in the way in which they implement the statutory nuisance legislation that exists; the powers are there for all of them, but of course, local authority policies depend on resources and the importance they attach to noise complaints. Some authorities give noise a high priority and have 24 hour noise lines and officers on hand at all times to deal with noise nuisances."

That relates to a comment that I made earlier about the varying attitudes of local authorities.

Some agree that there is a problem and state that they are tackling it. We welcome that. But there are others who say—the hon. Gentleman referred to this—that noise is a part of modern living: while it may be a bit unpleasant, we have to put up with it, as we cannot have everything in life. We are not asking for everything in life, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are asking for a reasonable period during which people will be able to live in their homes without disturbance. If the Bill is passed and becomes law, I hope that local authorities are made clearly aware of the wishes of the House.

The research paper goes on to comment:

"In 1993/4—

I understand that that was the most up-to-date figure available when the report was prepared in November 1995—

"180 out of 300 local authorities who submitted returns to the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health . . . ran out-of-hours noise teams."

Of the 180 authorities that replied, 86 ran a 24-hours-a-day service, seven days a week; 19 ran a weekend service—that is, Thursday to Sunday; 74 ran other unspecified services; and one authority had no response.

The other crucial point is the speed of an authority's response. Of the 382 authorities surveyed on this issue, nine had an immediate response and 51 responded within 24 hours. But the response of 206 authorities varied from two to seven days. Someone suffering the absolute hell of excessively loud music will expect a speedier response from their local authority than that. Indeed, nine authorities took more than seven days to get round to the problem. I wonder how concerned some authorities are about this matter.

The problem affects not just inner-city constituencies such as mine, but rural areas. I have a sister who lives in a small town in Norfolk, and that town suffers from the same problems as my south London constituency. This is a nationwide problem, and I give credit to the hon. Gentleman for getting the Government to agree to include Northern Ireland in the proposals of the Bill.

I am sure that this will be one of those days when the House shows its concern on a matter and when hon. Members—irrespective of what side of the Chamber they sit on—will try to help all constituents with an on-going problem. Some of us know that the problem exists; it does not matter if one is the local Member of Parliament or not—if people want to play loud music, they will do so.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Ealing, North on promoting the Bill, and I certainly support it. I hope that Opposition Front-Bench Members will also give the Bill their full support, because I genuinely believe that the Bill will help to overcome the problems to which the hon. Gentleman and I have referred.

10.18 am

Mr. Warren Hawksley (Halesowen and Stourbridge): In following the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), may I say that I agree not only with the concerns that he expressed, but with some of his concerns that the Bill perhaps does not go far enough and may result in some problems. I apologise to the House, as a constituency engagement this evening means that I may have to leave before the debate finishes. I have explained to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) that that may be the case.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on having chosen for a private Member's Bill such an important issue, and one that seems to have cross-party support.

The problems that are reported to us as Members of Parliament by our constituents are massive. One point that has not yet been made is that the problem of noise becomes worse during the summer months, as it did over the hot summer of last year, and over such periods, we receive even more complaints. That summer, I received regular surgery complaints about not only noise, but general public order.

The windows of houses are left open more frequently at that time of year, and more drink is consumed—perhaps as a result, people make louder noise. There are considerable problems, and the present system is found to be wanting. Like the hon. Member for Tooting, I have slight reservations about the implementation of the proposal, whether it goes far enough and whether, once it is on the statute book—as we hope it will be—it will be effective. We shall have to debate that issue later—perhaps we shall have to deal with it in Committee.

I shall put the matter in perspective in local constituency terms. The Dudley metropolitan borough area covers Halesowen and Stourbridge constituency, and I am told by my officers that, during the past year, 27 blues parties have led to complaints and problems and, overall, there have been 900 complaints. Of those complaints 200 were what my officers called hard-core complaints, for which there were serious grounds for follow-up action. As we all know, some people who are elderly and particularly nervous may make complaints that, on investigation, one would accept as perhaps not entirely justified.

On a national scale, the figures for complaints are probably even more alarming, particularly as they show the terrific increase of the past 20 or more years. In 1967, only 976 complaints were made to local authorities about noise. According to the figures published by the Institution of Environmental Health Officers, the figure had soared by 1992 to 111,515. In between those dates,

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there was a steady increase, with a figure of 25,000 in 1979 and 33,014 in 1982. I do not think that it is just that people are complaining more willingly; it also has a lot to do with the fact that people have less respect for their neighbours.

Mr. John Carlisle: My hon. Friend may like to comment on the remarks of our hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), who said that, in the past few years noise had increased, partly due to the equipment now used. My hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley) mentioned the year 1967—when most hon. Members other than myself were not even born. Since that time, the range of equipment and the types of music played, particularly the sort that used to be known as heavy metal music, has increased. Although the numbers of people complaining about noise has increased, the noise itself has become intolerable to many people. My hon. Friend may not remember 1967, but several of us do, and it was relatively peaceful.

Mr. Hawksley: I remember 1967, as I am slightly older than my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle). I agree entirely with his point. We were given the example of what happened in Norfolk—I was in rural Shropshire in those days, when one was more likely to hear cows than music from gramophones, as they were then called.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Is not 1967 around the period when I seem to recall that a great group called the Beatles was giving a concert on the roof of a building in London and was removed for causing so much noise? It is somewhat untoward to impose on the House a view of generational superiority; all generations have experienced the problem. Perhaps what has changed is the nature of society—there is a bit too much of the "me generation" among our generation, with too much selfishness and not enough responsibility, which is what we need.

Mr. Hawksley: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend, but I fear that we are straying out of order, so I shall not follow up in too much detail his point about the Beatles. I seem to remember that problems were caused not just by the noise of the group, but by the crowds that it attracted—many hundreds of thousands turned up.

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Beatles made an extremely good noise and everyone enjoyed listening to the group? Perhaps the crowds of people enjoying the noise created the other noise that caused the problem. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not just music that aggravates neighbours, but often marital problems; where husbands and wives scream at each other night after night or somebody uses an electric drill or somebody hoovers his or her flat in the early hours of the morning? We should widen the scope of debate of the noise problem, not confine it simply to music.

Mr. Hawksley: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. I was about to widen the scope of the debate and consider some of the many surveys on noise problems conducted by the Government's building research establishment. It found that, after sunset, two thirds of the population were exposed to noise above the 35 dB limit recommended by the World Health Organisation. It found on a sample survey that between 60 and 70 per cent. of people who endure noise from neighbours never complain. It has already been explained to the House that on many occasions people may be frightened to complain; they may be worried that relations with their neighbours will deteriorate and they may be worried about intimidation.

The building research establishment undertook a survey of 14,000 adults in 1986-87 in England and Wales. Neighbourhood noises that disturbed people were shown in percentage terms and amplified noise came top of the list, at 34 per cent. Noise from dogs generated 33 per cent. of the noise nuisance; domestic activities—I suspect that that is what my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) was referring to when he talked about domestic disputes—created 9 per cent. of noise disturbance; voices created 6 per cent.; do-it-yourself activities generated 5 per cent.; car repairs generated 3 per cent.; and a variety of other noises generated 10 per cent. That survey shows that there are a variety of causes of noise even within the home.

Apart from the damage to people's health caused by acute stress and sleep deprivation, regrettably, noise pollution from neighbours often leads to violence.

Mr. John Carlisle: Before my hon. Friend leaves the subject of domestic noise, perhaps he will take note of a recent case in my constituency. A lady with a coal fire was warned by environmental health officers that she should not riddle the fire to keep it going in the extremely cold weather that we have had recently, and a notice has been served on her to that effect. When considering domestic noise, we should be careful—that poor lady could have to stay cold and, if she were old, she might lose her life as a result.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): What was she riddling it with—a telegraph pole?

Mr. Carlisle: The hon. Gentleman should understand what riddling is. The lady was riddling with an instrument used for riddling fires which, in global terms, is called a riddler. She was riddling her fire and had a notice served on her by her local authority. While riddling her fire, she was upsetting the people next door, who were probably riddling with something else in their bedroom.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley) should take note of that case—an important one, which hit the national headlines. I am a little fearful of a Bill that may restrict the activities of the lady who riddles her fire and of other riddlers throughout the country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I hesitate to intervene, because I am enjoying this, but that was a long intervention.

Mr. Carlisle: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is a matter of national importance that hit the papers and is directly affected by the Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It was still a long intervention.

Mr. Hawksley: My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) is always diligent in looking after his constituents' interests. I am sure that he checked at what time the riddling took place. If it were at 4 am, there might have been legitimate grounds for complaint. If the noise was more than 35 decibels, one can understand why action was felt to be necessary.

More than 20 people have died as a result of noise disputes with neighbours since 1992. I pick out two cases from some newspaper cuttings that I have received. Until I looked into the matter on a constituency basis, I had never thought of noise leading to such serious repercussions.

The first case dates from 19 December 1995. A newspaper reported:

"A roofer killed a neighbour with a crowbar in a row over a barking puppy, Winchester Crown Court was told yesterday. Nicholas Farnell, aged 32, lost his temper in an argument with Willy Pottage, aged 56, and his wife, after they went out leaving their puppy in their garden in Waterlooville, Hampshire."

The prosecuting counsel said:

"In the week or so before the incident, when they were out, the puppy would be left in the garden. The puppy used to bark a lot and this apparently upset the defendant."

I will consider later whether that would be covered under the Bill as it stands. I doubt it, because the puppy was in the garden, not the house.

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): I counsel my hon. Friend that, if such a thing were covered—as I shall argue if I am lucky enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I would oppose the Bill.

Mr. Hawksley: That needs discussion at length.

The second relevant case—all these are recent cases—also involved a murder. *The Guardian* of 28 September 1995 reported that a man who firebombed a noisy reggae party was gaoled for life and stated:

"A British Telecom engineer who firebombed a party in the flat of noisy neighbours, causing the death of a 26-year-old mother, was yesterday jailed for life for murder with a recommendation that he serves at least 22 years . . . The Old Bailey heard that he snapped last July having endured prolonged excessive noise from neighbours."

I hope that those two examples and the fact that there have been 20 deaths as a result of agitation caused by noise since 1992 will convince the House that it is essential that action should be taken.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Does my hon. Friend agree that, with such noises and the aggravation and irritation that they cause, it is night-time noise that is the greatest curse? People suffer the most tremendous depressions because they cannot get a decent night's sleep. That is why the Bill is so important.

Mr. Hawksley: I agree, but as the hon. Member for Tooting said, there are people who work at night and need to rest during the day. Some people put their children to bed early, and noise can cause considerable problems for families trying get a decent night's sleep for their children.

Councils respond to the present situation in different ways. Some have full-time officers, and some do nothing. Dudley council takes the middle road. It does not have full-time officers, but it has two officers who try to mediate initially and record the facts. They operate between 7 pm and 3 am each night. They do not deal with the complaints that arise that night. If somebody rings the police, the council will be called, but those officers are responding to previous complaints. They try to check whether a continuous noise is being made. The council's environmental department sifts through the information on its cases to decide which are appropriate for the two officers to visit. The council would claim—councils claiming that will be one of the Bill's problems—that local authorities do not have sufficient resources to carry out present legislation.

Mr. Couchman: My hon. Friend makes a good point. This is a worthy Bill, and unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves) I shall certainly not oppose it. Does my hon. Friend agree that its success will depend on the energy and enthusiasm that local authorities put into its enforcement?

Mr. Hawksley: Yes, it will. It is important that local authorities take it up and do not say that they have not the resources to handle it. That is a fear, because the problem of resources is not the only one affecting council officers, who assure me that they often need police officers to accompany them. Violence and public order offences may be committed, and they do not feel that, even with the powers that the Bill would give them, they should carry out their investigations without a police officer present. Police officers have many duties and tackling noise is probably not top of their list. We all understand that. Other offences are being committed that they must tackle.

Although my officers in Dudley carry out mediation and attempt to reach peaceful settlements, the success rate is low. We have heard that there were 131,000 cases in 1994, which is only the tip of the iceberg. The average over the past 10 years has been 1,000 cases a year in which mediation has worked. That is a small number.

The elderly and the ill in particular come with great concerns to see their constituency Members of Parliament. Most of my recent cases involve people who live in flats, which suffer problems more than do houses because noises come through more strongly. Often, the complaints are against people such as a single lady with a child. When she arrives, there is no problem, but soon an unofficial lodger moves in. Many of my constituents suggest that drugs are involved and claim that crime is committed from such establishments.

Mr. Robert Banks: My hon. Friend mentioned mediation, which is a relatively new concept. The two oldest mediation services are at Bristol and Southwark and go back to 1985 and 1987. Does he agree that, if mediation is brought in early, it can save a great deal of bureaucracy and cost that would otherwise be incurred by the local authority and the police services sending their representatives to deal with the problem?

Mr. Hawksley: I entirely agree. If mediation can be used successfully, it has great advantages for costs and for neighbourly good will. It is important that everything should be done to try to bring about a peaceful agreement. Sometimes, the parties will say, "Yes, we are sorry: we did not realise it was quite so loud," but that is in a minority of cases.

Invariably, I find that constituents first complain to the police, who come round, look into the matter and talk to the people who are making the noise. Although they have

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no power to act at that stage, they will normally turn down the offending musical instrument for a short period, but the volume will go back up. The police do not have the time or resources to keep responding to such noises. We must remember that. The police are involved in other things and council officers are prepared to investigate cases only when they have a police officer with them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate was right to mention the bureaucracy, which involves policemen making arrests and people making complaints. I well remember the former chief superintendent at Brierley Hill, Dudley. He was worried when he went to his police station at about 4 am. He found all 12 police cars, which should have been out on patrol, parked in the police station courtyard. He was concerned and wondered whether they were having a party that he had not been told about, as his visit was an unexpected check on what they were up to. It was not a party. Each officer was dealing with one problem and was tied up for about three hours with the bureaucracy that went with it.

Obviously, the police do not want to get involved with the bureaucracy that goes with this Bill. They do not have the resources, and cannot afford, to do so. A fixed penalty is desirable, as it could help to reduce the amount of police bureaucracy necessary when a public order offence is committed and may save some time, although we must carefully consider the £40 figure.

We must accept that, even under the Bill, council officers will need to be accompanied by police officers on most occasions. On many occasions, particularly in the early hours of the morning, they are fearful of investigating such matters on their own. Officers working for my council have certainly said that they are not prepared to work without the close co-operation and support of the police. Their work is dependent on the police being available to help them.

My main concern is whether the Bill goes far enough and is the complete answer. I am far from convinced that it is. I am concerned about particular proposals, although I will certainly support the Bill today.

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I share some of the views that the hon. Gentleman has expressed about the Bill not going far enough. I have not read it in detail, but does he agree that the great disruption and noise pollution caused on densely populated estates late at night by people sitting around in large cars with loud music blaring, particularly in the summer, does not seem to be covered? I hope that the Bill will go into Committee, and I hope that that matter will be considered there.

Mr. Hawksley: I accept that point. I asked what would happen if a garden were involved. I understand why, when my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North proposed the Bill, he said that it was intended for households. Other legislation covers the matter that the hon. Lady mentioned—that is a public order offence, which is in police hands. I am not sure whether such cases could be brought within the scope of the Bill.

The Library produced a good review of the Bill and mentioned the powers in Scotland. It is interesting to consider the Scottish powers, which go much further than ours. The Library research paper states:

"The statutory nuisance provisions . . . were initially not extended to Scotland, where the very similar provisions of the Control of Pollution Act 1974, which the 1990 Act replaced, were retained for noise control, and the Public Health (Scotland) Act 1897 was retained for other statutory nuisances.

Two main differences arose from the different statutory provisions in Scotland. Firstly, Scottish local authorities did not have a duty under the 1974 Act to investigate noise complaints, and the maximum fines were much smaller. However, section 107 and schedule 17 of the 1995 Environment Act have extended England and Wales' statutory nuisance system, including the noise controls, to Scotland.

Secondly"—

this is the important part—

"in Scotland the police are empowered to tackle some noise problems, whereas in England and Wales they are not. This important additional control available in Scotland operates under section 54 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982, whereby it is an offence not to stop making certain noises (such as singing or playing a hi-fi) which are giving reasonable cause for annoyance, when asked to do so by the police. If the noise maker fails to stop he can then be arrested and charged, although evidence shows that many people making noise normally stop when asked to do so by a uniformed constable. Moreover, the police have powers under common law to remove articles suspected of being used in the commission of an offence, so they can seize equipment following a failure to desist from making a noise under the 1982 Act."

Mr. John Carlisle: In his research into the Scottish situation, has my hon Friend come across the awful problem of noise from bagpipes, which must be one of the most horrendous instruments ever invented—I say that in the knowledge that certain hon. Members have a Scottish connection? Is that covered in those statutory arrangements?

Mr. Hawksley: I suspect that few magistrates in Scotland, or Crown court officers—

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Does my hon. Friend accept that anyone who has had the privilege of living in Scotland and listening to the bagpipes would not regard them as making anything other than a beautiful sound?

Mr. Hawksley: Before I get brought back to order fairly quickly by the Chair, I must say that, not having lived in Scotland, I would not know whether the sound that bagpipes make is beautiful or not. I think, however, that one would have problems getting the judiciary there to take too seriously any complaints about the reasonable playing of the bagpipes. I should think that Scotsmen would show common sense on the matter.

Mr. Couchman: I hate to add to talk about the pipes, but I have the doubtful pleasure of expecting to be woken on Sunday at about 7 o'clock by bagpipes, played not by Scottish highlanders, but by Nepalese highlanders, for I have Gurkhas situated close by and they are definitely not as proficient on the bagpipes as Scotsmen. It is an unpleasant prospect on a Sunday morning.

I intervened because I wondered whether my hon. Friend wanted to say something about the incredible intrusion into one's life of badly set and faulty burglar alarms.

Mr. Hawksley: I gather that there is separate legislation that is supposed to cover that. I agree that

in practice, it is not adequate, given the noises one hears not just from cars—I admit my car seems to make noises when it feels lonely, or something like that, as I can never understand why the alarm is set off—but from households. On many occasions, it is a false alarm, and that creates a lot of ill will.

I must move on to a few concerns about the legislation. We have already heard about the £40 fine and whether it is adequate. I do not think that it is. If it is going to be an effective deterrent, it must be more than £40. If three or four people are at a private party, which they are not paying for, they will all give 10 quid and be quite happy. That fine is not high enough and I hope the Committee will consider raising it to £100 or something in that region, as suggested.

I hope that the replies to the debate will deal with clause 10 and the power it gives for equipment to be seized. My local authority assures me that it has never had any problems on that. It still seizes equipment if necessary, and has never been challenged successfully in the courts. It was surprised that the introduction of that power was felt necessary.

My concern is the position under the schedule. The Library research paper states that the schedule provides:

"Where a person from whom equipment has been seized is convicted of a noise offence and the court is satisfied that the equipment was used in commission of the offence, the court may make a forfeiture order for that equipment. This may be done independently of any other penalty decided on by the court and without regard to restrictions on forfeiture in any other enactment, but the court must have regard to the value of the equipment and to the likely financial and other effects on the offender."

So far, so good. That I understand.

I am slightly worried, however, that the paper continues:

"Where equipment has been forfeited but an applicant can show that he had not consented to the offender having possession of the equipment and that he did not know or suspect that it would be used in the commission of a noise offence, the applicant may take proceedings for the recovery of the equipment. This must be done within six months of the equipment being forfeited."

The police will obviously have to store that equipment, should it be forfeited, for a considerable time. It goes on:

"Where no such application has been made, regulations may provide for the disposal of equipment and for the application of any such proceeds."

I am slightly worried that that could be a loophole. People could well lend friends their equipment and then say after it had been used, "No, I didn't know that he was going to use it for that." I can foresee that those people may get the equipment back. If that happens and it becomes common knowledge when people who are determined to make a noise are involved, we will find that they go on using their friends's equipment because they will know that, under clause 10, the equipment must be returned. I am slightly worried, not being a lawyer, whether that is the correct reading of the situation.

Mr. Robert Banks: What would happen if the equipment were leased or on hire-purchase?

Mr. Hawksley: As I have said, I am not a lawyer. It is a matter that concerns me, and it should perhaps be examined in Committee. In practice, I hope that the ideas behind this clause will be effective, and that, if someone uses equipment and makes an excessive noise, the courts can take the equipment from them. However, I think that that clause might create an opening for people to get away from the Bill's intention. The question of leasing should be examined.

I conclude with the question whether the definition of "within the household" is the correct one, because I am worried about dogs in kennels. If one considers that there are almost as many complaints about dogs as about music, and that one of the murder cases that I cited involved a dog that was left outside in a garden barking all day and all night, one must ask whether that problem would be covered. I think that that is a problem that we should want to deal with to protect people against that type of noise—whether it comes from inside the house, from a kennel or from the garden—and that we should not want to differentiate between the origin of it. I believe that our intention in all those cases is for the dog to stop barking and to be kept quiet.

If I criticised the Bill in any way, it is not because I disagree with its purpose. I whole-heartedly support the Bill and think that it is very necessary. I question, to varying degrees, whether it goes far enough and does what we want it to do. I hope that it will be speedily accepted today in the House, that it will have a speedy passage through Committee and that it will soon become the law to protect all our constituents against the terrible noise nuisances from which they are currently suffering.

10.52 am

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I can do no better than to start by continuing where the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley) finished. I share his view and hope that the Bill obtains a Second Reading. Like the hon. Gentleman, I know that the Bill will be much appreciated. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), who has had to leave the Chamber, for choosing this subject after he had the good fortune to win a high place in the top 20 in the ballot. This is an appropriate topic for a Bill.

I am sure that all hon. Members would like to join the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) and the hon. Member for Ealing, North in the respect and condolences that they have expressed for the family of Philip Lawrence, whose funeral is today. As one who went to the memorial service in Westminster cathedral, I can tell the House of the family's great bravery. For the daughters and wife of Mr. Lawrence, that service was a wonderful tribute to their dad and husband. We wish them every blessing and support in the days and weeks ahead.

I am pleased to be a sponsor of this Bill. The only interest that I have to declare is that I am the hon. Member who represents the Institution of Environmental Health Officers, which has just a bit of an interest in this issue. However, I should add that it is always a bit cautious about such legislation. I do not want to misrepresent the situation and say that all these proposals have its full support.

In common with many colleagues, particularly those from the London constituencies with whom I have discussed the matter, I am a great supporter of the campaign that has led to this Bill's Second Reading. The National Society for Clean Air and the Right to Peace and Quiet Campaign—which now feels that it can wind down because it has made its mark—and its leader, Val Gibson, have been great campaigners.

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

I also pay tribute to the press, because it has been very good on this issue. We all have local papers that have done a good job. My neighbours, the hon. Members for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) and for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock), are in the Chamber today. The *South London Press* has been a very good campaigning paper, as has my borough's local newspaper, the *Southwark News*. The national press, especially *The Mail on Sunday*, the *Daily Mail*, *The Sun* and *The Independent*—newspapers across the spectrum—have also been very good. There has been much intelligent and informed support, for which we are grateful.

The only wry moment of amusement that I have so far had in this debate occurred when I was listening to Conservative Members hold forth on the music of our age. The hon. Member for Ealing, North stretched the imagination a bit as he spoke about techno music. I was amused by the general recollections of the Beatles by some hon. Members who, I should have thought, have outgrown that era. We must be very careful not to appear to be talking about things that we know relatively little about.

Mr. Tony Banks: As usual.

Mr. Hughes: Yes. Some of us may know a little more about musical things, from various experiences, than others.

We have moved relatively quickly, for this place, in bringing the Bill to this stage. We legislated in 1990, with the Environmental Protection Act 1990; we legislated again in 1993, in relation to such matters as car noise; the working party was set up, after a bit of pressure, in 1994; it reported in 1995; and we have a Bill in 1996. Although that might appear slow to the public, for this place we have moved very quickly.

As the hon. Member for Vauxhall said to me a moment ago, this Bill will receive a great welcome. I agree with her comment that, for people on estates in Lambeth, and for my constituents in Southwark, this Bill is probably far more significant than the Scott report, although it may be a bit provocative to say so. In terms of immediate impact, this Bill matters far more than the complicated ramifications of who is accountable in the civil service and the Government. Therefore, if we get this Bill through quickly, we can spend more time on Scott afterwards. We certainly cannot forget about Scott, and we will not. However, legislating on noise will generally be easier, and more popular and will receive more unanimous support from hon. Members.

The evidence on the number and severity of complaints has been mentioned. I should like to make two quotations. The first comes from a very good article in *The Independent* of 30 December 1992 about people who deal with the prospects of mediation. The article ran:

"Prolonged exposure to domestic noise can make people desperate. Seven months of relentless disco music drove a south London market trader to shoot his neighbour in the stomach, and months of nightly misery from a car alarm provoked an east London resident to vent his feelings on the offending vehicle with a metal pipe."

In today's *South London Press*, entirely coincidentally, there was a short article entitled "Row over rock led to stabbing", which said:

"A heavy rock fan stabbed to death a neighbour who complained about his loud Led Zeppelin records.

An Old Bailey judge heard that Billy Clark, 44, had to be up for work at 5 am but was kept awake by music from David Ravenhall on September 14 last year.

In a row that followed the complaint, Mr. Clark head-butted Ravenhall who then plunged a knife into his heart.

Mr. Clark was rushed to hospital from the bedsit block at Newlands Park, Sydenham, but his life could not be saved.

The judge told Ravenhall, 'Your music started this. He over-reacted. You picked up a knife and stabbed Mr. Clark in the course of the struggle.

'You are going to have to live with that death for the rest of your life.'"

Those of us who have been involved in the campaign have heard from many people of the deaths, suicides and violence to which people have been driven. I pay tribute to people such as Spike Milligan, among others, who have campaigned to bring attention to the way in which noise can be the most devastating intrusion into peoples' private lives and homes.

Mr. Couchman: Can the hon. Gentleman say, from his expertise in following this campaign through from its early days, whether car alarms will come within the scope of the Bill? I believe, as the hon. Member for Vauxhall said, that noise from cars can be just as devastating as noise from within a domestic property.

Mr. Hughes: The Bill deals only with noise from domestic premises and noise created at night. The Minister will no doubt deal with this point later, but, generally speaking, noise from vehicles is dealt with under the Noise and Statutory Nuisance Act 1993. Whether that is adequate is something that we can consider. We should, however, definitely examine the proposal made by the hon. Member for Vauxhall that noise from cars on estates should be included in the Bill. Existing legislation covers noise from cars on the street but, as the hon. Member knows, estate roads are not really the street, so noise from estates, which are private property, that is not from the home is not covered. Perhaps an appropriate amendment could be tabled in Committee.

I shall say a word or two about good precedent. The Scots have a criminal law to deal with noise, and their experience of it has been good. Yet again, we must pay tribute to the Scots, who are ahead of us in matters of legislation, and learn from their experience.

The Bill must provide three things: the right penalty, the right procedure, and the necessary protection for people who complain. The three penalty options in the Bill are a warning, a fine and then confiscation. I take a very hard line on this and believe that most people who live in the middle of the inner city, surrounded by estates, do, too. I agree with the "two strikes and you're out" view.

I accept that there should be a warning followed by the possibility of a fine and confiscation of equipment but, after a second offence, we should put the offender inside for a night or two. That person has usually deprived not only his neighbour, but hundreds of people of their liberty and the enjoyment of it. I shall press the Minister in Committee to agree that a second offence committed within a reasonable period should result in a night or two

in gaol. I am not suggesting long sentences, but people should know that, if they deprive other people of their liberty in this way, they risk a night in gaol.

Mr. Banks: Could not we toughen up that proposal a little by putting offenders away for a night and playing them heavy metal music all night at full volume? Perhaps we could play them Iron Maiden or AC/DC, as that is the sort of music that can drive people insane.

Mr. Hughes: I take the general point, but Iron Maiden is a good south London band and I would not want a word said against it. When I was a youth leader, I used to follow it around the country. Such was my wayward youth.

To be serious, though, we have to make people understand what they are doing. The danger of the fine option, as we know, is that fines are often not paid. That leads to a long, involved process of chasing the fine and trying to get people to court when they do not pay. Many offenders do not have readily available cash, and getting £1,000 from them might not be easy. It might be quicker, cheaper and easier to put them in a local police station cell for a night. Whether they experience a great deal of noise or absolute silence, either would be preferable to their making a nuisance of themselves at home.

Mr. Couchman: The hon. Gentleman has been very generous in giving way. From his experience in his south London constituency, he will be aware of the danger of intimidation and retaliation by people who create excessive noise against people who complain. Would he care to comment on that?

Mr. Hughes: I was coming to that point; it relates to the third of the points that I outlined earlier.

I said that the Bill needed to provide the right procedure. The working party left the matter open, so I pay tribute to the Government for being persuaded that a criminal procedure is likely to be far more efficient and effective than the current statutory nuisance procedure. The current process is very lengthy. Someone has to keep diaries and give evidence, but there are no immediate implications for the person who is creating the nuisance, who can then serve counter-notices. That is often not effective.

One of the problems is that the time that elapses between the commission of a crime or anti-social activity and its punishment is that the two appear unrelated. Kids often feel that they have got away with something because they are not dealt with until a year after the offence. Society's response to anti-social activity needs to be much quicker. I reaffirm the hope that we can add to the Bill a proposal to deal with noise from private property such as estate roads, rather than from houses alone.

My next point relates to the matter raised by the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman). The weakness of the current system is that people are often terrified of giving evidence. If a 75-year-old woman lived next door to a flat inhabited or visited by a muscular 6 ft 21-year-old who played loud music all night, we could not get her to court in a month of Sundays, and nor should we—if she did go, her life might not be worth living. In any event, many less vulnerable people have the same difficulty.

Noise nuisance is not a victimless crime—indeed, it is a victim-intensive crime. We must ensure that victims do not have to put themselves in the front line. The Bill is rather ambiguous in places. The police, environmental health officers and others who are recognised officers in the community should give the evidence. We must separate the complaint from the verification, and the evidence should be given by the verifier, not the complainant.

Finally, we must ensure that the resources necessary for the job are available. The proposals will have an impact on local authorities and the police. The Government might come up with good ideas but, often, others, whether local authorities or the police, are left to pay for them out of their own resources. The Bill will not work if we do not give police and local authorities the resources to do the business.

I welcome the Bill. I hope that it will end the terrorising of many people, especially at night and on large estates. I am sure that it will be generally welcomed and that we can do a businesslike job in Committee to get it on the statute book this year. Let us hope that 1996 will be the year in which peace will begin to return to our far too many noisy, and therefore devastatingly unpleasant, estates.

11.6 am

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to the Bill. Perhaps unusually, I wish to associate myself with everything that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said. I fully endorse the principle and purpose of the Bill.

It is common ground among all hon. Members that noise is an increasingly prevalent complaint with which we have to deal at our surgeries. Like the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey), I have heard endless complaints about noise on estates and in tower blocks, where noise seems to reverberate due, perhaps, to the concrete structure and the lack of thick interior partition walls—in any event, noise there seems to create a particular type of hell.

The increase in noise has a number of causes. One is undeniably the increase in the amplification power available with modern stereos. There is no doubt that modern equipment produces far more noise of greater intensity, and there has been a tremendous increase in the performance of speakers, especially of the bass sound, which can produce a thumping that can be felt through walls and make glasses chink in neighbouring flats. Such noise can be extremely penetrating, and can create an absolute nightmare for neighbours.

Another problem is the general lack of respect for neighbours shown by people who play loud music. We should take every possible step—I am sure that the Bill will be one of them—to remind people of their social responsibility to their neighbours. Demographic changes sometimes make the situation more difficult. More younger and older families live together than perhaps was the case in the past and it is inevitable that, friction may arise from the proximity.

There is also a greater awareness among the public that they should be concerned about noise. Why should their lives be made a misery by other people's thoughtlessness? It is right that Parliament should take the matter up. As I have often said, Members of Parliament should be the representatives of individuals who are struggling against something that they feel they cannot overcome and cannot

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even complain about for fear of intimidation, retribution and violence—all the problems that hon. Members have already outlined.

I strongly endorse the basic principles of the Bill. I have problems with certain aspects, which I have already mentioned, and I hope that those problems will be addressed in Committee. However, the idea of confiscation is excellent and we must ensure that it is an easy, practicable remedy. The Committee must ensure that local authorities feel that they have the power to confiscate equipment, irrespective of whether it is leased, hired or borrowed from a friend. I am sure that the Committee will be able to clarify that if necessary.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important not just to pass the Bill, but to ensure that local authorities carry out their permissive powers? In the London borough of Barnet, when it was under Conservative control, the council set up a noise patrol which dealt with many complaints. When a Liberal-Labour pact took control of the council, one of the first things it did was to get rid of the noise patrol. Is that not a thoughtless and anti-social action by the council?

Mr. Hargreaves: I entirely endorse that point. We must have uniform standards and guidelines which establish a duty of responsibility on local authorities and by which they can be measured, in the same way as charters measure other areas of responsibility. It is perfectly reasonable to do that for local authorities.

Confiscation is extremely important. The suggestion that we have heard from the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey who has temporarily left the Chamber, of a possible brief term of imprisonment, if other remedies fail, is very sensible. Furthermore, I entirely endorse the suggestion that the Bill should concentrate on the night hours. The Committee can examine which hours comprise the night hours, but 11 pm until 7 am is a particularly sensitive time, in which the restorative process of sleep does its work, and would be a sensible beginning.

Many hon. Members have said that they do not feel that the £40 fixed penalty is sufficient. I agree with them and I hope that in Committee we shall be able to increase that sum dramatically. I say that for an especial reason. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), who has also left the Chamber temporarily, will forgive me and I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will bear with me for a minute, as I have some personal comments to make.

A while ago, like other hon. Members, I received a number of threats. It was threatened that I would be blown up and killed. The threats were delivered to my local Conservative club and might have needed to be taken seriously. I was advised, as hon. Members are, to install a number of security measures. These included an intruder alarm on my premises in London and in my constituency. Last summer was very hot and there were many complaints about noise. That is perfectly understandable because people have their windows open.

For some totally unexplained reason—it was thought afterwards that the cause could have been a large butterfly or a fall of soot down the chimney—the alarm in my house went off. It created a nuisance and, although I was not at home, I was served with a statutory nuisance order, and a matter of hours afterwards, the police and local environment health officers broke into my house, tore out the alarm and silenced it. I was later presented with a bill for some £240, and it cost me double that to reinstate the alarm. Had I not been able to pay, I could have been fined £5,000.

The Bill proposes a £40 fine, with a maximum of £1,000 at a later date. I speak for my constituents and not just for myself. In one street in my constituency, householders have their houses or cars broken into, on average, six times a year. They have all had to install some sort of alarm. Alarms of that kind, which the police, the Government and all responsible people encourage people to install to protect their property and to lower the crime figures, may go off accidentally through no thoughtlessness or carelessness, but perhaps through shoddy workmanship, while people are visiting sick relatives or away for a weekend. A distinction should be drawn between that type of incident and those involving thoughtless and deliberate behaviour, which is what we are trying to tackle in the Bill.

I believe that the penalties for thoughtless and deliberate noise pollution and aggravation—for example, when people continue to play amplified music after being asked to turn it down—should be greater than in those cases which are covered by the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and its amendment by the Noise and Statutory Nuisance Act 1993. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), when he reads what I have said in the debate, and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, can consider in Committee whether we have the balance right.

There is a tendency in all local authorities—obviously, more in some than in others—to pursue soft targets. The property owner and responsible citizen is a soft target. He is likely to pay up, as I did, and the local authority is likely to recover the costs of the operation. That gives the local authority the opportunity to say reasonably that it has done its job on noise pollution and statutory nuisance, and that it went out on so many occasions and dealt with the problem.

However, the local authority may be picking on soft targets. For example, in Bristol, a surgeon held a party for a son or daughter and he was fined £900. My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) mentioned the case of the lady who was riddling a fire. In Camberley, Surrey, a lady was fined a significant amount of money because her dogs made too much noise. Again, she was an easy target, because the local authority knew that she would pay the bill and do something to remedy the noise. Perhaps it is right that she should do that, but we should get the balance right, because the Bill is designed to deal with those who are not responsible.

A dog or an alarm may make more noise than is reasonable while people are out, but such people do not deliberately intend to make that noise. The Bill is designed to deal with those who flagrantly ignore other people's rights to privacy and quiet. That means people who play music loudly and aggressively, and sometimes with intimidation, disturbing the peace of others solely because they enjoy noise at that level.

Mr. John Marshall: My hon. Friend seems to be ignoring the fact that the Bill deals with noise that is made between 11 pm and 7 am. I do not believe that many people riddle fires at that time. Surely it is more

responsible for people with house alarms to give a key to a neighbour so that he or she can turn the confounded thing off rather than go away without taking such precautions. Dogs should not be in gardens between 11 pm and 7 am; they should be inside the house and asleep.

Mr. Hargreaves: I am simply saying that the balance in the Bill is wrong. People should be subject to a greater penalty for making noise at night rather than accidental noise that may be caused during the day. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North will consider that. It is wrong that those who create noise and disturb other people's sleep and quiet at night are subject to a smaller penalty than those who may cause noise accidentally during the day. My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) says that people with house alarms should give a house key to someone else. In my case, that someone was in hospital undergoing treatment for cancer and could not be reached. I had taken every precaution, as I am sure my constituents also do with their house alarms.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): My hon. Friend could overcome the problems with his house alarm by fixing one with a 20-minute cut-off, as is required for outside alarm systems under the Environment Act 1995. Moreover, does he agree that many people regularly leave their dogs outside at night?

Mr. Hargreaves: My alarm was designed to cut out earlier than 20 minutes, but for some reason beyond my control it did not do so. That, too, may be a problem for constituents in my street who may be away visiting sick relatives. What can they do about their alarm going off? Those people are not deliberately making an excessive noise that disturbs others. The cause of the noise may be beyond their control.

There is difference between them and those who deliberately continue to make a noise after they have been asked to turn something down. In the former case, my constituents and I have taken every possible precaution to prevent noise nuisance to others. I am sure that those people, like me, do not object to paying up or running round and apologising most profusely to their neighbours, because they are responsible people.

The Bill refers to those who are not responsible and who are not accountable for their actions. They will not think of their neighbours, and may deliberately continue after they have been asked to turn the noise down.

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): As one of the sponsors of the Bill, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks, and I shall certainly pass them on to the promoter, my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway). Does my hon. Friend agree that the noise caused by a burglar alarm is an occasional occurrence, whereas the Bill is designed to deal with those who persistently offend night after night and cause distress and hardship to neighbours through their thoughtlessness and lack of consideration? My hon. Friend's comments are relevant and interesting, but he is talking about occasional noise caused by a burglar alarm rather than noise that is made night after night.

Mr. Hargreaves: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, but those who make such occasional noise incur the same penalty as those who are persistently noisy. That is why I should like that part of the Bill to be reconsidered.

The hon. Member for Vauxhall and some of my hon. Friends have spoken about the possibility that the Bill might cover noise from cars playing loud amplified music. I may be wrong, but I believe that, under the law, a car is a piece of private property, so noise emanating from a car should be within the compass of the Bill.

In my street in Battersea, as well as in my street in Hall Green, I have frequently complained, together with my neighbours, about a young gentleman in one case and a young couple in the other case who cruise down our street, stop and enjoy themselves for perhaps 20 minutes while playing music loudly. At the height of the summer, everyone has the windows open—as do the occupants of those cars—and I can tell my hon. Friends that the music from that young gentleman's car was so loud that glasses in my house rattled, such was the thump of the bass speaker.

I cannot say to my hon. Friends in all honesty that I would have had the time on the first two occasions to rush off and ring the environmental health officer so that the noise patrol unit in Wandsworth could race round. By that time, that young man and his friends would have left. Nevertheless, it is a serious problem, because it winds my neighbours up to an extraordinary level.

That individual has a perfectly good home to go to, and there are plenty of other places where he could play his music, but he chooses to come to a residential street late at night—always between midnight and about 2 o'clock in the morning—to play his music so loud that it makes glasses rattle in my house. That noise comes from a car, not from my next-door neighbours. I am not passing any comment about the sort of music he plays—everyone is within their rights to play whatever music they like—but it should not disturb my peace and that of my neighbours. Why should he be allowed to sit in his car outside my house or those of my neighbours and play his music loudly? A car is private property and the scope of the Bill should be extended to cover such property as well as residential property.

Mr. Robert Banks: Did my hon. Friend speak to the people in the car who were causing the problem and, if so, what was their reaction?

Mr. Hargreaves: On one occasion I went to speak to that person on my own behalf and that of my neighbours. I cannot repeat in the Chamber the language that met my request. Had I not been vaguely familiar to the occupants of that car, I might have been met with violence as well. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the usual reaction from such people, who do not respect either the privacy or the person of other people. They are likely to react violently or intimidatingly, and they are not likely to take any notice of those who simply ask them to turn the music down a bit.

Noise from cars is a serious noise nuisance. The worst thing about it is that it can lead to serious violent confrontation, and occasionally racial confrontations, when such music is played on and on and any requests for quiet are ignored. I hope that in Committee we shall be able to extend the scope of the Bill so that some remedy is available for those who suffer from noise nuisance of that type.

I hope that the promoter, my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North, will forgive me if I am not here for the winding-up speeches, because, like my hon. Friend the

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Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley), I have a constituency engagement and I may have to leave the Chamber.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To switch off the alarm.

Mr. Hargreaves: I hope that I shall never have to do anything else to my alarm.

I look forward very much to hearing further from my hon. Friend that the important matters that I have raised will be dealt with in Committee.

11.29 am

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves) has had his alarm serviced, he is one of the most unfortunate people that I have ever come across. I congratulate the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on this Bill, and I am pleased to be a sponsor of it—however, I have a number of points in relation to the detail of it, which I hope will be taken up during the Committee stage. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for not being present during his speech: I promise to read it in *Hansard*, immediately after I have read the Scott report—so I may be some time. Judging by the interviews that I heard on the radio this morning, Ministers are now calling the Scott report the "We all got off scot-free report".

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) is absolutely correct about the Scott report. I will not detract in any way from the political and constitutional significance of the Scott report, but I know—[HON. MEMBERS: "Order, order."] When did the House get a collective Chair? I was about to say that I will not detract from the Scott report's long-term political and constitutional significance, but merely point out that I receive far more letters about noise pollution than I will receive about the Scott report. I am trying to put this issue into some sort of context. Yesterday the Chamber was packed and there was a considerable amount of noise, but today it is quiet.

Obviously all hon. Members know something about noise—we make a lot of it, particularly at Prime Minister's Question Time. That part of our proceedings receives the most criticism from outside—people are offended by the boisterous activity they see—but, in many respects, that criticism is misplaced. Noise in this place is a product of the atmosphere. It is rather like a football stadium, particularly when it is packed, and everyone cheers on their side—even when it is playing rubbish. If our constituents were forced to be crammed into this place for Prime Minister's Question Time they would behave in the same way as Members of Parliament. I have always been ready to defend Members of Parliament in terms of their conduct at Prime Minister's Question Time.

Our constituents bring their noise problems to us on a regular, and depressing, basis. I find—as I am sure is the case for all hon. Members—that problems involving noisy neighbours are some of the most intractable that Members of Parliament receive. Another problem is that one hears only one side of the story—they tend not to turn up in pairs. I have had instances where one neighbour comes to me and complains and a few days later the other neighbour comes to me, and the stories are completely different.

One knows how impossible it is at times to reconcile the problems because people perceive them from a personal point of view. It is often difficult, if not impossible, for us to make a judgment. The problem then gets passed on to the various agencies, including the police. We all have a sympathy for those who try to deal with these sorts of problems.

The hon. Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) referred to achieving reconciliation between warring neighbours. In Newham, an organisation called Conflict and Change attempts to do precisely that. I feel almost guilty when I have a problem in front of me but I know that I cannot deal with it and then say, "There is a specialised, voluntary agency in Newham called Conflict and Change where someone will help you". I always feel as though I am passing the buck, but I also feel relieved that I can pass the problem on to an organisation that will at least attempt to reconcile it.

Mr. John Carlisle: The hon. Gentleman has talked about individuals. Is not part of the problem the fact that, under the present legislation, council environmental health officers insist on a diary being kept so that evidence can be brought forward? In many cases, only one person in the street will have the time to write the diary or the courage to produce it. Even though there may be a common problem, it often comes down to a neighbour against neighbour problem because only one person is willing to record the noise nuisance that emanates from the house.

Mr. Banks: We would all like to be able to resolve these problems speedily, but the process that we have at the moment—and even the process laid out in the Bill—will not achieve the speedy resolution that we would all like. There are many problems. For example, by the time someone can come around and hear the noise it may have stopped. The individual who complained then feels like an idiot, and says, "Well, you should have heard it before." That is why it is necessary for them to keep a diary.

When there are extreme cases, one would like to have faster methods of dealing with the problem. We all know that this is an appalling problem, and various examples have been given of people being pushed completely over the edge by noise pollution. It is one of the most intrusive, destructive and disruptive forms of pollution. I experienced noise pollution in a flat in which I lived, and I know how close I came to wanting to be aggressive—indeed, violent—towards the individual concerned. My privacy was encroached on—in fact, I had no privacy. I was trying to read, and all I could hear was the television and the music from the flat next door. I felt that they were living in my flat with me.

I well understand when people come to me and are in an advanced state of nervous breakdown. They say, "You don't know how bad it is". I can sympathise entirely with people such as that, because I have experienced it myself. In April 1994 the Newham council set up a special noise team, and there is now an out-of-hours service. However, budgetary restraints limit the size and the effectiveness of

that team. The environmental health service in Newham received 1,300 noise complaints in 1993-94; 2,000 in 1994-95; and 2,370 so far in 1995-96.

Mr. Robert Banks: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the construction of so many blocks of flats and multiple occupation dwellings has not incorporated sound-proofing materials in the walls and in the floors? That area is sadly neglected by architects and developers. Should not that issue be tackled?

Mr. Banks: The hon. Member for Hall Green made that point, and I had also planned to make it. There are two points in this regard. The first is the increasing technological specifications of hi-fi equipment—one can get far more speaker output with smaller speakers. Secondly, how could the architects who build the tower blocks understand, appreciate or anticipate technological developments in music reproduction?

Obviously, one could talk about adaptation schemes and insulation, but that involves big money. There are well over 100 tower blocks in the London borough of Newham. At the best of times, they are not the most comfortable places in which to live. Will the Government give us the money to insulate those tower blocks to avoid noise pollution problems?

One thing that the council could do is try to ensure that it does not jumble up the social mix of people who live in tower blocks. When there are a lot of elderly people in a tower block and the council moves young families—most of whom own hi-fi equipment—into the building, everyone is affected. The noise can carry and affect people on other floors, not just those who are next door, so a significant number of people can then be affected.

If we cannot get the resources to put in the sound insulation that is necessary, we need instead to look at housing policy to achieve the right social mix, especially the age mix. I only hope that architects are now paying much more attention to the problem than was possible previously. They could not have been aware of the problems in the 1960s, when so many of the tower blocks were constructed in my part of east London.

I have quoted some statistics to show that noise is a growing problem in the east end. The increase may be due in part to a number of factors, such as decreasing tolerance levels brought about by other, but allied, social problems such as unemployment, being on social security, being in poverty or suffering from overcrowding. Not only does being unemployed mean spending more time in one's accommodation, but that and the other social factors lower tolerance to other people's habits.

The problems often arise because of a mix of factors. Quite often it is not just the noise that upsets people: it is something else that eventually causes those suffering from noise pollution to crack. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green mentioned some cases where people actually died because of noise pollution. Given my experience, I can almost understand that people could be pushed to such a point that they resort to extreme physical violence. There is no excuse for that, but we understand that people might be tipped over the edge.

One reason why Newham is getting more complaints is that the council has run an extensive and commendable campaign to draw attention to the sort of action people can take to resolve noise problems. Of course, once something is drawn to people's attention, there will be an increase in the numbers taking up the various suggestions.

The specialist noise team in Newham tries to provide an immediate response wherever possible, but it must operate a priority system. It tends to prioritise those sources of noise disturbance which could end up causing a breach of the peace or where the noise does not just affect one flat or property but a whole range—an example of that is the tower block, which I have already mentioned—or where the council thinks that the noise is part of a deliberate attempt at harassment. I will not bore the House by citing numerous examples, as no doubt other hon. Members also receive complaints about noise being used deliberately to force someone out of his home.

That sort of harassment is even more unacceptable than someone making a noise without realising that others might not appreciate the music or the level of output. Of course, one problem is trying to get someone to the property at the time that the noise is being suffered, especially late at night. In Newham, the council tries to get someone out on at least four occasions to hear the noise and then serve an abatement notice.

I am a sponsor of the Bill. The hon. Member for Ealing, North quite often—well, perhaps not that often—comes up with good ideas, and this Bill is one of them. I was pleased to put my name to it. Unfortunately, once the Bill had been published, I sent it to my local council, and, although it generally welcomes the Bill, it also has many criticisms of it. They are generally matters that are better taken up in Committee. I volunteer my services for the Committee, if the hon. Member for Ealing, North nominates me.

One criticism was about the fine. Another was that the Bill would require measurements to be carried out that would substantially increase the amount of time involved in investigations. Another was that the offence would be committed only if the fixed criteria were to be breached in the property immediately adjacent to the source of the noise. As the council pointed out, that has two effects:

"(i) the anonymity of the complainant on the night is compromised"

and

"(ii) disturbance suffered in other nearby properties would not constitute an offence where the immediate neighbours were unwilling or unable to complain."

One reason they might be unwilling to complain is if they feel physically threatened by neighbours. We need to consider that point. If we ask people to come forward with complaints, we must be able to offer them the necessary protection.

I understand that the three London boroughs that took part in the pilot scheme all reported many instances in which the night-time noise offence could not be proved, but where a statutory nuisance had been established.

Mr. Couchman: When the hon. Gentleman took up this matter with his local council, did it have anything to say about the measuring devices that would be necessary if the Bill is to be effective? I understand that they are expensive and not all that easy to use. Certainly, at one point they were not that accurate.

Mr. Banks: As a matter of fact, the council did. It said:

"The requirement is that two separate 10-minute readings are taken to differentiate between the usual background noise in the household being disturbed and the noise being complained of.

[Mr. Banks]

This would be very difficult to carry out where there is no let-up in the noise source and it is almost impossible to ensure that the people complaining about the disturbance do not talk to the officers making the measurements in this period and so interrupt this procedure."

I am sure that people of good will, who are mindful that this Bill is a good measure, can work together in Committee to make it a better one that will meet the hon. Gentleman's points.

The council points out:

"Although it has been claimed that the two offences (night time noise and statutory nuisance) may be used in tandem this is considered unlikely since it may be anticipated that alleged offenders may use in defence of an allegation of statutory nuisance, the fact that the fixed offence criteria was not breached. Therefore the lower standard which would protect fewer people from noise disturbance may become the benchmark for assessing nuisance.

Initially, the new requirements could lead to additional safety problems for enforcing officers who will be required to approach the offender at the time of the offence and serve the fixed penalty notice. Although it may be necessary to request police attendance at this time, experience has shown that the police may be unable to attend at the time of the request and that, in some cases, the presence of the police in itself provides a potential source of conflict. At present officers are able to issue an abatement notice to the alleged offender and thereafter gain sufficient evidence to instigate a prosecution without returning to the premises at the time of offence.

In conclusion, the proposals for the new offence as presented thus far appear to be very difficult to enforce and take a very narrow view of the nature of noise nuisance."

The environmental health service people who provided the brief welcome the Bill, but as a means of codifying and further strengthening existing legislation in respect of a very serious form of pollution. In that respect, I welcome the Bill—despite the points that I have raised at their request. I want to see the Bill strengthened and on the statute book. I hope that the Minister will give it a fair wind.

11.47 am

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): I am delighted to speak in support of the Bill. I welcome its provisions. I hope that it will soon be on the statute book, because it is both necessary and long overdue. Like the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), I am proud to be one of the Bill's sponsors. However, there is much work still to be done in Committee to improve it.

I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on promoting the Bill. I have known my hon. Friend for many years; indeed, I have served on the Education Select Committee with him. I know that he has been a champion of his constituents and of constituency interests over the many years that he has been in the House. I also know that he has been aware of the growing problem of neighbourhood noise nuisance for a considerable time. I am pleased that, having won the ballot, he decided on this Bill as one that deserved to be on the statute book. His speech this morning covered most of the technical part of the Bill, but there is still a great deal more to discuss in Committee.

The second person I warmly congratulate is a constituent of mine, Val Gibson, who lives in Thamesmead. In 1991, she established the Right to Peace and Quiet Campaign. Having been a victim of noisy neighbours and having had to move home to survive, she has been a tireless campaigner for a change in the law and firmer action to deal with the noise pollution in general and noisy neighbours in particular.

Over the years, and with increasing success, the campaign, of which I have been a member and a proud supporter, has raised issues, given facts and publicised problems. My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) in a previous Bill and my right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), while an Environment Minister, made valuable contributions to advancing action on noise nuisance.

The excellent campaign run by *The Mail on Sunday* also played a major part in the debate on noise nuisance and raised the visibility of the problem among politicians and local authorities. The campaign helped to stimulate the Government to come forward with the Department of the Environment neighbour noise working party, which went through all aspects of the problems and made some proposals.

Val Gibson and the Right to Peace and Quiet Campaign collected information, advised sufferers, lobbied hon. Members and Ministers, enlisted media and show business support and help, and organised many publicity events to increase awareness of the problem. Indeed, I remember playing a silent trumpet with Spike Milligan in Covent Garden to highlight the problems of noise nuisance. The issues have also been debated through many other campaigns and celebrity occasions. As a result, cases of considerable hardship and suffering across the country, especially among people who live in inner-city tower blocks where there is greater proximity to one's neighbours, have been highlighted.

Mr. John Carlisle: I add my tribute to Valerie Gibson. My hon. Friend has not mentioned that she was made ill to such an extent that she had to give up work. Quotations in the newspapers said that the noise drove her mad to such an extent that she wanted to go out on the street at 4 o'clock in the morning to hit somebody. Her work in my constituency has been much appreciated, especially by those in the tower blocks. I am happy to add my name to my hon. Friend's rightful congratulations.

Mr. Evennett: I thank my hon. Friend for that addition to my praise. The Bill is a tribute to Val Gibson, her campaign and many other people who have been agitating for action in the recent past.

The Government too must be congratulated on taking the issue on board, not only because they set up the working party, but because they were willing to listen, discuss and debate the problem and suggest their own ideas. I welcome my hon. Friend the Minister, who I know is taking notes and listening to all the points that are being raised.

The most interesting part of the working party report was its highlighting of the scale of the problem. There were 111,515 registered complaints of neighbour noise nuisance in England and Wales in 1992-93—a rise of 30 per cent. on the previous year. It should be stressed, however, that many more thousands of complaints are never made by people who continue to suffer in silence. Either they do not know how to complain, or they are frightened to complain, or they have simply got used to the noise nuisance and live with it.

In my constituency, I have been inundated with complaints by people who have suffered over the past few years. There are a number of tower blocks in the North End, Erith and Thamesmead wards, where the sound

travels up the lift shaft from one floor to another and causes considerable suffering. There have been two examples of people suffering in a smaller block of flats too. My constituent, Mrs. Daisy Clement, who lives in Bostall ward, has suffered from people playing drums, loud electronic music and group practices for some rock band at all sorts of the day and night, which has caused her and her husband, who are both pensioners, considerable distress.

Another constituent, Mrs. Viki Harrold, was forced to leave her flat in Belvedere because the noise nuisance from do-it-yourself experts downstairs—not music—became too great. One must remember that not only noisy parties and the young cause noise nuisance and affect neighbours. The young play loud music and that is their interest. There are, however, many other perpetrators of noise nuisance, such as DIY enthusiasts who build cupboards and wardrobes late into the night and early in the morning. When they have finished one DIY improvement, they move to another room. They keep on trying to improve their property, yet do not realise the noise that it creates for people living in neighbouring properties, especially flats.

People seem to have their televisions and radios on louder and louder today, which is another problem. Car engines are revved while people tune their cars early on a Sunday morning. There is also general noise such as doors slamming and arguments in households. There has been a tremendous increase in noise in all aspects of life and a particular lack of consideration and understanding of the noise that is being generated.

Mr. Couchman: My hon. Friend will know that, for a time, I ran a discotheque pub in south London—in fact, in his constituency-to-be. Four years of listening to the noise there undoubtedly deafened me. Does he think—I am being quite serious—that people's use of loud music is leading to a deterioration of hearing, which causes them to turn up the television and music ever louder?

Mr. Evennett: As usual, my hon. Friend makes a very good point. I should like to put it on record that he ran his establishment superbly and he is fondly remembered as its landlord. It is of concern that the hearing of more young people is being damaged at rock concerts, where the music is getting louder and louder. Although we have tried to protect factory employees from noise, people's hearing is damaged elsewhere, rock concerts being one example.

Mr. Carlisle: I recommend to my hon. Friend muzzled earphones used in the shooting field, which can be turned up and turned down. One can hear what is going on 300 or 400 yd away and what the beaters are saying, but not the shot nearby. Perhaps the Bill should include availability of such earphones for those who suffer.

Mr. Evennett: I am always interested in my hon. Friend's comments, but I am also always mindful of expenditure.

Lack of sleep, nervous distress, illness and severe depression have all been experienced by people who have been subjected to inconsiderate and noisy neighbours. The worst offences are committed during the night. While I accept what my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) said about other noises during the day which people who work at night and have to sleep during the day must endure, the vast majority of us—even Members of Parliament, especially since the improved sitting hours—get to sleep at some point during the night when one needs it.

Although the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) suggested that the Bill's provisions should operate between 10 pm and 7 am—I am sure that we will discuss it in Committee—the hours between 11 pm and 7 am are the core time during which people should have the right to peace and quiet in their own home and not be interrupted by noise from neighbours that prevents them from relaxing and enjoying a good night's sleep.

I mentioned Val Gibson. Some people move from their flat to another property to escape noisy neighbours, but the vast majority of people cannot do that, because they do not have the finance or whatever. We must therefore accept that it is our responsibility as legislators to put on the statute book a measure that will give those people some respite.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the worst spots for noise problems are high-rise blocks of flats? The tenants of those blocks of flats have no escape, because the only way in which they can escape is by mutual transfer. It is not a very good advertisement to say in a request for mutual transfer, "Come and live in this block of high-rise flats; music 24 hours a day." That does not attract many people.

Mr. Evennett: Of course it does not. We must be aware of the difficulties faced by people in that situation. However, why should people be forced to move because of noise? They obtain their property, they furnish it as they like, their children go to school in the area and their friends and family are nearby. They should not be forced to move, even if they can, to other areas. The problem should be dealt with at source, and not by default with people having to move away.

We have heard this morning that the present position is totally unsatisfactory. The present procedures are too lengthy and too vague, and they require the sufferers to take considerable action themselves, with records and bureaucracy. Perhaps the local authority will take action, but perhaps it will not. We all agree that the present system is totally inadequate to deal with a growing problem.

The Bill will go a long way towards helping to address the problems. It will create a new offence of night-time noise nuisance, and it is based on the principle that individuals should be able to get a good night's sleep without interference from noise from another domestic dwelling. For the first time, the sound will be measured. Clause 3 will be warmly welcomed, because it defines the hours of night. I take on board the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), that the equipment required may be expensive, and that it may be difficult to get the readings needed. However, we have at least made a start and we can discuss the technical aspects in Committee. For the first time, we are looking for a measurement and for action that does not require the person who is suffering to keep a diary of their suffering.

The Bill is not meant to be a killjoy measure and it is not meant to prevent the occasional party. We have all gone to occasional parties; the best thing is often to invite

[Mr. Evennett]

the neighbours, so that everyone is there together. We do not want to stop people having fun or holding the occasional social function at home. What we do want is to make people more aware of the effect of their actions on others, whether they are holding a family celebration, a wedding anniversary party or a birthday party, or whether they are improving their property by gutting it and installing new facilities. The important point is to make people realise the consequences of the noise they are making for other people.

I have always believed strongly in education in this area. We know that in society, some people do not care. They want to have their music, their television or their parties and they do not care about their neighbours. That is extremely regrettable. However, some people are just thoughtless. They do not think about the effect of their actions on others. It would be much appreciated if, within the education system, more skills and information were given to young people about good neighbourliness. We have lost some aspects of the community. Families split up and we do not have extended families. That has created a more selfish society, and we need to get away from that and to make people more aware of the consequences of their actions for the elderly, the sick, those with young children and ordinary individuals who want peace and quiet when they are at home.

I am a great supporter of and listener to Capital radio and my local community station, RTM, on 103.8 FM.

Mr. John Carlisle: Is my hon. Friend a shareholder?

Mr. Evennett: No, I am not a shareholder.

It would be a welcome move if radio disc jockeys and presenters encouraged young people not to turn up the music, but to turn it down. I very much regret that some disc jockeys suggest that one should turn up the music to appreciate it.

We heard earlier about the Beatles in the 1960s. In the 1960s, I was a soul fan and liked Dusty Springfield and people like that rather than the Beatles. However, the important point about music in domestic establishments today is, as the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said, that the equipment is far more effective than the little record players and transistors that many of us had in those dim, distant days. The noise that one can get from modern equipment is incredible.

The parents, as the primary educators, the schools and the media should encourage people to think. There are concerts, parties and discos where people can hear loud music, if that is what they want. However, people should be taught that when they are at home, the volume should be turned down in the interests of good neighbourliness and in the interests of the rest of the family.

Although I support almost all the Bill, I would like the instant fines to be increased from £40. An instant fine is a good step forward, as we are looking for instant action. However, in today's society, a £40 fine is inadequate punishment for people who persistently make a loud noise and it will not deter them; it will not even hurt in many cases. It is therefore important that, in Committee, we have discussions to see whether we can up the fine to a more realistic figure. Some hon. Members today have suggested £100; that is a possibility.

There are variations in how good local environmental health officers are. In some areas, they are extremely good; in Bexley, we are fortunate in having a good department. However, people in other areas have written to me, because of my role in the Right to Peace and Quiet Campaign, saying that their environmental health officers are apparently not interested in dealing with the problem.

Although I welcome the fact that environmental health officers will have more powers and opportunities, I have two concerns. First, I am concerned about the safety of the environmental health officer on the front line who has to go to a noisy property—a point that must worry us all. Secondly, we do not know whether, as the Bill is an adoptive measure, local authorities will adopt the provisions in their area. We as Members of Parliament shall have to educate local authorities and encourage them to adopt the provisions. Local authorities will, however, have the choice.

Mr. John Carlisle: The other thing that local authorities will inevitably do is squeal that they do not have the funds. Perhaps my hon. Friend will suggest to them that they will be more popular if they spend time on implementing the provisions in the Bill rather than zealously enforcing certain regulations, especially those concerning health and safety and food. Regrettably, that takes up a lot of their time, upsets many people and causes the loss of many jobs. Local authorities would be better spending their time on the Bill.

Mr. Evennett: I endorse that absolutely, and I hope that local authorities will not whinge, but will—

Ms Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford) *rose—*

Mr. Evennett: I thought that we might get a reaction from the Opposition Front Bench.

I hope that local authorities will use their budgets in the most effective way. I believe that they can take action within the budgets that they have been allocated if they establish priorities, and I think that noise control should be one of those.

Ms Ruddock: The hon. Gentleman said that he endorsed what his hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) said. Will he reconsider that? Surely we do not want local authorities to do anything less than their duty under health and safety law, especially in connection with food, which the hon. Member for Luton, North mentioned. We do not want to have to choose between foods poisoning and noise.

Mr. Evennett: Right. I did not endorse that point; of course local authorities must carry out their statutory duties. I endorsed my hon. Friend's fear that local authorities would whinge that they did not have enough money. I think that they have enough if they channel those resources, of course into health and safety, and into food hygiene, but also into dealing with noise nuisance and the problems that so many of our constituents have suffered. The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) misinterpreted what I said.

The Bill represents a great step forward. If it became law, procedures would be quicker and a third party, the local authority environmental health officer doing the

measurement, would be involved. We have all had letters from individual sufferers—elderly people, single parents and others—who are frightened of the neighbours who are making a noise and perpetrating the problem.

Under the Bill, those people would not have to take the action in court themselves, or be responsible for gathering the information, presenting it and pushing the local authority. It would be down to the local authority to take the case over. I am sure that that would encourage many more people to present their problems rather than suffering in silence as many of them have done, at the cost of their health. That is good news.

The Bill represents a positive move. We must be grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North for the work that he has put in and for the way in which he presented the Bill today. We have a good Bill before us, and it has had almost universal support on both sides of the Chamber. That is welcome, because the problem has affected all our constituencies and all our people.

I believe that the Bill will deal with the problem of noise nuisance. It appears relatively uncomplicated and workable—both essential ingredients in any legislation. But some doubts and concerns remain. We need the Bill to reach the statute book as soon as possible, and we must campaign to ensure that local authorities implement it, and that its provisions are used to the full for the benefit of all citizens.

Today we have seen an important step forward in the fight against noisy neighbours, and I am delighted to support the Bill. However, education by parents, schools and community organisations, as well as legislation, is necessary. Legislation cannot cure all problems. Education, information and publicity can all help to make society better, so that the people suffering from noisy neighbours have some respite.

However, legislation is important, and the Bill is good news. But there is more to be done, away from the sphere of legislation, in educating people about their community responsibilities and in encouraging them to turn the volume down. Once the Bill is law, many people who now suffer from noisy neighbours will get some respite, some action and some results. I wish the Bill a speedy passage through the legislative process, and I look forward to its implementation.

12.13 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on his success in the ballot, and on his wisdom in choosing this subject for his private Member's Bill. It is a privilege for me to be associated with him, as a sponsor of the Bill. In passing, I also pay tribute to him in his role as a constituency Member of Parliament, because I had the privilege of living in Ealing for several years, and I remember that, when my hon. Friend was selected for Ealing, North, it was regarded as a marginal constituency. It is a tribute to him that, by 1987, he had a majority of 15,000—although that may have been helped by the fact that his opponent in that election was named Benn.

Tens of thousands of our constituents listen to an Australian soap opera whose musical jingle runs

"Neighbours, everybody needs good neighbours",

but they do not seem to pay much attention to it, because the problem of noise is generated by bad neighbours—by anti-social, selfish, thoughtless individuals who put their pleasure first and do not consider the impact of their thoughtlessness on other people.

Those people may enjoy loud music, but they forget that the music they enjoy may be a pain for someone else. Noisy parties may be fun for the drunks who take part, but they are preventing other people from sleeping and from exercising their right to enjoy the privacy of their own home.

That fact was brought home to me during one of my surgeries, when 20 or 25 people from one of the high-rise blocks that were one of the great innovations of the 1960s came to see me. When I asked, "What is your problem?", they replied, "Mr. Campbell." Mr. Campbell's particular skill was to turn his hi-fi unit on at 8 o'clock at night and to keep it going until 8 o'clock in the morning. That meant that the neighbours all too often had a sleepless night, and were always worried that they would have to go to work the next day unable to do as well at their jobs as they would have liked.

There is no doubt that the problem of noise has been aggravated by social trends in recent years. The problem is worse in the high-rise flats in which so many people live. In many such blocks, anti-social behaviour multiplies, and one has only to go to any council estate to see graffiti on the walls. One hears also of many other forms of anti-social behaviour, of which drugs and noise are but two.

It is a tragedy that the local authorities have been so slow to react to the mushrooming of anti-social behaviour. By their failure to react quickly, they have given an incentive for such behaviour to continue.

The problem has been aggravated elsewhere, as well as in modern high-rise blocks. Those of us who have lived in the modern purpose-built flats that have appeared over the past 25 years have frequently found that they are not as well insulated against noise as they might be. That means that a record player in one flat can be heard only too easily in another.

The provisions of the Bill are not mandatory for local authorities, but permissive. There is no doubt that some local authorities will say rightly that noise is not a major problem, as noise and noisy parties is more of an urban problem than a rural one, but some urban local authorities do not treat the problem as seriously as they ought to. When the Conservatives controlled Barnet council, they instituted a noise patrol that dealt with a large number of cases. When Labour and the Liberal Democrats took control, they redirected spending and wound up the patrol. The patrol was doing a lot of good work, and its absence has annoyed a large number of my constituents.

Mr. John Carlisle: Have not we had a semi-indication of that today from the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock)? She tried to refute my allegation that, in many cases, environmental health officers seemed to be spending a lot more time building small empires with what seem to be trivial regulations—some of which have been passed by the House. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that there is a possibility of political connotations. We as Conservatives see the very real problem that noise is creating and believe that local authorities should attach great importance to helping to

[Mr. John Carlisle]

alleviate that problem. Is that not confirmed by the fact that the Conservative Benches have been semi-packed all morning, while the Opposition Benches have been very sparsely attended?

Mr. Marshall: I do not wish to attack the London borough of Lewisham too much. I fought Lewisham in 1974 and Lewisham fought back and won, but I noticed recently that an hon. Member who lives there decided that the education system in Lewisham was not good enough for his children.

Ms Ruddock: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would expect me to comment on the intervention by the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle). There is no question in my mind that local authorities—whether they are Labour, Liberal Democrat or Tory-controlled—ought to carry out their duties with respect to their citizens in all areas, including health and safety, food regulation and noise. If authorities find that they do not have enough resources, perhaps the fault lies with the Government.

Mr. Marshall: I am surprised that the hon. Lady decided to intervene, as I suspect that she will make a speech later. I resent the suggestion that local authorities have been short-changed by the Government, and I speak with the authority of one who served for four years as chairman of a finance committee. Before we gained control of Ealing council, we were told by the Labour party that it was terribly efficient, but soon after we gained control, we found that we could squeeze millions of pounds out of local authority spending without affecting the quality of service.

If the hon. Lady looks at the statistics from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, she will see that there are huge fluctuations in the relative efficiency of different local authorities. If authorities such as Lewisham were to become as efficient as other authorities, they would have plenty of money to spend, both on improving the quality of the education service and on dealing with problems such as noise. It is no argument for her to say that the council does not have enough money—the council must become more efficient.

Ms Ruddock *rose—*

Mr. Marshall: Before the hon. Lady jumps up again, I should remind her that the Audit Commission has pointed out that local education authorities could save hundreds of millions of pounds by getting rid of surplus school places. If they did so, they could improve the quality of education, and the hon. Lady would have nothing to jump up about—but she can jump up again if she wants.

Ms Ruddock: The hon. Gentleman makes a great mistake in attacking Lewisham, as the very bodies to which he has referred frequently congratulate the council—as does the Department of the Environment—on its excellent delivery of public services and its good housekeeping and careful husbandry of resources.

Mr. Marshall: All I can say is that a colleague of the hon. Lady decided that—while it may be good enough for her constituents—the education service in Lewisham was not good enough for his two children.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. May I inquire what this has to do with the Second Reading of the Bill? I think nothing.

Mr. Marshall: I shall not beg to differ with you, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I shall wish to catch your eye for an Adjournment Debate later. Local authority spending is an important part of the Bill, as authorities have been given a permissive, rather than a mandatory, power. It is up to them to decide how they exercise that power.

I shall refer quickly to one or two items. The £40 fixed penalty is too low. Some 40 or 50 noisy people at a late-night party in London would have to pay only £1 each—what is a quid at two o'clock in the morning?—and the fine will be paid. I should like the fixed penalty to be as much as £100, as that is more realistic.

I welcome the power of seizure contained in the Bill. If local authorities were to take away the noisy equipment, and did so once or twice, that would act as a severe disincentive for people to carry on with late night parties.

This is a positive Bill, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North, on introducing it. I wish it fair speed in Committee; I am sure that it will have an interesting Committee stage, as the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) has volunteered to sit on it. He may create some noise—whether he will create any light is a moot point.

12.24 pm

Ms Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I join other hon. Members in congratulating the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on his success in the ballot and on introducing the Bill, which I am pleased to say has our general support. I also wish to express my understanding of his absence at this time, and to add to the tributes that others have paid to Philip Lawrence.

The Bill would implement some of the main recommendations contained in the report of the Government's working party on noise, which was published nearly a year ago. In particular, as we have heard, it will create a new criminal offence of night-time noise, and it will clarify the law relating to the seizure and confiscation of noise-making equipment. We believe that it would have been much more satisfactory had the Government managed to conclude their consultations in better time and had introduced comprehensive measures to tackle noise in last year's Environment Bill, as we urged them to do.

Measures to tackle the chronic and worsening problem of noise nuisance are long overdue, as all hon. Members have said. Noise, defined as unwanted sound, can cause extreme stress, exhaustion and other health problems. Many of us have had to deal with constituents suffering utter frustration and misery owing to noise nuisance. The problem is a real one for thousands of people, and it is still growing.

Other hon. Members have quoted the figures for 1993-94. In that year, there were 131,000 complaints about noise from domestic premises—a rise of more than 10 per cent. on the previous year—and it was the seventh consecutive year in which complaints rose. As my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) reminded us, noise disputes are reported to have been responsible for 17 deaths, and the true figure may be higher.

The Association of Metropolitan Authorities tells us that complaints about noisy neighbours have increased by 700 per cent. since 1978. Of the 131,153 complaints in 1993-94, more than 32,000 were dealt with through mediation and informal resolution, and more than 5,000 abatement notices were served. However, the vast majority of complaints were not resolved, and the number of court actions remains tiny. In that same period, there were just 441 prosecutions, and 372 convictions. Of all the complaints made, only one in 297 resulted in a court prosecution and one in 352 in a conviction. That cannot be right.

About 60 per cent. of all mediated neighbour disputes involve noise, and estimates of the success rate range from 40 to 77 per cent. Mediation is cost-effective and usually costs between £200 and £300. If intervention is early enough, it can save local authorities a great deal of money, as well as save the time of the police and the courts. Mediation services are a valuable resource when dealing with noise nuisance, and I wish to place on record my recognition of their role. I also wish to pay tribute to my local service, which has been extremely helpful to me and to many of my constituents. Obviously, mediation does not solve all noise disputes. The Bill does not tackle all noise disputes, but deals only with night-time noise.

The causes of some noises are more amenable to mediation than others. Night-time noise problems are especially difficult to mediate. Frequently, people are more belligerent and, in my experience, often suffering from the effects of alcohol or drugs. Noise nuisance and other forms of anti-social behaviour are often perpetrated by vulnerable people who are unsupervised under the guise of care in the community. Such people can cause havoc in a neighbourhood and neither mediation nor the provisions of the Bill will deal with their problems, which are more deep-seated and require much greater application from the Government to provide for them both in the health service and in community services.

I hope that the Bill will succeed in providing the first penalty for the careless, selfish and sometimes criminal householder who causes night-time nuisance. I know exactly what such noise means in practice. In my very own street, in my inner-city constituency, we have had a succession of noise nuisances over the past four years.

One couple, who live at the opposite end of the street, told me that, for the two years before I moved in, there had been continuous problems with their neighbours. When they came to me, they had already suffered for two years. They had a petition signed by 18 neighbouring households testifying to the extent of the problem. In a note that they put through my letterbox, the woman wrote:

"We are a normal family. We don't object to parties—anything within limits—but this is too much to bear."

Her husband is a postman getting up at 4.30 in the morning. They have a child of five who has to go to school. She also goes out to work, yet they could get no peace at home and no sleep at night. Life had become utterly impossible.

That problem was brought to me in June 1994. It was resolved only two months ago, despite all the efforts of the relevant authorities, as well as my efforts. During that period of persistent noise nuisance, various neighbours who were home owners, and an elderly woman who had to be rehoused by the local authority, moved away. My constituent wrote to me:

"people are being driven out, the police carry no weight whatsoever, though I may add, without them on the end of the phone I too feel I may have gone by now. I have also had great support from the EHO, who have sent us the 'Noise Pack', twice now they have sent letters to No. 18, so the next step is to take court proceedings which I have reservations of doing for obvious reasons."

That constituent was courageous and persisted in trying to deal with a problem that was not hers alone but the whole street's. However, the problems got worse and worse.

After the first offending household had been somewhat quieted through the procedures of the local authority and threatened with eviction—it was a council tenancy—the woman's immediate neighbour vacated his home and let it to a so-called care in the community organisation. That organisation, for a substantial amount of money, brought four young people—which became a succession of young people—into the house, all of whom were on probation and none of whom was supervised in the residence. The Government require no registration of such small homes. From then on, there was a reign of tyranny in our street.

Fortunately, we keep such long hours in the House that I would often get home when the worst was over. People could not believe that I had not heard every bit of the loud music, the shouting, the motor bikes, the throwing, the arguing and, once, an axe being thrown into the neighbour's garden. That havoc could not be easily arrested. Recordings were taken; things quietened down. By the time that the case was to come to court, it was said that new recordings were required and so on and so forth.

I shall not continue with that sad story, but it is a miracle that someone did not commit an act of violence against the perpetrators. Those responsible for the young people showed a complete lack of responsibility. What is more, that illustrates the amount of time, effort, expense and frustration involved when one uses the present law.

For all those reasons, we welcome the Bill. We congratulate Val Gibson and the Right to Peace and Quiet Campaign, as well as all those constituents who have tried valiantly to find some solution to the problems. Much more comprehensive action is required, however, to deal with cases of persistent anti-social behaviour, when noise is used as a weapon alongside threats and often actual violence.

In July last year, Labour proposed to tackle such anti-social behaviour, suggesting a number of remedies in our document "A Quiet Life". They were widely recognised, appreciated and applauded by everyone except the Government, who dismissed them as "merely window dressing"—those were Ministers' words. On reflection, however—perhaps because of the amount of support—Ministers have taken them up, I am glad to say, albeit in a more limited form, in part V of the new Housing Bill, which has little else to recommend it.

Although we welcome the Noise Bill and its intentions, the Labour party remains concerned about aspects of the legislation. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) raised the substantial technical concerns expressed by his local authority. I hope that we shall hear some response from the Minister to those concerns. I must raise a number of other concerns as well as some that I have in common with my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting mentioned resources. The financial memorandum states:

"The additional cost for local authorities to enforce the night noise offence is estimated to be between £1 and £3 million per year."

[Ms Joan Ruddock]

A few minutes ago, the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) and I had an exchange on that very question. How do local authorities prioritise, when they are required to implement so much legislation on behalf of their citizens?

I fear that the financial memorandum grossly underestimates the amount of money that would be required for effective implementation of the Bill as proposed. Dividing even the maximum figure of £3 million by each of the 405 local authorities in England and Wales would give just over £7,000 per authority. In the survey of local authorities published yesterday by the National Society for Clean Air, an alarming 70 per cent. of those who responded identified lack of staff and resources as a major constraint on their ability to control noise nuisance—it was by far the biggest reason cited for local authorities having difficulties dealing with the problem. I am sure that that was the problem that confronted the London borough of Barnet.

I know that the hon. Friends of the hon. Member for Ealing, North are taking notes on his behalf. I wonder whether he has estimated how many local authorities will adopt the provisions and how much, on average, implementation will cost each authority. Alternatively, perhaps the Minister would like to give the Government's view—I suspect that they assisted with the calculations.

Furthermore, as the offence is specifically night-time noise, it will be essential for local authorities to provide out-of-hours services if they are to implement the proposals with any effect. In an area like mine, local authority officers would probably feel unable to go if they had to go alone. They either have to get a police escort or go in pairs, such are the dangers of dealing with night-time noise in many areas. Given that local authorities are currently cutting services to meet the Government's latest demands in respect of revenue support settlements, that may well be impossible.

Even if local authorities do implement the measures effectively, they will not benefit from the moneys raised by fixed-fine penalties. I wonder whether the hon. Member for Ealing, North considered allowing local authorities to retain the sums so raised, as they are able to do with parking fines. If so, why did he decide against it?

The level of fines proposed is one of the few points on which I agree with Conservative Members's criticisms of the Bill. I do not believe that £40 is consistent with deterrence, and I doubt very much whether victims of noise nuisance would consider it sufficient punishment.

We are unable to understand why the proposed powers are adoptive rather than mandatory. The hon. Member for Ealing, North outlined his reasoning, which is that not all local authorities face the same severity of problem. If any local authority is faced with just one such problem, that authority owes it to the council tax payer householder to see to it that the problem is dealt with. That means that there should be mandatory powers and that action should not be a matter of choice.

If it is a matter of choice, it is likely to give rise to a situation in which behaviour that constitutes a criminal offence on one side of a street would be perfectly legal—perhaps not perfectly legal, but at least not subject to redress—on the other side if that street happens to be divided by a local authority boundary. The consequence could be even greater disparity between the noise nuisance services provided by local authorities in future.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): Does the hon. Lady accept that the provision of a mandatory service across the country will inevitably cost more?

Ms Ruddock: I can only deduce from the Minister's question that he is perfectly happy that some local authorities will not use the powers, either because they cannot find the money or perhaps because they do not give sufficient priority to dealing with noise nuisance. The Minister's question shows yet again that the Government are interested not in people but—

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): They are interested in window dressing.

Ms Ruddock: Indeed, as my hon. Friend says, the Government are interested only in window dressing. They support the Bill but are not prepared to ensure that local authorities have the necessary resources to give an equal right to all our citizens to have noise nuisance dealt with effectively.

Mr. Jenkin: I apologise for not hearing the beginning of the hon. Lady's speech. It is interesting that Conservatives are usually accused of over-centralising and being too dictatorial to local authorities, but when we want to give local authorities the choice to decide how to handle issues such as noise abatement, according to local circumstances and their judgment, the hon. Lady wants to centralise and control. Does not that say something about the hon. Lady's party?

Ms Ruddock: If I may say so, it says something about the hon. Gentleman. What he is proposing does not mean choice for local authorities; he is proposing that citizens should have unequal rights. He is saying that some citizens should have the right to have noise nuisance at night subject to redress by their local authority, while others should not. That cannot be the proper way for the Government to proceed. We have often sought choice for local authorities to do the extra things that citizens would have them do, but it should be a common baseline that all citizens have this particular fundamental right. We do not wish local authorities to have to decide whether to provide the service according to the difficulties they face under the revenue support grant settlement by the Government.

Mr. John Marshall: Does the hon. Lady agree that there are very great differences between urban areas, such as those that she and I represent, where noise pollution is a major problem, and rural areas where it may not be a problem? In the real countryside, where people live at significant distances from each other, noise is not a problem at all. To impose a national solution to a local problem is sometimes a mistake.

Ms Ruddock: I wonder where the hon. Gentleman lives and what newspapers he reads. Has he never heard of the noise nuisances that occur in the countryside? Although the Bill would not cover the problem, raves are now one of the greatest problems for people living in the countryside. Noise nuisance is not just an urban problem. In a village, one anti-social neighbour can cause distress to others as great as in any town or city. Those affected

have a right to redress, and that is why the Opposition say that powers should be given to all local authorities and they should not have to opt in.

Measures to tackle the chronic and worsening problem of noise nuisance are long overdue. We already know that the provisions that exist are unacceptable to victims, most of whom are extremely dissatisfied and would continue to be if they found that their local authority would not tackle the problem whereas a neighbouring authority would. It would be preferable for all local authorities to be required to implement those measures and to receive appropriate support from Government to do so.

Clarification is also needed over the proposed night-time noise limit of 35 dB. I assume that that will be the limit used by the Secretary of State, if he has to implement the Bill—perhaps the Under-Secretary would clarify that for us. Defining noise nuisance is problematic. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West referred to some of the differences in the ways in which people perceive noise and how they are affected by it. Many hon. Members will be aware of the survey on attitudes to noise carried out by the building research establishment in 1991. One of the main findings was the great variety in the acceptability of noises. Car alarms and people arguing were far more objectionable than children playing or people laughing, even if the decibel level was the same. In other words, the type and quality of noise is as important as the level of noise in determining nuisance.

Specialists in the subject are also concerned that the 35 dB limit does not take adequate account of low frequencies and, in particular, that the "A" weighting used to adjust sound measurement to mimic the human ear does not adequately describe bass music. As we have heard today, that type of music—low, persistent beat music—is the most common source of night-time noise complaints.

Labour would welcome a clarification of how the chosen limit will take account of ambient noise levels, which in rural areas—I concede the point to the hon. Member for Hendon, South—are very different from those in urban areas. It seems unlikely that any one limit can prove satisfactory, and the Bill would give the Secretary of State the power to determine different noise levels for different circumstances.

I wonder whether the hon. Member for Ealing, North has considered that local authorities might play an important role in advising the Secretary of State on what levels are appropriate to different areas and different circumstances. Areas are different, and it could be useful to involve local authorities in trying to establish how to deal with the measurement of noise, as the Bill provides.

I want to address the important issue of the relationship between the local authority officers who will implement the Bill's measures and the police. Many of those officers are concerned that attempting to implement measures to deal with night-time noise nuisance and the confiscation of equipment may put them in potentially dangerous and difficult situations. Unless they receive adequate support and co-operation from the police, we believe that those local authority officers will be unable to make full and effective use of their new powers. Knowing the enormous pressures that the police are under and the shortage of officers on the beat, does the hon. Member for Ealing, North, or the Minister, believe that the police will be able to provide adequate back-up if local authorities undertake those new duties?

We seek clarification on a further issue. We wish to know whether the equipment that can be seized will include items such as records, cassette tapes and compact discs. Will do-it-yourself equipment and tools such as drills also be included? What is the status, if any, of noisy animals, such as the constantly barking dog that is often left alone at home overnight?

We are delighted that the Bill makes provision for the seizure of equipment and clarifies what can be taken. Although one hon. Member stated that such seizures had not presented a problem to his authority, it certainly has been such in my area, where, in one desperate case with which I had to deal, equipment was eventually seized by the police, but the courts made them give the equipment back. The police felt extremely angry about that, and felt that their position had been undermined. The case has not been successfully resolved, partly as a consequence of the court's intervention.

I have raised many points for clarification, and I hope that we can hear either from the hon. Member for Ealing, North, should he be able to return to the Chamber, or from the Minister, as it is important for us to get a better measure of the Bill before it proceeds to Committee. Having said that, I hope very much that it will receive a successful Second Reading and that it will take its place in Committee. It is but a small measure, but we should like to make it as effective as possible in the battle to contain noise and anti-social behaviour. The Opposition will co-operate with the hon. Member for Ealing, North when his Bill reaches Committee.

12.52 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on introducing the Bill and I appreciate his reasons for not being in the Chamber right now. He undoubtedly had a duty of friendship and loyalty to attend the funeral of Philip Lawrence, and I am particularly sympathetic in that regard as it was due to Philip Lawrence's tragic death that my private Member's Bill—the Offensive Weapons Bill—came into being. I therefore add my tribute to Mr. Lawrence.

I also wish to stress the importance of the Noise Bill. I suspect that, if one went to a pub or coffee bar and asked people which topic was more on their minds—the Scott report or the measures that my hon. Friend has introduced to try to control noise nuisance, which has destroyed people's lives—there would undoubtedly be a chorus of responses about how noise afflicted people's lives, making the subject of the Scott report a secondary issue.

No one needs bad neighbours. Everyone is entitled to a decent life. For years, however, neighbours have been suffering in silence, frustrated by the fact that the police do not regard noise as a matter for them unless violence is involved. Local authorities have also been reluctant to take action, and have perhaps felt somewhat powerless.

Desperate sufferers of noise have only one recourse: to take legal action at their own cost, and that takes time. The scale of the problem is reflected in the enormous post bag that I received, containing more than 200 letters from angry people. One of the letters—from a woman who lives in Sheffield, Yorkshire—sums up the passion and feeling that people have in this regard:

"We have personal experience of a neighbour from hell.

The noise was horrendous day and night. My thoughts alternated between suicide and murder."

[Lady Olga Maitland]

We must understand how deeply people feel about noise and how difficult it is for people to complain about it. Those who make noise have become intimidating and quite violent if people complain—for example, people have been stabbed, shot and beaten up for objecting to noise. In 1994, a classical pianist was gaoled because he set fire to the home of an elderly woman who dared to protest about his daily nine hours of practising.

The scale of noise complaints has increased over the years, particularly noise from neighbours. Last year, there were 112,000 recorded noise complaints—and I am certain that many more complaints could have been made—mainly as a result of bawdy parties, blaring music systems, barking dogs and quarrelling families.

Noise can have a serious effect on people's health—it can cause mental scars of stress, anxiety and depression, and the physical changes are well documented. I draw hon. Members' attention to other letters that I have received. One from a person who lives in south London states:

"It has affected my health and I am now under the Doctor's care. I have become so depressed about the noise, the lack of sleep and the amount of time and money involved in taking this action, that I regularly take antidepressants."

I have also received a letter from one of my constituents, which states:

"We have only had one decent night's sleep this year and that was only because we went and stayed at a friend's.

My wife and I are tired, stressed and suffering from depression. In short our life is being made hell and we are becoming ill because of this man."

The powers in this Bill are undoubtedly important.

Some hon. Members have asked why we are only talking about noise that is made at night, when there can be so much aggravating noise by day. I feel for people who have retired after a lifetime of work and toil and who are trying to enjoy peace during the day. Is music any more tolerable during the day? Nevertheless, I do not wish to denigrate the importance of putting a curfew on noise at night.

The powers we give to local authorities must enable them to tackle these problems robustly and take reasonable steps to investigate excessive noise. One issue is the benchmark of acceptable noise. We live in a noisy society. Even at night, we sleep at an average 35-dB level. That is considered normal. It is equivalent to sleeping in a bedroom with closed, single-glazed windows, facing on to a busy suburban street. Moreover, two thirds of British homes are exposed to noise above that limit.

Of all noise, noise at night is undoubtedly the most distressing. It is interesting to consider the experience of Westminster city council, which has led the way in tackling noise. It has noise patrols which operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That has undoubtedly brought relief to residents. That council's experience is that, in 90 or even 95 per cent. of cases, people will respond positively to a polite and courteous approach to turn down the sound. The real question is how we deal with the hard core of people who do not respond and cause hell for everyone else.

There are other problems. It is not just a matter of sounds coming from the domestic property next door, the flat above or the house nearby. Noise at night from other sources should be included in the Bill. For example, cockerels crow at night and with the early dawn. That is not just a rural issue. Many people living in suburban areas, including my constituency, like to keep a henhouse and cockerels in their gardens. That may seem romantic, but it is not—they make a dreadful piercing sound.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: My hon. Friend does not represent a rural seat. Is she saying that people who live in the countryside should no longer be able to keep cockerels, a tradition going back many centuries? Country people often find that people from, for example, Sutton and Cheam, move to the countryside and then kick up a fuss about rural traditions.

Lady Olga Maitland: I understand my hon. Friend's comments about cockerels in a rural environment. However, he must remember that the noise of cockerels in a urban area, where there is a concentrated population, cannot be absorbed and is therefore much more intense. Other problems include dogs barking in gardens and car doors slamming. Those are not strictly neighbour nuisances, but they are close to that.

We are talking about how we can improve the Bill. I have a few reservations about it. It is an empowering Bill. It does not make it obligatory for local authorities to set up noise patrols. Local authorities are mixed in the degree of seriousness that they attach to noise. About 65 per cent. of local authorities in England and Wales do not provide a 24-hour service. About 86 run some form of service, and about 19 run a weekend service.

Let us consider the experience of my constituency. Sutton is a Liberal Democrat-controlled council which claims to be strong on the environment and on environmental pollution. However, it employs just two people, once a week, to investigate noise nuisance complaints. In the past year, it has received about 1,200 complaints. Two people working once a week will not get very far when there are so many frustrated residents.

What worries me is how to put pressure on local authorities to take the issue seriously. Obviously I want to encourage all council tax payers to press the matter loudly, firmly and persistently. If they do not like what their local authorities are doing, for heaven's sake they should vote them out. The Liberal Democrats in Sutton do not deserve to retain their so-called green label when they are manifestly not taking action against environmental polluters.

I welcome the Bill. It is important that, at long last, people will have a swift remedy. There will be clearly defined standards of what is acceptable when mediation fails. A sharp rap on the knuckles or in the pocket with a noise ticket will focus minds. Perhaps the level of fine, which is set at £40, should be raised, or perhaps it should be flexible. I agree with hon. Members that £40 is not a real deterrent.

Neighbours should not have to suffer months and months of guggling around by local authorities and environmental health officers, which in the end achieves absolutely nothing. Residents want action. The Bill gives them the means to take action. In future, it will be closed season for noise. The tyranny of noise vandals can end. I warmly welcome the Bill.

1.4 pm

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): It is a privilege to speak in this debate, which has attracted wide interest both within and outside the House. I compliment my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), who is in his place, and I welcome his Bill.

Apart from physical violence, probably nothing other than noise causes so much distress, offence and misery, and results in such a lowering of the quality of life of innocent people. People should have the right to enjoy their homes in peace and quiet, and the selfishness of noise makers should have the attention of the law. The Bill will enable that.

Hon. Members have given examples of constituents complaining about excessive noise which councils feel unable to do much about. They require detailed evidence, collated over quite a long period, detailed records, and so on. The net result of council inquiries is continuing misery for the person suffering from the noise until something is done and often, as my hon. Friends have said, unpleasant retaliation from the people causing the nuisance and their friends in the meantime.

The law is clearly unsatisfactory, and statistics show how ineffective it is. In 1993-94, there were roughly 111,000 complaints of neighbour or domestic noise to local authorities. Of those 111,000, statutory nuisance was confirmed in only 40,000, and only 3,600 abatement notices were served. As a result of those notices, only 247 prosecutions took place and 220 convictions were obtained. That shows that the law is deeply unsatisfactory.

Those 111,000 complainants cannot all have been completely mischievous and without merit. They took the trouble to do something about the misery that noise was creating in their lives. The law is also unsatisfactory because local authorities are uncertain about the extent of their powers. That may account for the minimal number of prosecutions that are undertaken. I understand—it has not been contradicted—that local authorities will welcome a specific power to act such as that in the Bill.

I am afraid that, in daily life these days, I find people more and more selfish. Music—if one can call it that—is one of the worst examples of noise nuisance. Barking dogs also come very near the top of the list. Such selfish acts cause sleep deprivation and damage to health. Often, violence results, and it is sad that, when it does, both parties are brought before the magistrates court and both are bound over as though they were equally at fault. It is a useless remedy and gives no satisfaction at all to the person suffering from the noise. When both parties are bound over, the perpetrator continues his or her activity, often to a greater extent, while taunting the other person that they can do nothing about it. Moreover, the person who complains is made to feel equally to blame. That must be unsatisfactory.

To make noise above a certain level should be a criminal offence, both during the night and during the day. I believe that the Bill does not go far enough. The matter should not just be left to local byelaws or local interpretation. Making noise above a certain level needs to be a criminal offence per se, just as not wearing a seat belt is. It should be a law like the others that we all have to abide by. Life should be made just as unpleasant for the perpetrator as he or she makes it for the victim.

I tell my hon. Friend the Minister that the Bill could go further. It still relies on warning notices, it still relies on local authority action, and it does not provide the instant action or instant prosecution that many of us would like. By instant action, I mean an immediate summons to the magistrates court, as applies when one is caught speeding or driving with excess alcohol in the body.

On 30 October 1994, the then Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), announced that he was setting up a working party to identify quicker and simpler remedies to the problem of neighbour noise. The Bill is the result, but I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State that it could go further. The person suffering from noise in the middle of the night who complains about all the nuisances that we have been discussing will not get any more sleep that night, the next night or any subsequent night until the local authority has gone through its procedures.

I grant that the procedures under the Bill are better than those available previously, but I seek from the Bill the instant remedy that I thought the Government sought to provide. Such an instant remedy was one of the proposals contained in the package of measures announced by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State on 12 December last. He said that action was to be undertaken as soon as possible, and an instant remedy should have been included in the Bill.

So long as making noise above a certain level is only a civil offence, people will continue to have to take the law into their own hands, and complaints about noise and disturbance from neighbours will increase. Controls on neighbour noise must be strengthened. The Bill is a start, but it is only a start. I draw the Under-Secretary of State's attention to his press release on 12 December last. He said that the Government wanted to create a new offence dealing with excessive noise from domestic premises during the night-time period. He added that that would

"require new legislative powers and we will look for an early opportunity to introduce these".

The Bill gives my hon. Friend that opportunity, and I hope that he will table suitable amendments in Committee to achieve just that.

I have a further concern, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) alluded. It relates to timing. There are two completely opposite problems. The first concerns when night time is proposed to start. A perfectly lawful activity that is a little noisier than one might wish could still be going on between 11 pm and midnight. To cut off that noise at 11 pm might be a little inappropriate, especially if a conviction resulted. I suggest that midnight might be a more appropriate time.

There is, however, a totally contrary concern, which may be thought to conflict with what I have just said. Noise is also offensive during the day, and 11 o'clock may not be early enough. Many people are shift workers or work at night, such as those who run our hospitals and transport services. Their sleep patterns are different from the norm, but they are as susceptible as the rest of us to excessive noise. That is the other side of the coin, and I hope that that, too, can be considered in Committee.

As a result of what is happening these days, people find that their general health is being badly affected through stress and lack of sleep. The result is something akin to road rage: anger, rage and hatred. In many cases, violence also results, and who can blame the victims of noise if

[Mr. Richard Alexander]

that sometimes happens? The Bill will prevent some of that. It does not go far enough, but it deserves all our support.

1.14 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate. With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, may I also be the first to welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) back to the Chamber from his duties in his constituency? May I be allowed to put on record the fact that everyone who has spoken has heaped praise on my hon. Friend for his work in preparing and introducing the Bill?

Much of the discussion has been about the scope of the Bill. I echo some of the sentiments of my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) about its possible deficiencies, in that it confines itself to night-time noise and to neighbourly noise. Much of the noise that affects people's residences comes not from other people's residences but from commercial and publicly owned concerns outside the domestic environment with which the Bill deals.

I fully accept that we should perhaps tackle the issue in bite-sized pieces rather than try to be too comprehensive, but I still hope that those aspects will be taken on board. If my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North studies the record of the debate, he may find good meat to feast on when he is thinking about amendments for the Committee stage.

I shall now pick up something said earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett), who unfortunately cannot be in the Chamber at the moment. He got dragged into a minor altercation about the role of local authority environmental health officers and their attitude to forms of regulation other than noise regulation. If we could persuade the environmental health officers to tackle the problem of noise abatement with the same terrifying enthusiasm with which they tackle food safety, we should probably have a riot on our hands about their intrusion into our lives.

It is worth analysing what drives environmental health officers on the food safety issue—it is usually a "more than my job's worth" mentality. The way in which the regulations have been framed—the European legislative and regulatory framework is as much at fault as ours—means that there is a liability on the officers if they fail to enforce them. For noise abatement there is no such liability. Perhaps there should be.

Perhaps there should be more than a mere discretionary duty on local authorities to enforce noise abatement. Perhaps there should be more of a legal requirement, so that in case of failure, sanctions could be imposed on the local authority. Perhaps, also, there should be less of a legal obligation on local authorities to reduce the temperature of our cheese to below 6 deg C, which spoils its flavour, and all the other silly things that people are forced to do. I offer that as a countervailing thought.

One of the factors that drove me to take part in the debate was the case of "Mrs. Smith". I call her that because I want to maintain her anonymity, but she will be a familiar figure to almost every right hon. and hon. Member of the House, because she is typical of the problem that I hope the Bill will tackle. She is a dear, sweet lady who has saved enough money to live in her own home and maintain herself. This is not, incidentally, a problem caused by high-rise construction. She lives in a modern, well-spaced housing area called Highwoods, which is an attractive place to live.

She has been unfortunate, in that a rather selfish young man has moved in next door. He started out by causing a great deal of noise at night with music and cars revving. She naturally involved the environmental health department. It is appalling that, ultimately, the local authority will advise her to take out an injunction against the neighbour. It is absurd that ordinary law-abiding citizens must start spending their good money on legal advice to take out an injunction against somebody who is literally breaching the peace.

The sad thing is that the youth next door would probably be eligible for legal aid. The lady's solicitor did what a wise solicitor should do in the circumstances—he advised her not to go down that route, as the youth would have unlimited resources with which to contest the injunction, while she would be using up her valuable savings. It is absolutely right that we should tackle the matter. We do not expect the police to apply to the court for an injunction to stop somebody exceeding the speed limit, so why do we expect little old ladies to spend their savings to stop someone breaching the peace?

Mr. Couchman: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the few drawbacks of the right-to-buy legislation is that a property bought with hard-earned savings and a mortgage may be next door to a property that has not been bought? That is particularly true with blocks of flats. A tenant can then arrive at a property that is still owned by a local authority or housing association and make all the noise under the sun, thereby severely prejudicing the peace and happiness of the people who bought the next-door property and blighting the property so much that it becomes unsaleable.

Mr. Jenkin: I agree with my hon. Friend. When properties are bought, the undertakings on noise and the countervailing pressures on tenants by a landlord are transferred. It should be easier for a landlord—whether social or council—to deal with people who are disrupting the peace. Surely there is less of a duty on a public housing authority to provide long-term accommodation for somebody who is not prepared to play by the rules or to fit in with the local community. It should be easier for councils to evict tenants who have breached the covenanted undertakings about noise that they made when they moved in.

I fully understand my hon. Friend's point, which ultimately depends on the interpretation of the courts. My authority, Colchester, argues that there is little purpose in applying for court orders to evict noisy tenants from premises, because magistrates tend to support the right of residence of the tenant rather than the rights of the other tenants and residents.

We have been dealing with the minutiae and the technical detail of the Bill, but I would like to take a step back in my last few comments.

This is an important piece of social legislation. In some respects, it is the equivalent of the Clean Air Act 1956, under which individuals who were polluting the

environment to the detriment of the common good were told that they could no longer do so. It was a good piece of Tory legislation. We want a clean airwaves Act, if that is the correct term. We want to be able to have around us clean sound, not sound pollution—to that extent, the Bill is important.

I would go further: we are living in a society in which people have more and more rights and are more capable of indulging themselves. People are increasingly brought up to express their own aspirations and emotions, and there is less discipline in schools. People are less encouraged to have regard, for their immediate neighbours, and they have more technical means of inflicting their indulgences on others. If people abuse their rights, it must be the duty of the law to take those rights away. It is the duty of the law to ensure that it protects those who live in the community considerately, in co-operation with others, and who abide by what we would regard as social norms.

I plead with the House to make the Bill as effective as possible, so that decent people receive protection. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North said that he did not want the Bill to be a killjoy Bill. I hope that it will wipe the smirks off the faces of some of the selfish people in society.

1.26 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): I welcome this opportunity to make a brief contribution to the Second Reading debate. Before welcoming the Bill, I should like to join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on choosing this as the subject of his private Member's Bill, following his success in the ballot. I also congratulate him on the clear and concise way in which he outlined the Bill to the House this morning. My hon. Friend deserves our congratulations and thanks. For my part, I fully associate myself with all the comments that have been made about the reasons for my hon. Friend's absence earlier. I extend my sympathy to him on that account.

The Government welcome the Bill, which is an important piece of legislation. We take on board the general welcome that has been extended to it in speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley), for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves), for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett), for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) and for Newark (Mr. Alexander), as well as the hon. Members for Tooting (Mr. Cox), for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). I note, too, that the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock), who speaks for the Opposition, extended a broad welcome to the Bill. The measure has been debated in a good and constructive way and has had a well-deserved general welcome.

The Government recognise the extreme distress that can be caused by domestic noise, particularly at night. We also recognise the potential cost to the country of the lost sleep, illness and disrupted lives that result from such noise. Today, we have heard many examples of individual suffering. I hope that the Bill will help people who suffer from the problem, especially noise at night.

I am thinking of people such as the residents of Clare road in Greenford, to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North referred in his opening speech. Those residents have suffered from loud music, noisy parties and six months of sleepless nights. My hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford mentioned constituents whose cases he has taken up, including Viki Harrold and Daisy Clement. In particular, he has vigorously taken up the case of Val Gibson, the founder of the Right to Peace and Quiet Campaign.

At present, local authorities have a range of powers to abate noise nuisance in premises, including land, and from vehicles, machinery and equipment in streets, but it has become increasingly apparent that the controls on domestic noise are not working as well as they might.

The number of complaints to local authorities in England and Wales about noise from domestic premises continues to rise steadily. In 1993-94, there were more than 130,000 such complaints—more than a threefold increase over the previous decade. That concern is reflected by the large number of letters received by my Department asking that more be done to address the problem.

One of the themes that has emerged in the debate is that it has been the general experience of hon. Members that the number of complaints that come to them is rising. That was said my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford and the hon. Member for Newham, North-West. That demonstrates the extent and prevalence of the problem, especially in urban areas such as Hendon, South, where residents in tower blocks are particularly affected.

Another theme has been that noise is a widespread problem that can have tragic consequences, as we heard in graphic detail from my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge. He spoke of the disproportionate and violent response in some instances. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey spoke in similar vein, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Newark. They made clear the tragic consequences that can stem from noise.

Noise can come from many sources. We have heard about a wide variety of noises, from Nepalese bagpipes to the problems caused by riddling, but hon. Members have come back to the problem of noise from loud music, especially amplified noise and noise from musical equipment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) took us back to the era of flower power, which I had not previously associated with him. It was a trip of some nostalgia. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North showed a commendable knowledge of modern music and broadened my knowledge of rap, jungle, techno and hardcore, the latter three of which I have not come across before. I look forward to hearing more about them. He made the valuable point that one man's music is another man's noise. We need to be thoughtful and considerate about our tastes in music, and especially about the volume at which it is played.

It is fair to say that many young people who listen to those sorts of noise are considerate and do not cause problems. Many of our constituents enjoy such music peaceably and thoughtfully, but there are those who are not reasonable or neighbourly and, above all, not considerate. My hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford made a valuable point in talking about thoughtlessness. That is the common denominator of much of the problem of noise. If neighbours would think of other neighbours, possibly by extending invitations to

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parties, they might overcome some of the problems. Sometimes, neighbours are not prepared to be reasonable or accept mediation. There need to be actions that can be taken and powers for local authorities to deal with the serious problems of domestic noise nuisance.

The Bill would give local environmental health officers additional powers to deal with the problem. It takes forward part of the Government's response to the recommendations and proposals of the working party set up by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) in October 1994. The resultant consultation paper, issued in March last year, was the subject of widespread positive comment.

The Bill establishes for the first time a noise offence based on an objective standard that will apply to noise from domestic premises during night hours between 11 pm and 7 am. I will answer the other points made by the hon. Member for Deptford in due course, but she asked about the level of permitted noise. While this is the Second Reading of a private Member's Bill, the Government take the view that an appropriate level for the permitted level of noise—the expression used in the Bill—would be 35 dB. That standard is appropriate because it is objective and based on World Health Organisation guidance on the levels of noise that are consistent with preserving the restorative process of sleep. I think that it was my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam who so rightly said that we all need a decent night's sleep. That is very important in the context of this Bill.

The broader points about noise outside the defined hours are also important—for example, taking into account the interests of people with young families and babies and of shift workers. One hopes that those responsible for noise will be considerate about such people outside night-time hours, but the Bill is limited to those hours.

We have debated what the hours should be. My hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford said that resistance was low at night. He took the view that 11 pm to 7 am were the key hours. Other hon. Members have suggested that 10 pm would be an appropriate starting point. No doubt those are matters that can be visited in Committee, but the important point is that people are entitled to a good night's sleep. The Bill will protect people from noise at night.

Mr. Jenkin: Is my hon. Friend averse to extending the powers in the Bill to the whole day? Often, noise from neighbours during the day is just as irritating and stressful as that at night.

Mr. Clappison: The Bill focuses on the problem of night-time noise. My hon. Friend will be familiar with the many other legislative measures that deal with noise pollution and general anti-social conduct. He has certainly made a valuable point, however.

A local authority will be able to offer documentary evidence to a court that, despite a warning, the permitted noise level continued to be breached after environmental health officers had gone into action. Their measurements will be based on an objective standard, rather than the subjective judgments that apply under the statutory law of nuisance with which the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey familiarised the House.

In addition to the usual option of prosecution, a local authority will be able to operate a fixed-penalty scheme for night-time noise. The Bill initially sets the fixed penalty at £40. I have heard the views, expressed on both sides of the House, about whether that is an adequate sum. That is certainly a matter that will arise again during the passage of the Bill. I remind hon. Members that the fixed penalty is provided as an immediate sanction—one that could be an immediate remedy for many cases of neighbour noise.

Further measures can be taken in other instances, particularly in cases of gross or persistent domestic noise. The Government agree that, in those cases, the option must remain for prosecution through the courts. The maximum fine for the offence is to be set at level 3, which is at present £1,000. That reflects the seriousness with which the problem of noise should be viewed.

The Bill also contains the important power for local authorities to seize noise-making equipment that has been used in commission of an offence, under either the night noise offence or the existing noise nuisance provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. From responses to our working party consultation paper, the Government are aware that that clarification of existing powers relating to confiscation has the overwhelming backing of local authority practitioners. Judging by some of the comments made in the debate, it also has a broad welcome in the House. Hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey and some of my hon. Friends, spoke of the need for tough measures to deal with noise. Confiscation would certainly fit the bill.

The hon. Member for Deptford extended the legislation a general welcome. She mentioned resources for local authorities. She should bear in mind the fact that approximately one third of all local authorities already have a night noise complaints service. There are examples of successful services, and our calculation of the additional costs that she said were likely to be incurred is based on a gradual take-up of the powers by other local authorities. That is the way in which the costs will arise.

She said that she wanted a mandatory scheme. She listened to an intervention in which I pointed out the way in which the scheme can be adapted under the present legislation. She also took a very acute intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North about leaving such matters to the discretion of local authorities. She will have to deal with that issue. It is important for local authorities to examine the problems in their areas and to decide the appropriate level of service.

Ms Ruddock: I think that the Minister should be referred, if he has not already seen it, to the report issued yesterday by the National Society for Clean Air and Environmental Protection, which stated that, based on the society's contact with and survey of local authorities on this Bill and on this issue, 70 per cent. of local authorities have said that they cannot properly and effectively deal with noise nuisance because they lack resources.

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Lady is treading into the territory of advocating additional spending. The problem with her plan for a mandatory scheme is that there may be additional spending in authorities that have decided that such a scheme is not appropriate for them, and result in their incurring the expense of the scheme. That would

mean fewer resources for other authorities, which are bound by the same public expenditure constraints. She will know that many authorities, particularly in urban areas, provide a satisfactory noise level response service.

Ms Ruddock: The Minister would help the House if he told us which authorities in England and Wales have no one suffering from noise nuisance at night which should be dealt with by the new provision in the Bill.

Mr. Clappison: That is a matter for local democracy. It is for local authorities to decide, by listening to their residents, what level of noise they think is appropriate. It may be that all authorities will wish to participate in the scheme; we do not know. The Government are leaving it to the authorities to decide. The hon. Lady is, first, taking away the opportunity for local authorities to offer the service. Secondly, she would spend additional money to deliver the service in areas that may not consider it appropriate. The hon. Lady must face that problem.

We should like local authorities to examine the noise problem seriously. If they think that it is a problem, we would encourage them to find methods of best practice. We shall certainly do what we can to disseminate best practice and professional guidance and to adopt a graduated service standard that will clearly identify the appropriate type of service.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford and other hon. Members raised the issue of police involvement. She will know that that issue was also examined by the working party, and that how the police will work alongside environmental health officers is an important question. She will also know that there are many excellent examples of good local liaison between environmental health officers and the police. We want to encourage those informal arrangements by supporting the representative bodies in drawing up a code of practice on effective liaison between the agencies. The police will, of course, continue to have responsibility to support local authority staff where there is a threat to public order. However, the judgment as to what level of support is required is an operational matter for the police. It is clearly an interesting and important issue, to which hon. Members have drawn attention.

The hon. Lady also asked a question about the destination of the fines that will be imposed under the system. I can tell her that the fixed penalty under this scheme, in effect, will substitute for court fines. As with other court fines, local authorities will not receive the fines, because they will have been set by the courts. The situation is not the same as with, for example, parking tickets, because, as the hon. Lady knows, they have been decriminalised. We are taking the noise problem seriously. It can be dealt with by fines in the courts and, as I have already said, they can be very substantial.

The hon. Lady and other hon. Members asked what types of noise can be investigated. The Bill, as it is currently drafted, is very wide-ranging in relation to that question. There may be problems in relation to certain types of noise, but many sources of noise will be investigable. If she examines the Bill, she will see that it is aimed at the equipment that causes the noise. That must be a matter of judgment in each case. Such equipment could certainly include tapes, records, compact discs and do-it-yourself equipment. Perhaps the Committee will want to examine that point further.

The hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) mentioned vehicle noise—

Ms Ruddock: And barking dogs.

Mr. Clappison: And barking dogs—dogs that barked in the night as the caravan passed on.

Noise from vehicles is covered by legislation that has recently come into effect. I refer the hon. Lady to regulations and the Noise and Statutory Nuisance Act 1993. If the hon. Lady examines the fairly wide definitions of dwellings and their surroundings, she will find that some instances of vehicle noise may be covered.

Mr. Simon Hughes: If the Bill is granted a Second Reading, will the Minister ask his officials to consider the question of vehicles on private land? This is where the problem usually arises, but private land is not covered by existing legislation.

Mr. Clappison: I hope that I am not going into too much detail, and I appreciate that there are many matters still to be debated in Committee, but the Bill has been warmly received, and I am sure that, as the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) said, it will benefit many people in the real world who suffer from the problem. The Government warmly welcome the Bill, and I again congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North on introducing it.

1.46 pm

Mr. Harry Greenway: With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I should like to say a few words in reply to the debate. I thank you, your predecessor in the Chair and the House for the indulgence granted me this morning, as I was spending time with my constituency community on a most poignant, sad and important occasion. I am very grateful to everyone.

I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) and for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), who so kindly kept watch for me and provided me with an admirable briefing on the debate. It is clear that the Committee stage will be extremely important, as my hon. Friend the Minister said. I am grateful to him for the comprehensive points that he made in picking up matters raised today.

I am also grateful for the consistent support of the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) and note that he would like the relevant time to be brought forward from 11 pm to 10 pm. This is something that will have to be debated, but we can come back to it. I am also grateful for the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley), who asked whether dogs barking in a garden will be covered. My hon. Friend just responded to that question and said that that difficulty is already dealt with under existing legislation, so the Bill cannot be extended to cover it.

I understand that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) would put people in cells if they made too much noise. Clearly, the mood of the House is very tough, and rightly so. My hon. Friends have spoken in a similarly forceful way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) was anxious that the Bill should be tough and thought that offences committed under the Bill would

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be only civil offences. I assure him that the offences detailed in the Bill will be criminal in nature. That is an important point, and I hope that it gives him some reassurance.

I was sorry to miss the distinction between accidental noise and deliberate noise that was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves). That is important, but noise is noise whether it is deliberate or accidental. I am sure that we will come back to that issue.

I am also very grateful for the generous support of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) with whom I see eye to eye on animal welfare and other issues. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) for his support and I am grateful for the strong support of my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford, who kept a careful and clear watching brief for me.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) made several points which I have noted. My hon. Friend the Minister has made his response, and we will discuss the hon. Lady's points further in Committee.

I am anxious that the Bill should be capable of being as widely applied as possible if it becomes an Act, as I hope it will. My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) drew an analogy between my Bill—and its hoped-for effect—and the Clean Air Act 1956. I agree with that analogy, and my Bill is, like that Act, an attempt at an absolute. My hon. Friend made an inspired point, and we should all bear it in mind.

The advice of the National Society for Clean Air and Environmental Protection suggested measures for preventing noise nuisance. We must remember, for the purpose of the Bill and everything else, that prevention is better than cure. The society's advice included suggestions to site noisy household equipment away from partition walls. It suggests performing noisy DIY jobs during normal working hours when other people are making a noise; apologising to neighbours in advance for disturbance caused by DIY; and telling neighbours in advance about parties and inviting them, and keeping noise to a minimum. It also suggests that, if a dog barks when left alone, arrangements should be made to leave it with a friend. If people do not do that, they might be caught under existing legislation.

I thank the House for an excellent debate, and I hope that it will give my Bill a Second Reading today.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Railway Heritage Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

1.52 pm

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the railways in the development of the country's transport infrastructure. They certainly shaped the landscape of my childhood. I grew up in Bristol, which contains many examples of the work of Isambard Kingdom Brunel. I have many early memories of travelling to London on the Great Western Railway, as we always called it, through the great Box tunnel just outside Bath. I was lucky enough to travel on occasions on the old Bristolian with one of the Castle locomotives pulling the coaches rapidly along.

I remember thinking that I would approve of the advent of the diesel engine as modern technology, but I quickly changed my mind. I believe that many, like me, have great affection for the age of steam and the history of our railways. The influence of the railways on our nation goes far deeper than just the landscape. One has to think only of the Duke of Wellington's anxiety that railways would encourage

"the lower orders to go uselessly wandering about the country"

to realise the enormous social change that has been brought by the railways, in other countries as well as ours. Those of us who are aficionados of the Western movie will clearly understand that.

As a history graduate, I believe strongly in the importance of learning from the past. To do that effectively, we must ensure that historic materials are preserved and made available to the public so that it is possible for our children to learn about the railways and their great contribution to our industrial revolution.

Governments of all political parties have been aware for some time of the need to ensure the conservation of our railway heritage.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Does my hon. Friend agree that interest in the railway heritage is part of a wider interest in transport heritage? If any museum shows old ships or ship models, old bicycles, old cars, old aircraft, old engines or old carriages, those displays have a tremendous appeal for the young, and always will do. That interest should be fostered and encouraged, and that is why my hon. Friend's Bill should be supported in every possible way.

Mr. Robinson: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, and I thank him for his intervention. At this late stage, it may be difficult to extend the scope of the Bill to the preservation of other parts of our transportation heritage. My hon. Friend's extremely good point is borne in mind by all those who have a great affection for the railways.

Section 114 of the Transport Act 1968 transferred responsibility for British Railways Board's historic artefacts and certain of its records to the then Department of Education and Science. In 1975, the national railway museum was opened in York on the site of the former London and North East Railway museum in what was once the York north motive power depot, to house those artefacts and records.

I look forward to visiting the constituency of the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley), who has registered his support for the Bill. For reasons connected with his advice surgeries, however, he is unable to be with us today. I certainly look forward to taking up an invitation to visit the national railway museum. If the Bill is successful in passing into law, I hope to deposit a copy of the Act at the museum.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): While touring the north, perhaps my hon. Friend would like to come to my constituency to visit Wylam in Northumberland, the birthplace of the locomotive. One of the great disputes in history surrounds who built the first locomotive. Wylam is the birthplace of George Stephenson. Although he is often credited with building the first locomotive, it was built by a local shipowner, William Hedley. If records had been properly kept, that mystery could have been cleared up many years ago.

Mr. Robinson: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. My knowledge of railway history has just been significantly improved. If I have time, and my hon. Friend is in his constituency, I will be delighted to come and learn a little bit more on my way north.

The need to preserve our railway heritage was not forgotten in the privatisation legislation, because section 125 of the Railways Act 1993 extended the protection of railway artefacts and records to those owned by the new public sector bodies set up under that Act. Under that section, the Railway Heritage Committee was created in 1994, with the function of designating artefacts or records as worthy of preservation and ensuring that they go to the appropriate collecting institution at the end of their working lives. The committee consists of individuals who are respected in the working railway and railway heritage communities.

The committee has done some worthwhile work. For example, it has designated the Railtrack collection of Brunel-era drawings between 1883 and 1859. That collection comprises more than 7,000 drawings of original Great Western Railway structures, many of them by IKB himself, and bearing his signature. Classed as working drawings, many are still in use and are regularly consulted by Railtrack engineers. A programme of restoration is under way and a feasibility study is now in process to determine whether additional funds can be found to speed up that programme and make the collection available for public inspection.

Also designated is the famous Gooch centrepiece—which has nothing to do with the great man who recently occupied the crease at many of our test match grounds. In 1837, Brunel appointed Sir Daniel Gooch, then aged 21, as the GWR's first locomotive superintendent. He was living proof that one could rise to the top, because, although he resigned in 1864, he soon returned as chairman of the board. In 1872, the shareholders voted him an honorarium of 5,000 guineas, from which the centrepiece, which has a triangular base, was commissioned. At each corner of the centrepiece sits a sculptured figure—I. K. Brunel, George Stephenson and Joseph Locke. Artefacts from the royal train—among other things—are currently being considered for designation.

The powers of the committee, and the excellent work that it has carried out, are in danger of coming to an abrupt end when the companies that own railway artefacts and records are privatised. When the Railways Bill was in another place, Ministers undertook to bring forward a voluntary scheme to extend the heritage regime to the private sector. I understand that that is no longer considered a viable option. The Bill will ensure the protection of those artefacts and records that are leaving the protection of the Railways Act as their owners pass into the private sector.

I pay tribute to the chairman and members of the Railway Heritage Committee, who have given the Bill so much support. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister and to his civil servants at the Department of Transport, who have also taken a keen interest in this matter. Their advice in helping to frame the legislation has been most useful. I am grateful that they were prepared to listen to members of the Railway Heritage Committee and to incorporate their thoughts and observations into the Bill.

The Bill deals with moveable items, artifacts and records, rather than buildings and permanent structures. Buildings and permanent structures are protected by planning legislation. Brunel's train sheds at Temple Mead are grade 1 listed. Hon. Members will be aware that the Railway Heritage Trust does an excellent job in funding and carrying out preservation work on such structures.

The owners of artefacts and records that are covered by the Bill will inherit the British Railways Board's property under the restructuring of the railway industry, as a consequence of the Railways Act 1993. The Bill makes a number of changes, which reflect the different requirements of a scheme involving private sector operators.

I shall outline how the regime will work in practice. When a body to which the Bill applies wishes to dispose of a designated artefact or record, it will be required to notify the committee of the intended recipient and the terms of the disposal. If the committee is unhappy with either the intended recipient or the terms, it can direct the body to offer the item to a different person, on different terms, or both.

The body making the disposal will be able to do so only with the committee's consent or under the terms directed by the committee, but the committee has to make up its mind in six months, after which the disposing body can act freely. I believe that to be a reasonable stipulation.

If the committee determines terms for the disposal, the people to whom the object is offered have to act within six months. All other such disposals under the Bill would be void. Making disposals in contravention of the Bill void should act as a deterrent and reduce the likelihood of dishonest dealings. That is why I have felt that it would be inappropriate to introduce criminal sanctions into the Bill.

I pay tribute to those who devote so much of their lives to preserve old steam locomotives, carriages and the like. Indeed, this week, I had the opportunity to visit Cranmore railway station in my constituency, where I saw the painstaking work that was being done on the Nunney Castle, which is one of the Castle class steam locomotives. In the 1980s, I represented the constituency of Newport, West. Extraordinarily enough, I found one of my former constituents, whom I knew well at the time, on top of the engine busily polishing its engine and getting it ready for tomorrow. As part of its commissioning, tomorrow, it will set off on a journey to Plymouth, which

[Mr. Robinson]

will take the weekend, and then return to Cranmore the following weekend, hopefully having given much pleasure to many people—as it will continue to do.

The Bill gives the Secretary of State the power to give guidance to the committee. That guidance will be used to set out the compensation and dispute regulations and to give helpful advice on how to word directions so that they may be legally binding.

In order to be effective in its task of preserving railway artefacts and records, the legislative framework must recognise the interests of the working railway. It is essential that the working railway should work in partnership with the railway heritage community in the preservation, for future generations, of railway artefacts and records. I believe that the provisions of the Bill will meet that need.

When an item is transferred from a private sector body to a collecting institution, in accordance with the direction of the committee, and the collecting institution pays market value compensation to that body, the committee would not be able to direct the owner to dispose of an item in a way different from that which the owner wishes—for instance, to lease when he wishes to sell or vice versa. For the further protection of the owners, the committee would be required to consent to a proposed disposal if it does not object, rather than just sit on it until its power to direct expires after six months. If the committee failed to notify the owner of the designated artefact or record of the designation, that owner would be free to dispose of that item.

Of course, it is necessary to ensure that working records and artefacts are not in danger of compulsory transfer to museums. To that end, transfers of equipment between owners covered by the Bill—which would, before April 1994, have been BR internal transfers—and disposals in accordance with transfer schemes under part II of the Railways Act 1993, would not require a direction from the committee.

I believe that the Bill will act as an important fail-safe in the task of preserving our railway heritage. One of the delights of our railway heritage is the work of individuals and organisations who voluntarily ensure that museums, such as that in York, make such a contribution to the history of our railways. By doing so, they demonstrate to the younger generation just how important our railways have been to the development of Britain's economic prosperity.

We can travel around many parts of our country and come across preserved and special railways. Indeed, I did so only last summer, when I had the pleasure of travelling on the Blaenau Ffestiniog railway with my family. That railway, together with the East Somerset and West Somerset railways, are to be commended to any hon. Members who are thinking of doing something a little different in the coming summer recess. Certainly, for those of us with young children it is a delight to travel on the railways and to see the enthusiasm of the people who run them and the care that is taken to ensure that these magnificent engines and their carriages are restored to such a remarkable condition.

I know that many hon. Members who spend many years in the House are never successful in the private Member's ballot. I feel fortunate for having been successful and for having this opportunity to try to contribute to the preservation work on our railways. I commend the Bill to the House. I hope that it will pass all its stages, go into another place and eventually become law.

2.10 pm

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson) on choosing the subject of the Bill, and I am grateful to him for his generous reference to my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Bayley), who has put much effort into achieving the ends that the Bill embraces.

My only possible disagreement with the Bill is over what the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome said about there not being any need for criminal sanctions. Given some of the people to whom the Government appear willing to sell our railways, criminal sanctions might not be a bad idea. Compared with systematic ticket fraud or stashing away a few million pounds for after the success of a management buy-out, flogging a few artefacts on the side might seem a relatively minor offence.

Mr. Mark Robinson: I deliberately tried to keep the politics of change in the railways out of my speech. When I visited Cranmore station, it was mentioned to me that one of the advantages of privatisation, which is already apparent, is that people are thinking up new ideas and new ways in which to improve our railways, which I am sure is for the good.

Mr. Wilson: Let us leave it at that. I think that the hon. Gentleman will agree that that sounds like a pious hope rather than a firm commitment.

One cannot entirely leave politics out of the debate, because the Bill is a necessary tidying-up measure as a consequence of rail fragmentation for privatisation. If the railways were not being fragmented for privatisation, there would be no need for the Bill.

The alternative to the Bill, however, as I am sure the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome would agree, is unthinkable. If no safeguard were built into rail privatisation legislation, the history of our railways would be scattered to the four winds, which is certainly not acceptable. Indeed, it would be a tragedy to compound the other tragedies unfolding in our railway network. There must be measures to stop people who, if uncontrolled, might be prepared to sell the railway family silver and other valuables.

We are not only dealing with knick-knacks. For instance, Railtrack owns many historic documents such as the Brunel drawings—the original working plans for the Great Western railway, signed by Brunel and still kept at Swindon—as well as artefacts such as signal boxes and items of signalling equipment. There is much valuable material, and not only in the monetary sense. Much of it is recognised as of intrinsic value by everybody who is interested in this country's extraordinary railway history. We do not want Railtrack to be privatised, and I do not expect it to be, but if it were, it would be an additional public scandal if it gained untrammelled possession of those artefacts.

It is as well to keep some control of the more ancient parts of our railway network, and not only for historic reasons. I was interested in a story in last Sunday's *Wales on Sunday* that described the return of "ancient trains" to the rails. It said:

"On the Rhymney Valley line, a 35-year-old train from . . . Watermans Railways company travels the route from Mondays to Fridays. The Class 47 diesel engine, normally used on special trips, is known as Davies the Ocean."

So, in our wonderful new railway system, the engine has been brought back into service for regular passenger use.

On the south Wales to Birmingham route, passengers

"found themselves on a train leased back from a railway preservation company in Lancashire."

A spokesman for the train leasing companies went as far as to say:

"A lot of people actually like travelling on the old rolling stock."

They may do if they choose to, but whether they want to turn up for their normal commuter train and find that it has been replaced by one that the bold, new, fragmented railway company has hired from a rail preservation company because there is no new rolling stock in the country is another matter. I repeat, the spokesman, effectively for the Government, said:

"A lot of people actually like travelling on the old rolling stock."

However, Cardiff resident Nick Lewis, who travelled between Cardiff and Newport on Sunday, said:

"I couldn't believe it when this ancient train trundled into the station. It was an absolute disgrace to go back 40 years in time to travel in this dilapidated and decrepit train."

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): No sense of history.

Mr. Wilson: As the Minister says, that shows no sense of history. However, he would probably prefer to choose when he travels on 40-year-old trains hired from rail preservation societies and when he travels on rather more modern rolling stock. The point is that it is not just a matter of keeping old railway artefacts to put them into museums. There is the problem that, in the new set-up, the museums will be raided to keep the railways running at all.

As the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome said, the railway industry in this country has a long and honourable history, with its origins in the 18th-century coal mining industry. Earlier, hon. Members discussed which was the first locomotive. There are many contenders for the title of first railway in the United Kingdom. The first railway sanctioned by Parliament was the Surrey iron railway from Wandsworth to Croydon in 1801. The first Scottish line authorised by Act of Parliament was the Kilmarnock and Troon railway of 1808, which opened in 1812 and linked collieries at Kilmarnock to Troon harbour. There is no truth in the rumour that Jimmy Knapp was on board. The line operated with a steam locomotive and carried passengers as well, several years before the Stockton and Darlington railway in 1825, which is usually credited with being the first public steam railway in Britain.

The railways laid the foundations of much of the modern British economy and were one of the more important British developments. Railways were then adopted around the world. British and especially Scottish railway engineers took their expertise to the railways of south America, India and Australia, as well as Europe.

It is understandable that the passionate devotion of many in Britain to the railway should extend to an interest in preserving its past. There are 35 preserved steam railways listed in the British Rail timetable and dozens of museums dedicated to the history of the railways. Many people devote weekends, holidays and retirement to restoring railway equipment and sharing it with the public, who have a huge interest in our railway heritage.

Regardless of questions of ownership—I do not think that my views on that can be mistaken—it is right to have in place a properly ordered procedure for the identification and protection of historic railways. The Bill is therefore welcome. The real tragedy in our railway system is that we are now approaching 1,000 days since an order was placed in this country for new railway rolling stock. Let us therefore treasure what was given to us in the past, while bitterly regetting what is being done to our railway network and our railway rolling stock in the present.

The operations of the proposed committee must be rigid. I can see the point in a six-month time bar after which the owners can do what they like. However, that suggests potential loopholes, and it must be absolutely clear that the availability of the artefacts is notified, publicly known and considered at an early stage by the committee, and the committee's conclusions should be well known, certainly within the railway world. We do not want to find that, somehow or other, certain disposals have slipped through before anyone noticed. In Committee, we should consider ways in which to tighten up the procedures so that they guard against that eventuality.

In many instances, we are dealing with objects of considerable value, not just in the national market, but in the international market. Let us ensure that they are properly protected.

2.18 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson) on having introduced this important Bill. I also welcome the support of the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson). We do not often agree on railway matters, but I am glad that we can at least agree on this one. However, I shall not let the hon. Gentleman tempt me towards some of the more controversial aspects of the railways. Perhaps the *Hansard* record of some of our rather more spirited exchanges on privatisation should form part of the record of the history of privatisation—but I shall say no more about that today.

As the Minister responsible for railways, I am well aware of the importance of and fascination for railway heritage. My hon. Friend has already touched on its value to future generations and to historians. On a more practical note, it is vital for the railway that artefacts and records of historical significance are preserved, so that the industry can benefit from the lessons of the past.

Historic railway records can be surprisingly relevant to the running of the railways today. Indeed, Railtrack still has about 7,000 engineering drawings from the Brunel era. They have not been placed in a museum, because, as my hon. Friend has explained, they are still in use as working records.

The need to ensure the preservation of Britain's railway heritage was taken into account during the passage of the Railways Act 1993, by the creation of the Railway

[Mr. John Watts]

Heritage Committee, an independent committee of experts from railway heritage interests and from the railways industry, to ensure that historically significant railway artefacts and records went to the appropriate collecting institution at the end of their useful lives and became available to a wider public. I must take this opportunity to join my hon. Friend in applauding the work done by that committee.

The committee's powers under the Railways Act extended to the British Railways Board, and to the new public sector bodies due to come into being as part of the restructuring process. Now many of BR's successors are entering the private sector, and thus leaving the scope of the existing heritage provisions, which means that new arrangements have to be made.

Ministers recognised while the Railways Bill was in another place that it would in time be necessary to extend the heritage provisions to the private sector. As my hon. Friend said, there was then a proposal to introduce a voluntary scheme, but on closer examination that proposal proved inappropriate, and we decided that legislation for a statutory scheme was necessary.

I must thank my hon. Friend and congratulate him on the timeliness of his Bill. It will reinforce the powers of the Railway Heritage Committee and enable it to carry out its work more effectively, by giving it power to require information from owners of records and artefacts and by allowing it to delegate to sub-committees. The power to require information from owners is important, and the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North touched upon that aspect. We can ensure that those important records and artefacts are protected only if we know of their existence, and of any proposal to dispose of them.

There may be a gap between privatisation of some of the major owners of railway artefacts and records and the enactment of the Bill. I understand that that may cause concern, but I can assure the House that transfer to private ownership does not mean that objects will be lost to the nation. It has already been mentioned that Railtrack is one of the major owners of such records and artefacts, and I have discussed the matter with the chairman of Railtrack. I have his personal assurance that, as one of the principal owners of railway records, Railtrack will continue to work positively with the Railway Heritage Committee after privatisation. Indeed, Railtrack's solicitor is a member of the Committee and fully supports its work.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that the chairman of Railtrack, too, is what is colloquially known as a bit of railway buff, and will therefore support the Bill containing the measures outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome?

Mr. Watts: Yes, I am sure that my hon. Friend is right. Indeed, I would expect many railway companies moving into the private sector still to want to make records and artefacts available to collecting institutions at nominal cost, as the nationalised railway has done. They will do that to show their support and good faith, and their commitment to both the future and the past of the railway.

Mr. Wilson: On the subject of good faith, if the owners or inheritors of the artefacts set a price upon them, will the purchasing body be given any financial support, as there is likely to be a different level of commercial transaction involved than at present?

Mr. Watts: I am not sure whether the private sector owners will necessarily want to get full the commercial value for the items that they seek to dispose of, but I shall refer to the way in which we propose to use the Secretary of State's power of guidance to indicate the values that we would expect to be set.

My hon. Friend has said that the Bill provides for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to issue guidance to the committee, and I should perhaps explain why that power is necessary and how it would be exercised. It is essential that private sector owners of designated records and artefacts be compensated at market value if the committee directs disposal of those items. But the British Railways Board is happy to continue to transfer records and artefacts to the national railway museum, the Public Record Office, the Scottish Record Office and other collecting institutions, either free or for a nominal charge.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Will my hon. Friend ensure that the Royal Commission on historical manuscripts—of which I am a member—is consulted on the disposal of all archives? Will he also recommended that, where possible, artefacts should be transferred to the science museum's department at York, a marvellous and incomparable railway museum?

Mr. Watts: Indeed. Most of these records have in the past been passed to the railway museum in York, and we intend that that should continue. I shall look further into the point that my hon. Friend makes about the royal commission.

It would not be right to obstruct such a mutually beneficial arrangement between the British Railways Board and the collecting institutions, and it would be wrong for us to make one provision in the Bill for the public sector and another for the private sector, as I am advised that that might hybridise the Bill. I am also responsible for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill, and I think that one hybrid Bill at a time is quite enough. The guidance would deal with that problem.

The market value compensation for private sector bodies would be arrived at through agreement between the owner and the collecting institution. Clearly they will not always agree, and the guidance will therefore need to make provision for disputes. We envisage recourse to arbitration under those circumstances. If the parties failed to agree on an arbiter, the president of the Institute of Arbiters would be asked to choose one. The guidance would cover those matters. In addition, the guidance will assist the committee in drafting directions.

I understand that there may be some concern that giving the Secretary of State the power to provide guidance to the committee would undermine its independence. I must stress that it is not our intention to dictate to the committee which artefacts and records should be preserved. Even if the Secretary of State were to give such guidance, the committee would merely be obliged to have regard to it, not to follow it.

A summary of the matters to be covered in the guidance is set out in more detail in the notes on clauses for this Bill, copies of which are available from the Vote Office

and have been placed in the Library. I am aware of the public interest in the actual contents of the guidance and I can confirm that, when it has been fully worked up, it will be published and copies placed in the Library.

Railway heritage may be primarily concerned with the past but, as I said earlier, it is highly relevant to the future. I am confident that privatisation will bring considerable improvements in the running of the railway, and innovations that will be of interest to future generations. I am therefore very keen to ensure that the records of such an exciting period in railway history and the innovations that will be encouraged by the introduction of private sector disciplines will be preserved for the nation.

I warmly encourage my hon. Friend to visit the national railway museum and to deposit a copy of his Bill there. I am sure that he would be welcomed there and would enjoy his visit. The Bill is supported on both sides of House and is clearly very much in the public interest. I commend it whole-heartedly to the House, and invite the House to give it a Second Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

TOBACCO PROMOTION (PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AND RESTRICTION OF PROMOTION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

2.29 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. There is a rumour circulating the Palace of Westminster that a device has been found under the car of an hon. Member. I hasten to add that it is rumour, and that the device was not found within the precincts of the Palace of Westminster. Will you use your good offices and those of Madam Speaker to circulate warnings to hon. Members so that we can all be on the alert this weekend?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I should have thought hon. Members would be aware of the position already.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Will you use your offices to encourage Madam Speaker to ask the Leader of the House to come to the Chamber today to make a statement about what he proposes to do to increase security in the Palace of Westminster? In view of what my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) has just said, it seems that hon. Members should know, as a matter of urgency, that they are being properly protected.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have noted what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton North): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have already dealt with the point of order. The hon. Gentleman must sit down.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I beg to move, That the Bill be read a Second time now, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. John Carlisle: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is this a different point of order?

Mr. Carlisle: Yes, it is on a different subject. I am a little concerned that the business that is to follow the business that we have been discussing, and which we have just accepted, is the result of a ten-minute Bill. Other hon. Members have Bills that came up in the ballot for private Member's Bills. A ten-minute Bill appears to have almost jumped the queue—perhaps you, Madam Deputy Speaker, could give me some guidance on that.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes, I can give the hon. Gentleman some guidance straight away. It is a bogus point of order, of which I take a dim view. I now put the Question on the tobacco promotion Bill.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 22 March.

WATER CHARGES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Simon Hughes: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I shall deal with the previous Bill first. I moved it "now"—I hope that that was on the record. I understand that it was not able to be taken—

Mr. John Carlisle: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am not taking any points of order from the hon. Gentleman now.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I moved my Bill "now". I understand that an objection was taken to that, so I have now named a date for the Bill to be taken again. I believe that there cannot be any objection to that.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is correct.

Mr. Carlisle: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already ruled on this. I am not taking another point of order on that issue.

Mr. Simon Hughes: On the second Bill, which has just been called by the learned Clerk, with the leave of the Member whose Bill it is, I wish to move the Bill now.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 1 March.

WILDLIFE BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

HOUSE OF COMMONS (REFORM) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be read a Second time on Friday 1 March 1996.

BRITISH TIME (EXTRA DAYLIGHT) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [26 January], That the Bill be read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 1 March.

Mr. Simon Hughes: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) raised a point of order in the dying moments of today's sitting. Could you investigate whether the hon. Gentleman should be required, even at that stage, to declare his interest in the Bill? I realise that the subject has just been placed partly within the remit of the Commissioner for Standards, as well as being within your remit and that of Madam Speaker. Two of the hon. Gentleman's interests listed in the Register of Members' Interests appear to be pertinent, and I wonder whether the House and the public should be aware when someone tries to block a Bill, by whatever means. Whatever the interest of the hon. Member concerned, should it not be declared and appear in the record of the debate in the House?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter with which I can deal. If there are any complaints, I think that they should go to the commissioner.

Mr. John Carlisle: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether it should be stated on the record that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who has just made that objection, should be accurate in his assessment. It is, of course, for you to judge Madam Deputy Speaker whether he is out of order. Are you satisfied that the accusation that he has just made against me as an individual Member is entirely accurate in terms of my interests in this place?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I made it perfectly clear that I did not regard it as a matter for me, but if an hon. Member felt that there was cause for complaint—about which I did not judge—there was a proper course of action to take. That should settle the matter.

Mr. Carlisle: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Entirely untrue and inaccurate aspersions have been cast which show that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey has not kept up to date with the Register of Members' Interests. He has a rather out-of-date copy. When such aspersions, which are without foundation, are cast on an hon. Member's name and character, has he any way, through you, of clearing his name, or does he have sit here accused and unable to say that he is not guilty?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I presume that it will also be open to the hon. Member to make that point to the commissioner.

Mr. Carlisle *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have had enough.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 20th February, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community Documents), the Speaker shall put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Lilley relating to Social Security, Family Law and Pensions not later than Ten o'clock.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

Serious Fraud

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

2.35 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I have raised the question of serious fraud on several occasions in the House. I realise that I cannot refer to individuals who may have been subject to previous prosecutions but who are also subject to current prosecutions.

There are several serious issues which must be considered. First, there is the competence of the Serious Fraud Office. There have been a large number of acquittals in high-profile cases. Secondly, there is the cost of cases to the public purse and the national scandal whereby a number of wide boys have been helped by the legal aid fund. Thirdly, there is a widespread feeling that serious fraud cases are too complicated for the average jury.

We must remember who the victims of serious fraud are. They are frequently the financially unsophisticated—the small man. I remember, at the time of the Dunsdale Securities case, meeting a constituent who told me that he had concentrated all his financial investment in one company, Dunsdale Securities. He had even been persuaded by Mr. Miller, who ran Dunsdale Securities, to increase the mortgage on his house so that he could invest even more money in Dunsdale. He did not realise that the return offered by Dunsdale Securities was far higher than that offered by the gilt-edged securities in which it allegedly invested—so high as to be suspicious.

Similarly, those of us who were in the House at the time of the Barlow Clowes disaster will remember meeting constituents who had put money aside for a rainy day. One constituent had put money into Barlow Clowes to save for school fees. They were the people who suffered because they were not wise enough in the ways of the world and invested in a duff company. More recently, there was the Belling pension fund, about which pensioners suffered worry and concern.

In Sussex, two partners in a firm of solicitors engaged in an £8 million fraud. The victims were the employees of the firm, whose jobs disappeared from under them because it went bankrupt, and honest solicitors throughout the country who had, through the solicitor's compensation fund, to pay out £8 million to the clients of that company. That was all paid for by honest, decent solicitors.

Although the victims may often obtain compensation, as they did eventually in the Barlow Clowes case, the uncertainty before getting it can be fatal. I knew an investor in Dunsdale Securities who got a 7.30 am telephone call to tell him that Dunsdale had gone bust. Within a few days, he had died of a heart attack, which was clearly not unrelated to the worry and concern that he had suffered. While those who suffered as a result of Barlow Clowes were eventually pleased to get compensation, they went through many months of agony about which the perpetrators of the fraud were not concerned.

The other case is one of which I have spoken to my right hon. and learned Friends the Law Officers from time to time. About £59 million was misappropriated, and it was all investors' money. Some of those who suffered were very small investors.

It is not just the fact that small people suffer. The reputation of this country for honest dealing in finance is put at risk when one of these individuals gets away with tens of millions of pounds. Vast sums of money are involved, and the greed and dishonesty that enables people to seek to get away with it beggars belief.

The public have a sense of intense frustration that large sums of money are lost by the victims of fraud. In some of the high-profile cases, many tens of millions of pounds are lost. Many millions are spent on the cases themselves. The Government not only pay the costs of the Serious Fraud Office, but normally help the defendants through legal aid. All that happens—the money has been lost and the costs are paid out—but all too often there is no conviction.

The Serious Fraud Office is nicknamed by some the "seriously flawed office". When Mr. Nadir decided to fly to Cyprus, many people thought that he could have chanced his arm and been prosecuted. He probably would have been at liberty in England now, rather than a prisoner in northern Cyprus.

My interest in this issue was aroused by the Levitt case. I thought that the prosecution by Mr. David Cocks was bungled. He ended up blaming the judge, complaining unsuccessfully about defence counsel and misleading the director of the SFO, the Attorney-General and, indirectly, the House.

Many of us have complaints about the SFO. It has had three directors in its short life. Many question whether its budget is adequate. The *Sunday Times* recently pointed out that the SFO's responsibilities have been increased, in that it is now responsible for cases in which the fraud is more than £1 million, whereas previously the threshold was £5 million.

A lawyer called Bob Goldspink—one could not have invented that name—who is a partner at Denton Hall and specialises in major fraud cases, says:

> "To be the dynamic, fraud-fighting body the country desperately needs, the SFO must be given the resources to hire and train the very best lawyers."

Another lawyer said that the SFO is already woefully under-resourced.

The SFO has had a mixed record. I wish to thank the Lord Chancellor's Office for answering a question of mine today. In the year 1992-93, there were 21 trials, but in only 12 were all the defendants convicted. In 1993-94, there were 26 trials, but in only 14 were all the defendants convicted. In 1994-95, there were 12 trials, in five of which all the defendants were convicted. In 1995 and to date, there have been nine, in six of which all the defendants were convicted.

The scale of convictions is not always the best guide, however. Mr. Levitt was convicted after plea bargaining, but he did 185 hours of community service—scarcely an adequate penalty in view of the scale of the fraud that he had committed.

Apart from the cost of serious fraud to the individuals concerned, there is a huge cost to the legal aid fund. The wide boys who practise serious fraud are smart enough to transfer their assets before they are charged. In the Levitt case, for example, he was given the legal aid appropriate to a pauper, but he lived in a house worth £750,000 and celebrated the end of the case with champagne and going to the plush boxes of White Hart

[Mr. John Marshall]

lane. Since then, he has moved up market in his housing rather than down. The victims suffered twice over—they lost because they were unsuccessful investors, and they lost again as taxpayers.

It sticks in the gullet of most decent people that villains who have been party to very large frauds can then live the life of Riley, having been helped with legal aid. When they apply for legal aid, they are allegedly penniless, but if they escape conviction they suddenly seem able to live the good life.

One of the most amazing cases was that of Mr. Ernest Saunders, who was always able to get legal aid when fighting his case in the United Kingdom courts. I saw recently that he was taking a case to the European Court' for which, I assume, he is having to pay solicitors but where he is not eligible for legal aid. One wonders whether this man, who at one stage suffered from Alzheimer's disease but discovered that Guinness was a good cure for it, may not occasionally suffer from amnesia when filling out his legal aid application forms.

In 1994, there were 1 million applications for legal aid and 600,000 for criminal legal aid, but only 15 prosecutions for fraudulent claims. Are we being told that the criminal fraternity is honest when claiming legal aid? I cannot believe that. I believe that all too often those who practise serious fraud have salted away their assets, so that, when they are brought to trial they can get legal aid paid for by the taxpayer. I welcome the Lord Chancellor's commitment to ensuring that those who are apparently rich and living in big houses will no longer be eligible for legal aid.

The House may like to know about the growth in expensive legal aid. I have today been given the answer to a question that I tabled to the Lord Chancellor's Department. It shows that, in 1993-94, there were 172 cases in which the cost of legal aid exceeded £100,000. In 1994-95, there were 237 such cases, and so far this year there have been 178. In other words, the cost to the taxpayer is considerable.

Finally, we must consider whether juries are suitable for trying serious fraud cases. The Roskill committee in 1986 recommended that serious fraud cases should be tried not by juries but by a judge and lay assessors. We have to ask whether juries are able to understand very complicated serious fraud cases. One recent case was so complicated that the court heard evidence only in the mornings because the judge thought that it would be too much for the jury to take in evidence in both the morning and the afternoon. The burden on the judge is magnified by the need to explain inherently complicated issues to a jury which may include some more simple people.

I have been told by Law Officers and others that the judges themselves are almost exhausted by the end of some serious fraud trials, because the judge has to understand issues that are foreign to him in his daily life. If complicated fraud trials are sometimes too much for the judges, they are certainly going to be too much for the jurors. Complicated fraud trials frequently last for many months, and I do not believe that the juries in such cases are representative of society as a whole.

In a recent case—the one that I am not allowed to mention in case it prejudges another trial—the potential jurors were asked whether they had any views on X. For people not to have a view on X meant that they could not have been frequent readers of newspapers. If they are not frequent readers of newspapers, I suggest that they are not typical of the average person.

If the judge had the benefit of lay assessors, accountants, solicitors and lawyers specialising in City matters, instead of trying to explain the almost inexplicable to people who will never again have to deal with such matters, he would have the arcane issues explained to him by technical experts who understand them very much better than he.

I believe that the history of serious fraud cases—such as the Levitt case, the Brent Walker case, the Guinness cases marks 2, 3 and 4, the Blue Arrow case and other high-profile serious fraud cases—shows very strongly that serious fraud is too serious a matter to be left to the normal system of prosecution. Just as we developed the Serious Fraud Office to prosecute, so we need to have a different system to try those cases, because they are far too complicated for the average person to understand.

2.49 pm

The Solicitor-General (Sir Derek Spencer): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on obtaining the debate, albeit not at the first time of asking. We had an assignation about 18 months ago in the middle of the night which we were not able to complete. I have listened to his points with interest, and he made them with his usual force and effectiveness.

The debate gives me an opportunity to confirm the Government's view that the Serious Fraud Office plays and will continue to play a successful part in combating and deterring financial fraud. Since the SFO was set up in April 1988, it has developed a unique body of skills and expertise, and I speak as somebody who has appeared as counsel in a number of large and heavy fraud cases over the years.

There is much ill-informed and sometimes malicious comment about the record of the Serious Fraud Office by those who have not taken care to look at the complete picture. Their attack upon it is seriously flawed. The reality is that, rather than being in decline, the Serious Fraud Office is expanding, and it is dealing with an increasing work load. The work load was 50 active cases when the Davie report was received more than a year ago, and the case load is now 64.

What is more, the number of cases in which the SFO is answering requests for assistance from foreign jurisdictions by virtue of the extension of its powers under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 has increased significantly, and has contributed to the effectiveness of the office's work. The number of staff, both professional and support, has increased to accommodate the expansion: 32 new posts have been created, of which 13 have been filled to date. More are to come.

I do not wish to bake old bread and go over cases such as Levitt and Guinness, so I would draw the attention of my hon. Friend to more recent successes. In January this year, Deacon, a solicitor who defrauded business men in an elaborate advance fee fraud, was sentenced to nine years' imprisonment after he had been convicted. His co-defendant, Fuller, received a seven-year sentence. Van der Horst received a

three-year sentence of imprisonment for corruption at the Southampton crown court in January, after he had admitted taking £1.6 million in bribes for ship repair contracts.

Graham Ford, the Sussex solicitor about whose case my hon. Friend spoke, received 10 years' imprisonment in December last year after pleading guilty to stealing £5 million of clients' money. In July last year, Mohammed Naviede, the former chairman of Arrows, was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment for an estimated £100 million fraud on international banks. To put the record of the SFO in its true context, it is quite untrue to say that it is a failing or unsuccessful organisation.

In the brief time available to me, I shall deal with the main points that my hon. Friend has raised. It is intrinsic in the prosecution of complex and serious fraud that the investigation will be expensive. There is no avoiding that. The Conservative party, having taken the political step to ensure that serious and complex fraud is prosecuted with energy, has then to will the means of achieving that by voting appropriate sums of money not only for the investigation, but for the subsequent prosecution.

The investigation and prosecution involve the use of private sector firms of accountants on a case-by-case basis, as in the case of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, and they involve the employment of extremely experienced Queen's Counsel, again on a case-by-case basis—members of the independent Bar, of high calibre and with appropriate skills and experience to prosecute such cases.

It follows from what I have just said that, if those cases are to be prosecuted effectively, a fair trial requires that the defendants have appropriate representation. There must be equality of arms. It is unrealistic to think that large sums of money can be expended properly in the investigation and prosecution of offences but that justice can be done without appropriate recompense for those instructed to appear on behalf of the defence.

My hon. Friend has referred to the record of the SFO. It has prosecuted 147 cases to date, and convictions have been recorded against 62.3 per cent. of all defendants. In more than 75 per cent. of those cases, at least one defendant, usually the principal defendant, has been convicted. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that that is an impressive and enviable record. The answer that I have given him today should be taken in its full context.

Criticisms about the amount of legal aid expenditure and whether individuals in particular cases are entitled to the legal representation they receive are easy to make. The Legal Aid Board has at its disposal effective weapons to inquire into whether legal aid has been properly granted or not.

Another complaint from my hon. Friend is that large sums of money disappear, and at the end of the day no one is convicted. That is so in certain circumstances, but I am sure that he would agree that there can be misjudgment, mismanagement and financial catastrophe on a large scale, just as there can be dishonesty on a large scale. The mere fact that there has been a financial catastrophe on a grand scale does not necessarily show that there has been dishonesty.

My hon. Friend's final point related to trial by jury, and he repeated what others have said before him: that in such trials juries cannot understand the case that is put in front of them. Although many of the cases are by definition complex, it is the execution of fraud that is complex, whereas the central notion and principle behind it is often perfectly simple and can be expressed in a few words.

In 1986, recommendation 82 of the Roskill report stated that trial by jury should be replaced by trial by judge and two lay members. However, Lord Roskill would be the first to acknowledge that, since his report of 10 years ago, immense strides have been taken to improve the presentation of serious and complex fraud cases. The judge in the recent Deacon case, which involved loss to the Belling pension fund, praised its presentation and the use of information technology.

In Serious Fraud Office cases, it is becoming routine—rather than exceptional—for use to be made of information technology. It is used in the retrieval of documentation and in the presentation of graphics to the jury—showing the way in which the fraud operated, often in just a few seconds. Information technology is used so that counsel can highlight, on their screens, the important pieces of evidence, and they are supplied with virtually an instantaneous transcript of the evidence. This is a quantum leap forward in the conduct of such cases.

Before hon. Members repeat the contention that such cases cannot be understood by juries, I invite them to go to the Serious Fraud Office to see a presentation—which I have had the benefit of seeing—that shows how such cases are conducted. I extend that invitation to my hon. Friend, who I am sure will find it interesting and instructive. I suggest that it will cause him to reassess his criticism that juries cannot understand what is going on in those cases. Juries often have a very good nose for fraud. The sole issue before the jury is: what was the defendant's state of mind at the time; was he being dishonest?

There is a case for considering modes of trial other than trial by jury. However, such consideration must be edged with caution and not taken lightly. A number of questions have to be considered, particularly whether any replacement for the judge and jury will be any better than the existing procedure. Very often, when an issue in the case is the jury's perception of banking practice and financial institutions, and whether someone was turning a blind eye to what was going on, its members are remarkably independently placed to form such a judgment. It might not be easy to find people who are willing to sit on fraud panels.

It is also important to consider how to draw a distinction between, on the one hand, justifying a special tribunal for serious and complex fraud cases, and, on the other, not having a similar tribunal for other complicated cases. It is incorrect to believe that the only complicated cases involve fraud—other cases, such as multi-handed robberies and child abuse, are lengthy and may involve a detailed analysis of complicated medical or technical evidence, such as in cases involving manslaughter.

The issue is by no means clear; it requires great thought and examination. Certainly, my hon. Friend could say that there has probably been a shift of view since Roskill reported. Certain people who were then

[Sir Derek Spencer]

of the opinion that trial by jury was the only way to try these cases may, with the benefit of further experience, have shifted their view, although I doubt that they have finally come to the conclusion that such change needs to be made and that we must get rid of trial by judge and jury in most cases.

The Government have resolved to re-examine the issue and will do so in a careful and measured way, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General has already explained to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes past Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 5 February 1996

TRANSPORT

Heavy Goods Vehicles (Drivers)

Mr. Lord: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effect of new regulations for drivers of heavy goods vehicles on the work prospects of drivers who wear spectacles; and if he will make a statement. [12913]

Mr. Norris: We estimate that some 3,000 drivers will be unable to renew their entitlement to drive large goods and passenger-carrying vehicles when the new eyesight regulations are introduced. It is not possible to estimate how many of these will lose their job or how many will find some other work with their present employer. The work prospects of those who wish to take up the driving of these vehicles will not be affected.

Bus-to-rail Connections

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he is taking to improve bus-to-rail connections. [13107]

Mr. Norris: The Government recognise the importance of ease of interchange for people using both buses and trains. By maximising private sector involvement, through our policies of privatisation and deregulations, we expect to see connections improve as bus and rail operators respond innovatively to passenger demand and seek to generate custom. The winning franchisee for South West Trains has committed itself to introducing a number of dedicated bus links to SWT stations. In the publication PPG 13: "A guide to better practice", which we published last October, we stressed the need for local authorities to consider both the location and the attractiveness of bus to rail and bus to bus interchanges when developing their transport strategies.

Rail Services

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport from which railway stations rail services have been withdrawn in 1995. [13133]

Mr. Watts: Passenger rail services were withdrawn from five stations during 1995—Attercliffe Road and Brightside in South Yorkshire and Godley East, Miles Platting and Park in Greater Manchester. The services at these stations immediately before closure were nine trains per week day for Attercliffe Road and four for Brightside; one train a week at Godley East, five trains per week day at Miles Platting, and three per weekday at Park. All were very lightly used.

Vehicle Inspectorate (Enforcement Activities)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many rolling road brake testing machines there have been in operation within the Vehicle Inspectorate in each of the last five years; [13234]

(2) if he will list the targets set out for the Vehicle Inspectorate regarding traffic and vehicle reinforcement for each of the last 10 years; [13242]

(3) if he will list the number of immediate and delayed prohibitions imposed by the Vehicle Inspectorate on heavy goods vehicles for each year from 1984 to 1994; [13282]

(4) how many inspections have been undertaken by his Department on tankers contracted by Yorkshire Water in the Yorkshire area; and how many were found to be defective; [13239]

(5) how many traffic examiners and vehicles examiners have been employed as a result of the extra £350,000 invested in the Vehicle Inspectorate in the last year; [13241]

(6) if he will list the procedures that have to be followed by officers from the Vehicle Inspectorate and the police following an accident involving heavy goods and passenger carrying vehicles. [13233]

(7) if he will list the number of *(a)* prosecutions brought and *(b)* convictions in magistrates courts for (i) tachograph and hours offences and (ii) mechanical illegalities. [13273]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Vehicle Inspectorate executive agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 5 February 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions relating to enforcement activities within the Vehicle Inspectorate (VI).

The number of roller brake testers in operation within VI in each of the last 5 years was

1991: 193

1992: 193

1993: 193

1994: 193

1995: 192

(191 roller brake testers are in use at February 1996).

Additional roller brake testing capacity is available in vehicle operators' (designated) premises, primarily for annual statutory testing purposes. This capacity has increased by 43 roller brake testers over the past 3 years.

The number of immediate and delayed prohibitions issued from 1984 to 1994 is shown in the attached Table 1.

The key targets for enforcement activities are shown in the attached Table 2. Previous to 1991, performance on 5 activities was measured against targets related to the number of operators and vehicles. The targets were:

a) MOT Inspections—the equivalent of 1.5 routine visits per year per garage on the broad assumption that there would be one visit. The additional effort would be spent in applying extra checks on garages where it was evident that attention was necessary.

b) HGV Premises—the number of visits would equate to one visit per operator every 5 years. After the initial visit following granting or consideration of a licence, subsequent visits would depend upon need relative to evidence of poor maintenance or substantial changes in the nature of operation.

c) HGV Spot Checks—the equivalent of 20% of the HGV population examined per year (including vehicles examined at operators' premises).

d) PSV Premises—the equivalent of one visit every 5 years with each operator being visited when the licence was being granted or considered. Subsequent visits would be based upon evidence of poor maintenance or a considerable change in operating circumstances.

e) PSV Spot Checks—the equivalent of 30% of vehicle population (including vehicles examined at operators' premises).

All heavy goods vehicles have an annual statutory roadworthiness examination and are subject to roadside checks conducted by VI regardless of the nature of the goods carried. We do not have separate information for tankers carrying water which are checked as part of this normal routine. However, we have carried out special roadside checks on water tankers in the Yorkshire area; total of 203 vehicles were checked between October and December, 29 immediate and 19 delayed prohibitions were issued.

The number of additional posts created because of additional funding provided to VI is 11.5 traffic examiners and 2.5 vehicle examiners.

In accidents involving HGVs or PSVs, a VI vehicle examiner, on notification from the Police, will arrange to inspect the vehicle at the accident site, if possible, or at a suitable location that allows a full examination of the vehicle to be carried out. Particular attention is paid to safety critical systems eg brakes, steering, tyres and suspension, and any defects which the examiner considers may have contributed to the accident recorded. When the examination is complete, the relevant information is entered on VI's accident database. The examiner may issue an immediate or delayed prohibition if, in his opinion, the vehicle is unfit for service. The Police may also request a written factual statement of his findings which can be produced as evidence in Court. In "Special Interest" accident cases eg serious accidents involving passenger carrying vehicles or serious multiple collisions with several fatalities, the procedures are the same although in the case of coaches a detailed examination of the coach interior will be carried out to establish possible causes of passenger injury eg crushing by seats, normally by specially trained teams.

Separate statistics for prosecutions are only currently available for drivers' hours and overloading. All other offences, including tachograph and mechanical illegalities, are counted under a general heading and we cannot provide separate information

The detailed breakdown for drivers hours offences for 1994/95 is as follows.

	Total offences reported for prosecution	*Offences successfully prosecuted*
HGV's	2,835	2,386
PSVs	198	170

Table 1: Immediate and delayed prohibitions issued to Heavy Goods Vehicles for roadworthiness defects

	All prohibitions	
	Immediate	*Delayed*
1984–85	3,619	6,956
1985–86	5,545	8,477
1986–87	4,260	5,331
1987–88	7,693	11,727

Table 1: Immediate and delayed prohibitions issued to Heavy Goods Vehicles for roadworthiness defects

	All prohibitions	
	Immediate	*Delayed*
1988–89	7,774	10,446
1989–90	7,816	9,433
1990–91	9,229	10,615
1991–92	9,827	10,788
1992–93	11,041	11,040
1993–94	10,834	11,426
1994–95	11,516	11,788

Table 2: Key targets set for enforcement activity within the vehicle inspectorate

Target set	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Turnaround time on MOT documentation	1.4 days	1.4 days	1.4 days	'non applicable
Production of traffic enforcement operator licence reports to Traffic Commissioners	non applicable	90 per cent. within 4 weeks	'non applicable	non applicable
Time to produce interim or completed traffic enforcement operator reports for the Traffic Commissioner	non applicable	non applicable	95 per cent. of cases within 4 weeks unless another deadline has been agreed	95 per cent. within 4 weeks unless another deadline has been agreed. 95 per cent. within the agreed deadline
Roadworthiness prohibition error rate	non applicable	non applicable	non applicable	0.5 per cent.
Time to return maintenance assessments for operator licence renewals and variations	non applicable	non applicable	non applicable	95 per cent. within 6 weeks. 99 per cent. within 12 weeks
Time to decide all MOT statutory appeals against refusal to issue a test certificate	non applicable	non applicable	non applicable	99 per cent. within 5 working days
Minimum number of tachographs charts to be examined—minimum 15 per cent. at roadside: 25 per cent. at operators premises	non applicable	non applicable	non applicable	HGV 1.4 million. PSV 0.145 million

Table 2: Key targets set for enforcement activity within the vehicle inspectorate

Target set	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Minimum number of heavy goods vehicles weighed	non applicable	non applicable	non applicable	115,000
Weighbridge equipment availability (nationally)	non applicable	non applicable	non applicable	90 per cent.

[1] Target no longer used as a key target.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what qualifications are required by personnel who carry out the maintenance of brakes and other safety critical parts on heavy goods vehicles and public service vehicles. [13237]

Mr. Norris: Responsibility lies with goods and passenger vehicle operators to ensure their vehicles are roadworthy; there is no legal obligation for maintenance personnel to hold a relevant qualification. However, when applying for a licence, operators make a formal declaration to the traffic commissioner that they will

"undertake to make proper arrangements so that motor vehicles and trailers, including hired vehicles and trailers, are kept fit and serviceable." Advice on how this should be achieved is set out in the "Guide for Maintaining Roadworthiness" which incorporates the procedures necessary to satisfy the requirements for traffic commissioners.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals his Department has to investigate incidents of wheel loss involving heavy goods vehicles; and what funding his Department has made available to investigate this problem. [13240]

Mr. Norris: The Department of Trade and Industry contributed £35,000 to a study of wheel loss which resulted in a 1989 report by the Institute of Road Transport Engineers and led to a British Standard—BS AU 50: Part 2: Section 3:1994—and a British standard code practice—BSAU50 Part 2: Section 7a 1995. The code of practice is referred to in the Department's "Guide to Maintaining Roadworthiness" for operators of heavy vehicles.

An information leaflet, outlining various aspects of the problem and suggesting ways of overcoming some of the difficulties, was produced by the Department at the time of the IRTE report. We plan to update the leaflet to draw attention to the code of practice.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what controls his Department has put in place to prevent the sale of inferior brake pads and linings and other safety critical replacement parts for heavy goods vehicles and public service vehicles. [13236]

Mr. Norris: None. However, discussions in Europe have resulted in a proposal for the control of replacement brake pads and linings which is expected to be incorporated in the braking directive 71/320/EEC. We shall consider taking advantage of these initiatives to introduce into the UK controls for replacement pads and linings. Decisions on the control of other replacement parts will continue to be taken on a case by case basis.

Vehicle and Traffic Computer Information

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each of the last five years the expenditure by the Vehicle Inspectorate and the traffic areas specifically on computerisation of enforcement intelligence. [13232]

Mr. Norris: The expenditure on computerisation of enforcement intelligence by the traffic areas is as follows:

1991–92: nil

1992–93: £131,000

1993–94: £46,000

1994–95: £10,200

(1995–96: year to date £3,400).

The initial set-up cost of the Vehicle Inspectorate's enforcement roadworthiness database in 1991–92 was £379,000. Subsequent running costs are not identified separately from all other computer running costs.

Brake Testing Machines

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many portable air brake testing machines are currently in use for the purpose of detecting air leaks in commercial vehicle breaking systems at roadside vehicle checks. [13235]

Mr. Norris: None

Disabled People (Bus Access)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidelines and advice he has issued to *(a)* manufacturers and *(b)* purchasers of buses about access for disabled people since the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [13188]

Mr. Norris: The Department of Transport has set up working groups with both manufacturers and operators of buses to discuss the regulations that will be drawn up under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

We will also shortly be publishing the first in a series of information bulletins which will report the progress we are making in implementing the transport provisions of the Act. Bulletins will be circulated widely to manufacturers and operators, as well as to local authorities and to disability organisations. When regulations are made under part V of the Act we will issue separate detailed guidance to all those affected.

Vehicle and Traffic Examiners

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vehicle examiners and traffic examiners were employed by his Department in *(a)* 1989, *(b)* 1990 and *(c)* 1991. [13244]

Mr. Norris: The number of vehicle examiners and traffic examiners employed for 1989, 1990 and 1991 were:

	Vehicle examiners	*Traffic examiners*[1]
1989	480	213
1990	474	222
1991	477	204

[1] Figures include traffic examiners, senior traffic examiners and enforcement managers.

Vehicle Crashes

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of vehicles weighing *(a)* 3.5 to 7.5 tonnes, *(b)* 7.5 to 17 tonnes and *(c)* more than 17 tonnes which were involved in crashes producing (i) fatalities, (ii) serious injuries and (iii) minor injuries in each of the last 10 years. [13238]

Mr. Norris: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Number of heavy goods vehicles[1] involved in injury road accidents: by accident severity: Great Britain: 1994

	Accident severity			
	Fatal	*Serious*	*Slight*	*All injury accident*
All heavy goods vehicles involved	633	2,924	11,009	14,566
Of which, gross vehicle weight known[2]				
3.5 to 7.5 tonnes	80	417	1,597	2,094
7.5 to 17 tonnes	65	406	1,551	2,022
More than 17 tonnes	411	1,571	5,353	7,335
Total known	556	2,394	8,501	11,451

[1] Goods vehicles over 3.5 tonnes gross vehicle weight.

[2] The police record heavy goods vehicles as such as on the STATS19 road accident report form.

However, the exact gross vehicle weight is only known for those cases where a link can be made with the vehicle details held by DVLA.

Railtrack Staff

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many members of staff are employed by Railtrack to oversee safety on the railways; how many of these have been appointed within the last year; how many people employed in this capacity have left the employment of Railtrack in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [13218]

Mr. Watts: I understand that Railtrack's safety and standards directorate currently employs 103 permanent staff and 12 temporary staff. During the last 12 months, six staff in this capacity have been appointed and eight staff have left the employment of Railtrack.

Rail Franchise Agreements

Mr. Coe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the franchise agreements and related documents for the LTS Rail, Great Western Trains and South West Trains passenger rail franchise. [13589]

Mr. Watts: Copies of the franchise agreements for Great Western Trains and South West Trains have today been placed in the Library, together with the disabled, senior and young persons railcard schemes, the staff travel scheme, the ticketing and settlement agreement, the Association of Train Operating Companies' LRT scheme, the Travelcard agreement and the through-ticketing (non-travelcard) agreement. Certain provisions of these documents have been deleted in line with section 73 of the Railways Act 1993.

The franchise agreement for the LTS rail franchise will be placed in the Library in due course.

Railtrack (Privatisation)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the eligible amounts for capital allowances on plant and machinery and on industrial building in respect of the qualifying assets transferred to Railtrack which will be transferred to the private sector. [13747]

Mr. Watts: The amounts of capital allowances allocated to Railtrack PLC in respect of property transferred to it from the British Railways Board on 30 March 1994 are as follows:

in relation to plant and machinery: £521,536,242

in relation to industrial buildings: £618,530,990

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

International Trials

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's relations with the Dutch legal authorities in relation to international trials in The Hague. [12000]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: No. if the hon. Gentleman is referring to the Libyan proposal to hold in The Hague the trial of those accused of the Lockerbie bombing, we have made clear to the Dutch and other Governments our view on holding the trial in a third country.

Prisoners of Conscience

Mr. Fachett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department circulates country-specific lists of prisoners of conscience to other Departments whose Ministers are about to undertake visits aborad; if he encourages Ministers from outside his Department to raise such cases on visits; and if he will make a statement. [13221]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We frequently raise cases of individual political prisoners with our Governments. When a reliable, country-specific list is available, and is likely to be an effective means of alerting another Government to our concerns, Ministers from other Departments due to visit the country in question may be briefed accordingly and encouraged to make use of it.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

UNICEF

Mr. Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was Britain's contribution to UNICEF in each of the last five years, at constant prices; and what is the planned contribution for 1996–97. [12578]

Mr. Hanley: The information is as follows:

£ million

	Core contribution at cash prices	*Core contribution at constant 1995–96 prices*
1991–92	9.00	10.09
1992–93	9.50	10.23
1993–94	9.50	9.94
1994–95	8.50	8.73
1995–96	8.50	8.50

We plan to contribute £8.5 million to UNICEF's core budget in 1996–97.

In addition to its annual core contribution, the ODA also makes ad hoc contributions to UNICEF's supplementary and emergency activities. These figures are as follows:

£ million

	Contribution at cash prices	*Contribution at constant 1995–96 prices*
1991–92	4.75	5.33
1992–93	4.50	4.85
1993–94	13.60	14.23
1994–95	17.10	17.57

TREASURY

Corporation Tax

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the percentage of information on the Inland Revenue's Corporation's tax pay and file system which *(a)* is unreliable, *(b)* is inaccurate, *(c)* is not updated and *(d)* omits interest charges. [11121]

Mr. Jack: The Inland Revenue continually assesses the performance of the CT pay and file system. There are no significant problems with the reliability and accuracy of the information which the system handles.

A recently identified software problem in the updating of information used by collectors of taxes—including information on interest charges—is scheduled to be fixed early this month.

Office for National Statistics

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the cost of market research undertaken on the name of the new office for national statistics; what were the options considered for the name of this agency; what market research was undertaken; if he will publish the results of this market research; and if he will make a statement; [11629]

(2) what is his estimate of the expenditure by his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies on market research associated with the renaming of the combined Office of Population Censuses and Surveys and the Central Statistical Office; and if he will make a statement. [13172]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have asked the director of the Central Statistical Office to write to the hon. Member and will arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 5 February 1996:

The Economic Secretary has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Questions on the cost of market research undertaken in selecting the name of the new Office for National Statistics.

2 The choice of name for the new agency formed by the merger of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys and the Central Statistical Office is particularly important. Individuals and businesses who will supply the new agency with its data have to recognise it as a safe guardian of data. It must also be widely recognised by users of statistics.

3 In terms of public confidence, the new agency must be identified with professionalism, integrity and independence from governmental control of statistical processes.

4 The existing names of the two organisations had created a measure of confusion in the public's mind as to the roles and functions of each organisation. It is important to create a simple, easily identifiable identity for the new agency. The new name also had to be carefully chosen so as to avoid conflicts with the roles and responsibilities of the territorial statistical services in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

5 To help in the difficult task of choosing a name for the new agency that would do all these things, a small scale market research consultancy was commissioned in 1995. This tested possible names amongst a range of users and other interested groups to identify the connotations of various terms, including "Official", "National" and "Government".

6 The clear findings of the market research were that there were strong benefits in using the terms "National" or "UK" rather than "Official" or "Government". This strongly influenced the choice of "Office for National Statistics" as the name for the new agency.

7 Almost all the work associated with publications design, design of a new logo and style of new office stationery was concluded in-house. The total money expended on consultancy advice was £4,250.

8. The research was significantly different from the large scale quantitative enquiries normally carried out by the CSO and is therefore not suitable for publication.

Incomes

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the percentage year on year change in real personal disposable income in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* France, *(c)* Germany, *(d)* the United States of America, and *(e)* Japan since 1979. [11936]

Mrs. Angela Knight: UK figures can be found in table 4.1 of the UK national accounts. For the remaining countries, figures on a comparable basis are available in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development publication, "National Accounts", various issues. These publications are in the House of Commons Library.

Nuclear Industry

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money in 1995 prices the nuclear industry has received from the Exchequer in grants, subsidies and debt write-offs in each year since 1966. [12470]

Mr. Jack: The information requested is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

British Energy

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the sum that the proposed sale of British energy will raise for the Exchequer. [12473]

Mr. Jack: The proceeds of the British energy sale will depend on a variety of factors, including market conditions at the time of the sale. The Government never release estimates of proceeds from forthcoming sales as such information would be market sensitive.

Privatised Companies' Debt (Sale)

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the sale of part of the Government's holding of privatised companies' debt. [14018]

Mr. Jack: The following bonds were offered for sale.

Issuer	*Face value £ million*	*Coupon (Per cent.)*	*Maturity*
National Grid	150	12.895	March 2001
Norweb	76	12.365	September 2008
Norweb	77	12.661	September 1999
SWEB	80	12.365	September 2008
Northern Electric	55	12.661	September 1999

I am pleased to report that the sale was successfully completed on 2 February. Three of the issuers, National Grid, Norweb and SWEB have purchased their bonds for early redemption. BZW has sold the Northern Electric bond on behalf of the Treasury.

Payment will be made to the Exchequer on 9 February. The net proceeds from the sale will total £538 million.

Departmental Property

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the annual cost to his Department and his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies of their empty and under utilised properties for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11450]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* The properties occupied by the Treasury, the Central Statistical Office, the Paymaster agency and the Valuation Office formed part of the Government's civil estate until 1990 and then the Government's common user estate. Information relating to the costs of holding CUE space vacant were given my hon. Friend Under-Secretary of State for the Environment on 31 January, columns *648-49.*

From 1 April 1996, Departments and their agencies assume responsibility for the CUE vacant space. The cost of such vacant space to the Treasury and the agencies responsible to the Chancellor of the Exchequer is estimated to be £574,000 for 1996–97. The Treasury is making every effort to dispose of the empty property as efficiently as possible.

The Royal Mint is responsible for its own property. It has not incurred, and does not envisage incurring, any costs in respect of vacant space for the years in question.

Inter-agency Co-operation

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made on co-operation between the Inland Revenue, the Contributions Agency, and Customs and Excise since 19 September 1995. [12540]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 1 February 1996]:* Excellent progress continues to be made on co-operation between the Inland Revenue, the Contributions Agency and Customs and Excise. A number of measures have been implemented since 19 September 1995, including the successful launch of a telephone helpline pilot in Scotland for employers and VAT traders; a joint leaflet to help those setting up in business on their own; and new arrangements being piloted in the North of England to give new businesses a single form to register with all three departments. Peter Wyman—head of tax at Coopers and Lybrand and a member of the deregulation task force—has accepted an invitation to oversee work on joint working between the Inland Revenue and the Contributions Agency to bring in an external perspective. All three departments are continuing to work closely to identify other areas which will streamline their relationship with business.

Unemployment

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage of people unemployed for *(a)* up three months, *(b)* three to six months, *(c)* six to nine months, *(d)* nine to 12 months, *(e)* one to two years, *(f)* two to three years, *(g)* three to four years, *(h)* four to five years and (i) five years and over who get a job in the following month. [13084]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 1 February 1996]:* The following table shows the percentage of claimants unemployed on 9 November 1995, in the UK, who left claimant unemployment in the following month for each unemployment duration band. No information is available on the destination of claimants who cease to claim unemployment-related benefit.

Percentage of UK Claimants Unemployed on 9 November 1995 who left the claimant count in the following month

Duration on 9 November 1995	*Percentage in the following month (ie. before 14 December 1995)*
Up to 3 months	17.8
Over 3 and up to 6 months	12.4
Over 6 and up to 9 months	11.8
Over 9 and up to 12 months	8.7
Over 1 and up to 2 years	9.5
Over 2 and up to 3 years	7.4
Over 3 and up to 4 years	4.7
Over 4 and up to 5 years	4.3
Over 5 years	2.7

Labour Statistics

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many persons, according to the latest available information, are employed under contract for *(a)* zero hours per week, *(b)* one to eight hours, *(c)* nine to 15 hours, *(d)* 16 to 24 hours, *(e)* 25 to 30 hours, *(f)* 31 to 40 hours, *(g)* 41 to 50 hours, *(h)* 51 to 60 hours, *(i)* 61 to 70 hours, *(j)* 71 to 80 hours and *(k)* more than 80 hours per week; and what percentage of the total work force each group represents. [13169]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 31 January 1996]:* The available information from the labour force survey is as follows:

Basic usual hours[1] worked by employees in Great Britain (summer 1995, not seasonally adjusted)

Basic usual hours worked per week[1]	*Number of employees (thousands)*	*As a percentage of all employees*
0	n/a	n/a
1 to 8	968	4.4
9 to 15	1,394	6.3
16 to 24	2,095	9.5
25 to 30	1,355	6.1
31 to 40	13,154	59.7
41 to 50	2,069	9.4
51 to 60	571	2.6
61 to 70	159	0.7
71 to 80	69	0.3
more than 80	83	0.4

[1] Hours usually worked in their main job, excluding meal breaks and overtime.

n/a not available, estimate below 10,000.

Cyclical Social Security

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what definition his Department has of cyclical social security; and if he will indicate each category of person included with spending on each category in 1994–95, and a forecast of 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98. [13616]

Mr. Roger Evans: I have been asked to reply.

Cyclical social security is defined as unemployment benefit and income support paid to people of working age. From October 1996 it will cover jobseeker's allowance and income support to people of working age.

The client group definition for cyclical social security is as follows:

"Unemployed" includes Unemployment Benefit (JSA from October 1996) plus IS to the unemployed.

"Short term sick" is IS to people who are sick for up to six months and who do not receive a disability pension.

"Long term sick and disabled" is IS paid to disabled people and people who are sick for more than six months.

"Families" is IS to lone parents.

"Widows and others" is IS paid to people who do not fall into the other client groups.

The expenditure details are shown in the attached table.

Cyclical Social Security client group expenditure

£ millions

	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Unemployed	6,583	6,522	6,473	6,468
Short term sick	429	457	478	503
Long term sick and disabled	2,218	2,290	2,364	2,460
Family	3,992	3,770	3,623	3,836
Widows and others	379	420	468	531
Total	13,602	13,459	13,400	13,800

Notes:

1. Totals may not sum due to rounding.
2. 1994-95 estimated outturn; 1995-96 to 1997-98 planned expenditure.
3. These figures are currently being updated and will be available in the 1996 Departmental report which will be published at the end of March 1996.

Source:

1995 Social Security Departmental Report.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

British Coal Properties

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much revenue he expects to be generated from the remaining sales of British Coal properties. [13258]

Mr. Page: The disposal of its property is a matter for British Coal. It would not be appropriate to speculate on what the eventual proceeds might be.

Domestic Electricity Consumers (Discount)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what number and percentage of domestic electricity consumers will not receive the National Grid discount because they live in mobile homes; and if he will provide an age breakdown of the affected consumers. [13551]

Mr. Page: My Department does not keep this information.

The National Grid discount is being made by the regional electricity companies to their 21 million domestic customers.

Fireworks

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to restrict the use of category 3 fireworks to those operating under licence from the local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [13491]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have no plans to restrict the use of category 3 fireworks to organisers of fireworks displays. Category 3 covers a wide range of firework types, some of which are not suitable for use in small spaces. For this reason, category 3 fireworks are required to be clearly marked as "display" fireworks, carry instructions for use and indicate the safe distance for spectators. This allows people to make choices and purchase fireworks to suit their own circumstances.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the average price for a kilowatt hour of electricity in each of the organisations for Economic Co-operation and Development countries; and if he will make a statement. [13738]

Mr. Page: The information requested is given in the table and relates to the annual average prices for 1994. Data for all countries include any duties or taxes payable which are non-recoverable.

pence per kWh

	Industrial electricity	*Domestic electricity*
Austria	4.68	10.79
Belgium	3.84	11.44
Canada	2.47	3.90
Denmark	4.10	11.70
Finland	3.38	5.72
France	3.45	9.75
Germany	5.98	11.57
Ireland	3.97	8.00
Italy	6.11	10.27
Japan	11.25	16.19
Luxembourg	n/a	8.32
Mexico	2.73	4.49
Netherlands	3.71	7.48
New Zealand	2.34	4.36
Norway	n/a	4.36
Portugal	7.54	10.60
Spain	5.20	11.31
Sweden	2.41	5.53
Switzerland	6.89	8.52
Turkey	5.01	4.94
United Kingdom	4.42	8.00
United States	3.06	5.46

Note:
Data for Australia and Greece are not available.
Source:
International Energy Agency.

Electricity prices for both industrial and domestic consumers in the UK have fallen, in real terms, by 10 and 7 per cent. respectively since privatisation of the electricity supply industry. The above table show that United Kingdom prices are among the lowest in the industrialised world and are generally lower than our main European competitors. Further reductions in UK prices during 1996 are likely to improve the UK's position even more.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the average price for a kilowatt hour of electricity charged to consumers in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [13739]

Mr. Page: In 1995, the average standard tariff charge for a kilowatt hour of electricity in the United Kingdom was 7.3p. Domestic customers also pay a quarterly standing charge. In 1995, the average standing charge in the UK was £10.39. The standard tariff and standing charge quoted do not include VAT.

In 1995, the average price paid by industrial electricity consumers per kilowatt hour was about 4.5p.

Domestic electricity prices in the UK have fallen, in real terms, since 1990. The average price of electricity is now 7 per cent. lower, in real terms excluding VAT, than it was before privatisation. Domestic consumers will benefit from further reductions during 1996. The National Grid rebate, tightened distribution price controls and a reduction in the fossil fuel levy, mean that average domestic electricity bills in 1996 should be around one fifth lower, in 1995 prices, than in 1995.

Since privatisation, industrial electricity prices have fallen by 10 per cent. in real terms. Industrial electricity prices are now at their lowest level, in real terms, than at any time since records began in 1970. Reduction in distribution charges and the fossil fuel levy will also benefit industrial customers during 1996.

Research and Technological Development

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the total sums allocated to *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* each other EU state under the European Union's framework programme for research and technological development in each of the years from the establishment of the programme. [13364]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Payments from European Community expenditure programmes are not allocated to member states in the legislation supporting the programmes.

Framework IV, which runs from 1994–98 is the EU's main research and development programme. It has a budget of 13.1 billion ecu—approximately £10.9 billion. It is administered by the European Commission, which receives applications and manages the project selection process. The budget is not pre-allocated in any way among member states. Projects are selected on the basis of scientific excellence. UK researchers have participated strongly in successive framework programmes.

Official Receiver

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 12 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *600*, what contracts have been awarded with regard to the functions of the official receiver. [13112]

Mr. Oppenheim: Following the conclusions of the initial and financial evaluation of the six tenders received for the case administration work of official receivers, I have agreed to an extension of the timetable to allow additional discussions to take place with those bidders most likely to be able to offer increased value for money. It is now my intention to make an announcement on the outcome of this exercise before the end of February.

Company Procedures

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 12 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *600-01*, what progress he has made with the British Bankers Association on a binding code of practice. [13113]

Mr. Oppenheim: The British Bankers' Association has accepted the invitation to develop a code of practice.

Departmental Publicity

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) of 26 January, *Official Report*, column *424*, how much has been spent by his Department on publicity and media relations for each year since 1990, including staff costs and how many press officers have been employed by his Department in each year since 1979. [13114]

Mr. John M. Taylor: *(a)* Expenditure from centrally managed budgets on publicity and media relations, including staff costs, has been as follows:

1990–91: £18,199,000

1991–92: £12,326,000

1992–93: £13,002,000

1993–94: £11,482,000

1994–95: £10,685,000

(b) Some 19 press officers are currently employed in the Department's Press Office. Corresponding figures for previous years are as follows:

1995: 19

1994: 17

1993: 19

The numbers of press officers before 1993 are not separately identifiable.

Departmental Running Costs (Limits)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 20 December, *Official Report*, column *1265*, when he expects the MINIS process currently being used to seek savings in all areas of the Department's running costs completed. [13591]

Mr. Lang: The MINIS 96 process is continuing on schedule. I expect to publish the outcome for the financial year 1996–97 by May 1996. A copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

European Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how he ensures that the negotiating brief for his officials discussing EU legislation takes fully into account the need to minimise the burdens on United Kingdom business. [13685]

Mr. Page: Official guidance on how officials are to apply deregulatory principles when negotiating EC regulations are contained in the booklet "Getting a Good Deal in Europe". This guidance has also been supplemented by the recent publication of guidance on the preparation of compliance cost assessments which stresses that the likely burdens on business highlighted by UK compliance cost assessments of EC proposals should be integral to the UK's negotiating strategy.

Copies of both these guidance booklets have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Pike: To ask the President of the Board of Trade after which date National Power and PowerGen can dispose of sites owned at the time of privatisation without a share of the proceeds going to Her Majesty's Government; and if he will make a statement. [12856]

Mr. Page: The provisions of the property clawback regime will continue to apply to all of the privatised electricity companies until 31 March 2000.

Mr. Pike: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which power stations or other sites have closed or become surplus to requirements since privatisation by *(a)* PowerGen and *(b)* National Power; which of such sites have been sold; and what Her Majesty's Government have received in each instance. [12855]

Mr. Page: Detailed questions about the classification, use or sale of sites are a commercial matter for the companies. Since 1990, under the property clawback provisions which apply to all the privatised electricity companies HM Government have received £0.56 million and £0.89 million from National Power and PowerGen respectively.

Combat-induced Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Mr. McNamara: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what research is or has been undertaken by the Medical Research Council into combat-induced post-traumatic stress disorder. [12905]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Medical Research Council is not currently carrying out, and has not carried out any research into combat-induced post-traumatic stress disorder.

HEALTH

Private Health Care (Referrals)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients were referred to private health care by NHS doctors in 1995–96. [12938]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Psychiatric Hospitals

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the number of medium secure beds provided in each year since 1985 by each private psychiatric hospital, analysed by location and health authority; and what is the average current cost of such beds as compared with equivalent NHS beds; [12297]

(2) how many medium secure psychiatric hospital beds there have been in each region in each year since 1985; [12296]

(3) how many of the patients currently in medium secure provision in each of the private psychiatric hospitals live within their health authority catchment area; and how many come from homes outside the area. [12298]

Mr. Bowis: The tables show the number of purpose-built medium secure places in each region. Since 31 March 1995 a further 160 places have opened. There are also about 450 places nationally in interim secure psychiatric units, many of which are of medium secure standard. The other information requested is not available centrally.

Purpose-built medium secure places by region

Regional health authorities	*31-01-85*	*31-01-86*	*31-01-87*	*31-01-88*	*31-01-89*	*31-01-90*	*31-01-91*	*31-01-92*	*31-01-93*
East Anglia	36	36	36	36	36	34	34	34	34
Oxford	—	—	14	26	36	36	25	25	25
North-east Thames	10	10	10	14	14	14	14	14	14
North-west Thames	—	40	40	40	40	40	46	46	48
South-east Thames	75	90	90	90	82	85	85	85	85
South-west Thames	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South western	30	30	30	60	46	60	60	60	65
Wessex	31	31	31	31	22	26	26	28	29
West Midlands	—	—	—	40	58	63	77	77	77
Trent	45	22	45	30	45	45	45	48	48
Yorkshire	48	48	48	48	39	44	44	44	44
Northern	30	30	30	25	15	15	21	25	27
North Western	20	102	102	86	73	74	82	82	82
Mersey	50	50	50	50	36	36	36	36	36
National total	375	489	526	576	542	572	595	604	614

Purpose built medium secure places by region

Regional health authorities	*31 March 1994*	*31 March 1995*	*5 January 1996*
Anglia and Oxford	89	121	121
North Thames	108	108	165
South Thames	90	90	141
South and West	94	108	112
West Midlands	77	77	95
Trent	48	48	48
Northern and Yorkshire	101	101	131
North West	110	139	139
National total	717	792	952

Regional health authority boundaries changed in 1994 and the date on which the figures were collected changed from 31 January to 31 March. These figures are for medium secure places in the new regions.

Hospital-at-home Schemes

Sir Timothy Sainsbury: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the number of patients now being treated under hospital-at-home schemes annually. [12697]

Mr. Bowis: Information concerning hospital-at-home schemes is not collected centrally, however health authorities and national health service trusts are continuing to show interest in such developments. Recent initiatives include the expansion of the Peterborough hospital-at-home scheme to include paediatric services and the introduction of a new hospital-at-home scheme funded by East Sussex district health authority and established by collaboration between the South Downs Health and Brighton Healthcare NHS trusts. Further information is available from the chairman of the North West Anglia Health Commission and the chairman of the South Downs Health NHS Trust respectively.

Public Health Laboratory Service

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Public Health Laboratory Service abandoned work on hospital disinfectants; and if he was consulted on that decision. [13132]

Mr. Horam: The Public Health Laboratory Service has not abandoned work on hospital disinfectants. Its central public health laboratory maintains a continuing expertise in this field. CPHL gives expert advice in response to numerous enquiries, and has in hand a number of specific projects such as testing disinfectants which are suspected of contamination and, for the World Health Organisation, tests of systems currently used for the asepsis and safety of vaccines.

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many scientists are employed in the Public Health Laboratory Service; and what number it is planned will be made redundant. [13130]

Mr. Horam: The Public Health Laboratory Service employs 224 scientists. Consultations on four redundant posts have recently been completed and are still proceeding on a further two scientists' posts.

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors underlay the decision that the Public Health Laboratory Service would no longer be represented on EC committees engaged in writing procedures for testing disinfectants. [13131]

Mr. Horam: The Public Health Laboratory Service continues to have an input to European consideration of matters relating to the testing of disinfectants. A PHLS representative sits on the British Standards Institute technical committee IH/57 "Chemical Disinfectants and Antiseptics", which links directly with its European counterpart.

Family Planning

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the medical centres *(a)* dealing with abortion, *(b)* providing contraceptive advice and *(c)* with in vitro fertilisation facilities. [12983]

Mr. Horam: Information on medical centres dealing with abortion or providing contraceptive advice is not available centrally.

On 11 October 1995 the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority published "The Patients' Guide to Donor Insemination and IVF Clinics". The publication contains information on treatments offered by licensed centres. Copies are available in the Library.

Alcohol Information Leaflets

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to make funds available for the reprinting of alcohol information leaflets; and if he will make a statement. [12996]

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to make money available to assist local alcohol advisory services to rewrite and reprint information leaflets, to reflect the recent changes in the Government statement on weekly guidelines for alcohol consumption. [13560]

Mr. Bowis: We recognise that the recommendations in the report of the interdepartmental group on sensible drinking need to be communicated effectively to the public. We are funding the Health Education Authority to do this.

Cardiac Services, London

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who is responsible for strategic planning of London's cardiac services; and what is his current plan. [13260]

Mr. Malone: The strategic planning of cardiac services in London—as elsewhere—is a matter for purchasing authorities and national health service trusts working together to ensure that comprehensive services are provided to meet patients' needs both now and in the future, taking into account national planning and priorities guidelines.

Plans for developing specialist services in London are set out in "Making London Better" including an independent review of cardiac services, which was published in July 1993. Its recommendations have contributed to planning the future configuration of these services in the capital. Copies of the documents are available in the Library.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what proportion of the hospitals listed as providing specialist treatment for cardiac patients in the 1993 London implementation group report of the cardiac speciality review *(a)* have since closed and *(b)* are in the process of closure. [13245]

Mr. Malone: The independent review of the 14 tertiary cardiac centres in London, published in July 1993, is only part of a range of available advice taken into account in considering the future configuration of these services in the capital. In April 1995, decisions were announced on the concentration of cardiac services in south east London at St Thomas's hospital and in east London at the Royal London hospital site at Whitechapel. Since then, cardiac services provided in outdated accommodation at the Brook hospital have transferred to Guy's hospital and St. Thomas's hospital. The Brook hospital closed in November 1995. There are no immediate plans for the closure of other hospitals named in the report.

Junior Doctors' Hours

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many newly qualified doctors have joined the NHS in each year since 1979; and how many hours newly qualified doctors work each week on average. [13267]

Mr. Malone: Information on the numbers of newly qualified doctors joining the NHS is not held centrally. However, the normal route is for them to become pre-registration house officers. Figures for these are shown in the table.

Number of pre-registration house officers in England as at 30 September each year since 1979

Year	*Number*
1979	2,610
1980	2,650
1981	2,720
1982	2,710
1983	2,830
1984	2,770
1985	2,840
1986	2,810
1987	2,790
1988	2,860
1989	2,940
1990	3,020
1991	3,060
1992	3,040
1993	3,090
1994	3,020

Normally, the duration of the PRHO training period is one year.
Figures are rounded to the nearest '10'.

Again, figures for the average number of hours worked each week by junior doctors, whether or not newly qualified, are not held centrally. However, returns from regional task forces on junior doctors' hours indicate that under 1 per cent. of PRHOs were contracted for hours above the December 1994 limits and under 2 per cent. in total remain above the target to be reached by December 1996. These limits are set out in the "New Deal on Junior Doctors' Hours," a copy of which is placed in the Library.

Secure Places

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made by local authorities involved in providing the 170 additional secure places required for criminal justice purposes; and when he expects all the additional places to be available. [13818]

Mr. Bowis: The first additional places became available in December of last year. Further new places will come on stream throughout 1996 leading to around 100 additional places being completed by the end of this year and the balance by mid-1997.

Details of the new places being provided within the capital development programme are shown in the table.

Local authority	*Number of new places from within the 170 supply plan*
Northumberland county council	7
Lancashire county council	8
Salford city council	12
Leeds city council	9
Sheffield city council	8
Coventry city council	8
Staffordshire county council	12
Derbyshire county council	3
Lincolnshire county council	4
Nottinghamshire county council	10
Cambridgeshire county council	10
Essex county council	16
Northamptonshire county council	16
Southwark London borough	16
Hammersmith and Fulham London borough	10
Hampshire county council	5
Avon county council	6
Devon county council	4
Wales—West Glamorgan	6
Total	170

Methylphenidate

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what discussions his Department has had with the drug company Ciba regarding *(a)* the production and *(b)* distribution of the drug methylphenidate; and if he will make a statement; [13700]

(2) how much methylphenidate is produced annually; and if he will make a statement; [13698]

(3) what further steps he is taking to control the *(a)* production and *(b)* distribution of the drug methylphenidate; and if he will make a statement; [13693]

(4) what guidance he has issued to general practitioner fundholding practices regarding the drug methylphenidate; and if he will make a statement; [13699]

(5) what assessment he has made of the effects of the drug methylphenidate; and if he will make a statement; [13692]

(6) what representations he has received on the drug methylphenidate; and if he will make a statement. [13694]

Mr. Malone: Methylphenidate—Ritalin—has been assessed by the normal procedures for licensing of medicinal products in the United Kingdom to ensure its efficacy, safety and quality. As for all medicines, there is continuous monitoring of safety after marketing by the Medicines Control Agency. Methylphenidate is not manufactured in this country. It is available as a prescription-only medicine under the controls of schedule 2 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. Any discussions between the licensing authority and the marketing authorisation holders are treated in confidence. There are no plans for further controls on the availability of methylphenidate.

Methylphenidate—Ritalin—is licensed for use under the supervision of a specialist in childhood behaviour disorders. No guidance has been issued regarding prescribing by a general practitioner in a fundholding practice, but this may be done by mutual agreement as part of a joint protocol of care with such a specialist. The Department of Health has received representations in the form of four parliamentary questions and a small amount of correspondence.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) on what basis the decision was taken to make the drug methylphenidate available as a controlled drug through general practitioners; [13697]

(2) what consultations took place prior to the decision to make the drug methylphenidate available as a controlled drug through general practitioners; on what basis it was previously available; and if he will make a statement. [13696]

Mr. Malone: I understand from the Home Department that methylphenidate, in conformity with the United Nations convention on psychotropic substances 1971, has been a controlled drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 since it came into force. It can therefore be prescribed by general practitioners.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the number of prescriptions dispensed for the drug methylphenidate since it became available; and if he will provide a breakdown by *(a)* general practitioner fundholding practice and *(b)* health authority for (i) the nations and (ii) regions of the United Kingdom. [13695]

Mr. Malone: The Department has a duty of confidence relating to the use of information derived from patient records and, following our usual practice, the information requested cannot be supplied at this level of detail because it is confidential.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department collects on *(a)* travel expenses and *(b)* overseas visits made by trust personnel. [13751]

Mr. Malone: The National Health Service Executive collects annual information on the total staff travelling and subsistence expenditure by each trust. Information is not held centrally on overseas visits by trust personnel.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department maintains on *(a)* sickness levels and *(b)* employee dismissals in trusts. [13750]

Mr. Malone: None.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of BSE were confirmed in cattle *(a)* under two years of age, *(b)* between two and three years, *(c)* between three and four years, *(d)* between four and five years, *(e)* between five years and six years, *(f)* between six and seven years and *(g)* seven years and over for each breed of cattle in the United Kingdom, for each year since 1985. [12177]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Tables showing the number of cases of BSE by breed and age and by year of the disease for Great Britain and Northern Ireland are being placed in the Library of the House.

Cyclamates

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for each European Community country the permitted amount of cyclamates which were granted with effect from 1 January; what were the figures 12 months ago; and if he will make a statement. [12865]

Mrs. Browning: From 1 January 1996, all member states were required to permit the use of cyclamates in table-top sweeteners and in certain foods up to specified maximum levels in accordance with European Parliament and Council directive 94/35/EC of 30 June 1994 on sweeteners for use in foodstuffs—OJ No. L237, 10.9.94, p.3). Details concerning the maximum permissible levels of use of cyclamates in those foods are given in the annex to that directive.

Prior to the 1 January 1996 the use of sweeteners in foods was not subject to Community legislation and national rules applied in each member state. While precise details are not available, it is understood that the use of cyclamates was authorised to varying degrees in Germany, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal. Although these sweeteners were not permitted for food use in the United Kingdom because of uncertainties over their safety, the Department of Health's independent expert committee, the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment, has recently advised on the basis of the results of new studies, that there are no longer any health concerns preventing their use.

I have arranged for the COT's statement to be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in how many cases in September 1995 animal export health certificates were presented to his officials at Dover where the certificates or their accompanying schedules had not been completed in accordance with his Department's instructions to local veterinary inspectors; and if he will make a statement. [12637]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) on 26 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *751*. Subsequent returns have identified two further minor deficiencies in documentation of which one was resolved locally and the other was referred back for resolution to the divisional veterinary manager for the area from which the animals originated.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether all consignments of animals for further fattening and calves destined for export from Brightlingsea between 18 January and 25 October 1995 arrived at the port with completed export certificates; and if consignments were unloaded from their respective vehicles and loaded into the MV Caroline with the same accompanying certificates. [12541]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 1 February 1996]:* All consignments of animals for export from Brightlingsea, with one exception, arrived with completed export health certification although a number of minor irregularities were identified and resolved. The sole exception related to one certificate for slaughter sheep which was not signed and stamped by a LVI and the consignment had to be re-certified by a LVI at the port. All consignments were loaded on to the vessel in such a way as to ensure that individual consignments of animals remained segregated, each with the same accompanying health certification.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many consignments of sheep for further fattening and calves were issued with an export health certificate for exit through the port of Brightlingsea between 18 January and 25 October 1995. [12542]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 1 February 1996]:* Export health certification is not specific to a port, but 384 consignments of sheep and 664 consignments of calves were exported from the port in this period. It is not possible to given separate figures for sheep for slaughter and for further fattening except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the anomalies in respect of the implementation of health export certificates for calves between *(a)* Holland, *(b)* Belgium, *(c)* France, *(d)* Italy and *(e)* the United Kingdom. [12916]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 1 February 1996]:* All certificates for export of live animals to other EC member states are drawn up to ensure that they meet the necessary animal health requirements.

PRIME MINISTER

Prime Minister's Question Time

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the occasions since 9 June 1995 when answers given at Prime Minister's Question Time were subsequently corrected or otherwise qualified. [13669]

The Prime Minister: This is a matter of public record.

Crime Rates

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column 773, if he will set out the basis of his statement that crime is falling for the first time in 40 years. [13721]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the oral answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) on 1 February 1996, *Official Report*, columns 1120–21.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Pendle Borough Council

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the organisations located within the boundaries of Pendle borough council that received grants from the Duchy's benevolent fund in (i) 1994 and (ii) 1995. [13144]

Mr. Freeman: I am not a trustee of the benevolent fund and thus do not have details of donations. However the Secretary of the fund has provided the following information:

Year	*Fund*	*£*
1994	Burnley and Pendle Greenspace	400
	A handicapped lady in Nelson	250
1995	A young person in Earby	200
	Mansfield High school Brierfield	400
	Barnoldswick Park Rovers FC	450
	Pendle Duke of Edinburgh's award team	1,000
	Colne parish church	500

Donations are also made to other charities which may assist causes or individuals within the boundaries of Pendle borough council.

Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what cost savings he expects to accrue from the contracting out of the principal civil service pension scheme; [12932]

(2) what representations he has received from members of the principal civil service pension scheme concerning the contracting out of the scheme; and what percentage of those representations have been in favour of the contracting out proposals; [12936]

(3) when the decision to contact out the principal civil service pension scheme was taken; [12934]

(4) what the level of investment in the administration of the principal civil service pension scheme has been since 1992; [12933]

(5) how many members there are in the principal civil service pension scheme; [12937]

(6) if he will make a statement on the conclusion of the efficiency scrutiny into the principal civil service pension scheme, published in December 1992, with particular reference to administration of the scheme; [12931]

(7) what discussions his Department has had with the current administrators of the principal civil service pension scheme with respect to the contracting-out of the principal civil service pension scheme. [12935]

Mr. Willetts: The efficiency scrutiny of administration of the principal civil service pension scheme identified the administration function as suitable for market testing and recommended that departments should be encouraged to pursue this. All the recommendations of the scrutiny were accepted, including those directed at raising standards of service quality and delivery to scheme members. New pensions administration software is being developed at a cost of some £1.2 million. This will facilitate the market testing process and make it particularly effective. Employing departments have been fully involved in the development of the new software, as they have with other aspects of implementation of the efficiency scrutiny recommendations.

There are some 520,000 active members of the PCSPS. Some 544,000 former civil servants or their dependants are in receipt of a pension, and there are approximately 240,000 former civil servants with pension benefits preserved for payment at pension age.

It is not possible to specify in advance the savings which result from subjecting particular activities to competition, but I have no reason to doubt that market testing PCSPS administration will identify cost savings consistent with the average saving of 21 per cent. that has resulted from the £2.6 billion worth of activities reviewed under the competing for quality programme in the three years to March 1995.

My predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), announced in a written answer on 17 October 1995, *Official Report*, columns *184–85*, that an order under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 opening up administration of the PCSPS to the private sector would be laid in this Session of Parliament. Various representations that had been made were taken fully into account in the decision to open up to competition the administration of the PCSPS. The Council of Civil Service Unions and the Civil Service Pensioners' Alliance have been formally consulted. I can assure scheme members that occupational pension arrangements for civil servants will continue to be provided through the PCSPS and that the scheme will continue to be managed and controlled by the Office of Public Service. It is scheme administration that is to be market tested.

Deregulation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which regulations have been repealed under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994; and which of them applied to firms with *(a)* under 100 employees, *(b)* under 50 employees and *(c)* under 10 employees. [13099]

Mr. Freeman: Two orders have been enacted under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. They contain a number of measures to assist the greyhound industry and building societies. Both measures benefit industry as a whole and were not targeted specifically at small businesses.

A further 19 proposals have been laid before the Parliamentary Committees which will ease burdens on a wide range of industrial sectors including Scottish salmon fishers and private companies.

European Directives

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when the interdepartmental review of guidance on gold plating is planned to be completed; and which Departments have been involved. [13617]

Mr. Freeman: It is expected that the interdepartmental review of guidance on gold plating will be completed by Easter. All Departments with responsibility for implementing EC directives are involved in the review.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on what date it became Government policy not to gold plate EC directives; and how may *(a)* existing pieces of legislation have been reviewed and *(b)* changes to United Kingdom law have been made since that date. [13635]

Mr. Freeman: This Government's long-standing policy on the implementation of EC directives in the UK has been to avoid the addition of unnecessary burdens. Government Departments keep existing legislation under review in the light of this policy.

DEFENCE

Low Flying

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low-flying sorties were booked in 1995 by non-United Kingdom based aircraft from each foreign air force. [12893]

Mr. Soames: The number of sorties booked in the United Kingdom low flying system in 1995 by non-United Kingdom-based foreign aircraft were as follows:

	Number
Belgium	154
Denmark	99
France	139
Germany	111
Holland	164
Italy	115
New Zealand	1
Norway	45
Portugal	21
Switzerland	4
USA	53
Total	906

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the pilots of the four Italian air force AMXs involved in an aircraft proximity incident near Teesside airport on 12 July 1994 were *(a)* given a pre-flight briefing by RAF personnel on the rules of the United Kingdom low flying system and *(b)* interviewed by the Royal Air Force personnel following the report of the incident; and how many formal approaches seeking a report from the Italian pilots were made to the Italian authorities by the Civil Aviation Authority personnel. [13255]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is as follows: *(a)* yes; *(b)* no. The Civil Aviation Authority advised that it has no records of any formal approaches to the Italian authorities.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what instructions are given to Royal Air Force Chinook crews concerning the safety aspects of prolonged cruising flight at heights of less than 300 ft above ground level. [13211]

Mr. Soames: To maintain essential skills for operational low flying, it is routine for RAF Chinook crews to train below 300 ft above ground level. Normal RAF rules for low flying apply and Chinook crews receive training, both in the simulator and in the aircraft, to cope with emergencies which might arise.

Arms Sales (Saudi Arabia)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of Sir Colin Chandler in respect of arms deals with the Government of Saudi Arabia; and if he will make a statement. [13102]

Mr. Arbuthnot: While head of defence sales, from 1985 to 1989, Sir Colin Chandler discussed the sale of British defence equipment with many countries including Saudi Arabia.

Munitions Dumping

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Huddersfield of 19 January, *Official Report*, columns *844–45*, for what reasons complete records of past Ministry sea dumping operations are not available. [13382]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is contained in correspondence between my Department and the House of Commons Defence Committee, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all *(a)* ships sunk and *(b)* aircraft ditched off the coast of the United Kingdom since 1966 which records list as carrying (i) chemical weapons, (ii) toxic wastes and (iii) conventional explosives and munitions; and if he will make a statement on the environmental impact of these wrecks. [13352]

Mr. Soames: There are no records of either accidental or deliberate sinkings of RN ships or ditchings of military aircraft carrying these materials.

Tornado Accidents

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the accident involving a Royal Air Force Tornado GR.1 on 11 January. [13212]

Mr. Soames: A RAF board of inquiry is conducting a detailed investigation into the cause of this accident and a copy of a summary of its findings will be placed in the Library of the House in due course.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the nationality of each of the crew involved in the mid-air collision between two Tornado F.3 aircraft on 10 January. [13213]

Mr. Soames: The crews were British.

Air Misses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates, aircraft types and nationalities, locations, risk classifications and causes of air misses involving military aircraft in United Kingdom airspace from 1 January 1994 to the latest available date. [13207]

Mr. Soames: Information on air misses in the UK is published by the Civil Aviation Authority three times a year in the joint air miss working group compendium, copies of which are routinely placed in the Library of the House.

Aircraft Proximity Incident (Perth)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British military personnel, and from which units, were on board the Portuguese air force helicopter involved in an aircraft proximity incident at Perth airfield on 6 June 1994. [13254]

Mr. Soames: There is no record that any British military personnel were on board.

Italian Air Force (Exchange Visits)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates of exchange visits by aircraft or crews from No. 56 Squadron Royal Air Force to units of the Italian air force since 1992. [13214]

Mr. Soames: Aircraft and crew from No. 56 Squadron have taken part in exchange visits to units of the Italian air force on the following occasions since 1992:

10–12 October 1994: to Aviano

17–19 March 1995: to Grossetto

21–27 April 1995: to Ghedi

22 June: to Grossetto

4–6 July 1995: to Gioia Del Colle

Official Residences

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what decision has been made about the future of the official service residence, Haymes Garth; and if he will make a statement. [14019]

Mr. Soames: Haymes Garth will be sold on the open market. Thereafter, the air officer commanding in chief, personnel and training command will be accommodated in an existing quarter adjacent to his headquarters which is presently occupied by the air officer training. Disposal will follow AOT's vacation of the quarter on completion of his tour of duty.

Land Mines (Bosnia)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the dangers of anti-personnel land mines for implementation force troops in Bosnia; and if he will make a statement. [12274]

Mr. Soames: IFOR estimates that up to 5 million land mines, including anti-personnel mines, may have been laid in Bosnia. Under the terms of the peace agreement, the clearance of mines and related devices is the responsibility of the consenting parties themselves. IFOR's role is limited to monitoring and co-ordinating this programme, except where there is a serious threat to life or where clearance is necessary to allow IFOR to complete assigned tasks. In a tragic incident on 28 January, three British service men were killed when their armoured vehicle triggered a mine while on patrol.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of staff employed by his Department or related agencies in each of the travel-to-work areas of Carmarthen, South Pembrokeshire, Haverfordwest, Fishguard and Cardigan on *(a)* 31 March 1979, *(b)* 31 March 1990, *(c)* 31 March 1992, *(d)* 31 March 1995, *(e)* the latest available figure and *(f)* the estimate for 31 March 1997. [13298]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Historical information is not available in the form requested. However, data are available for 1 April 1995 and 1 April 1998. Details are:

Travel to work area[1]	*1 April 1995*	*[2]1 April 1998*
Carmarthen	750	740
South Pembrokeshire	1,050	873
Haverfordwest	1,021	870
Fishguard	992	852
Cardigan	540	468

[1] Travel to work area is defined as a radius of 25 miles.

[2] 1 April 1998 figures are a forecast based on current plans and could be subject to change.

1. Figures are for civilian and service personnel.

Gulf War

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if all individuals that served in the Gulf war will now qualify for medical assessment following his recent announcement. [13754]

Mr. Soames: All service and ex-service personnel who think that they are suffering some form of illness as a result of their service in the Gulf war are entitled, upon referral by a service medical officer or general practitioner, to be seen under the medical assessment programme run by my Department.

Equal Treatment Directive

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, (1) pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report,* column *139*, if he will list the measures taken by his Department to implement article 7 of the equal treatment directive; and when each was taken; [13587]

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the documents showing how article 7 of the equal treatment directive has been implemented by his Department. [13588]

Mr. Soames: Members of the armed forces were brought within the scope of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 on 1 February 1995, the effective date of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (Application to Armed Forces etc.) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/3276). Sections 4 and 6 of the SDA have the effect of implementing article 7 of the equal treatment directive. Copies of all these documents are already held in the Library of the House.

Royal Flight

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many flights are charged to the Privy Purse when the aircraft of B2 (the Royal Squadron) return to base between the outward and return journey by the passenger. [13684]

Mr. Soames: My Department does not levy a charge for the positioning or recovery of flights associated with private travel in aircraft of No. 32 (The Royal Squadron) by those entitled members of the royal family.

ENVIRONMENT

European Commission Meeting

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what matters relating to the environment were discussed at the European Commission weekly meeting on 24 January. [12683]

Mr. Clappison: The agenda for the weekly Commission meeting is a matter for the Commission rather than my Department. I understand, however, that at the meeting on 24 January the Commission adopted its review of the fifth environmental action programme.

Wind Farm, Forest of Bowland

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning the possibility of a wind farm in the forest of Bowland area of outstanding natural beauty. [12597]

Sir Paul Beresford: None.

Local Government Finance

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish *(a)* the proposed or actual total external support in 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97 and *(b)* the proposed or actual spending limit, taking into account the revision of Somerset's spending limit during 1995–96 for each of the seven counties of the south-west plus Kent, Oxfordshire and Warwickshire. [11827]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is given in the following tables.

Total external support (revenue support grant + income from non-domestic rates + damping grants)

£ million

Local authority	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Somerset	199.328	186.054	197.383
Cornwall	215.420	208.475	220.175
Devon	449.441	434.932	463.274
Dorset	255.181	247.173	260.960
Avon	413.732	387.500	—
Wiltshire	238.899	222.890	233.338
Gloucestershire	224.118	215.769	227.311
Kent	754.492	714.126	744.804
Oxfordshire	234.920	221.320	229.819
Warwickshire	198.916	186.319	197.072

Provisional cap limits

£ million

Local authority	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*[2]1996–97*
Somerset	280.204	[1]264.920	279.277
Cornwall	294.730	280.749	296.637

Provisional cap limits

£ million

Local authority	1994–95	1995–96	[2]1996–97
Devon	622.177	592.045	627.857
Dorset	373.866	358.274	379.241
Avon	588.244	558.317	n/a
Wiltshire	336.801	313.981	330.177
Gloucestershire	318.382	300.713	317.968
Kent	1005.828	955.879	1004.539
Oxfordshire	330.891	315.959	332.024
Warwickshire	288.339	273.596	287.877

[1] Figure shown is the cap imposed on Somerset; Somerset's provisional cap limit for 1995–96 was £262.320 million.

[2] Cap limits implied by provisional criteria for 1996–97, announced on 31 January 1996.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was *(a)* the per capita and *(b)* the total standard spending assessment in both current and real terms for Hereford and Worcester county council for *(a)* social services, *(b)* education and *(c)* total council expenditure in (i) 1992–93, (ii) 1993–94, (iii) 1994–95, (iv) 1995–96 and (v) 1996–97. [12070]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is as follows:

Hereford and Worcester County Council
Standard Spending Assessments

SSA

Year	Education	Social services	Total
1992–93	358	70	587
1993–94	308 (299)	75 (73)	543 (528)
1994–95	314 (299)	89 (85)	562 (536)
1995–96	320 (297)	101 (94)	531 (493)
1996–97	331 (299)	114 (103)	556 (502)

SSA

Year	Education	Social services	Total
1992–93	241.88	47.19	397.04
1993–94	211.59	51.24 (49.78)	372.57 (362.00)
1994–95	216.53	61.28 (58.45)	388.04 (370.09)
1995–96	219.79	69.57 (64.57)	364.55 (338.39)
1996–97	229.01	78.60 (71.01)	384.19 (347.07)

£ million (figures in parenthesis are at 1992–93 prices, using the current GDP deflators).

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give figures for standard spending assessments to cover each category of spending in education for the counties of *(a)* Lancashire, *(b)* Essex, *(c)* Kent and (d) Hampshire each year since 1991–92. [12492]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is given in the table.

SSA for each category of spending in education for the years 1991–92 to 1996–97 inclusive

	SSA element					
Local authority	Primary education	Secondary education	Post 16 education	Under 5 education	Other education	Total
1991–92						
Lancashire	179.247	198.909	92.713	22.900	24.031	517.800
Essex	183.498	218.819	90.652	21.632	23.523	538.123
Kent	181.129	213.555	92.536	22.099	23.990	533.309
Hampshire	179.192	197.356	101.458	22.770	24.140	524.916
1992–93						
Lancashire	191.442	209.223	102.651	24.919	25.012	553.247
Essex	196.384	232.814	102.760	23.912	24.945	580.814
Kent	192.767	225.967	100.210	24.136	25.051	568.131
Hampshire	193.503	209.809	109.316	24.830	25.182	562.640
1993–94						
Lancashire	193.978	211.548	18.347	24.725	24.562	473.160
Essex	203.468	240.749	34.788	25.188	26.534	530.727
Kent	201.056	235.907	47.953	25.740	26.704	537.360
Hampshire	203.178	219.978	11.352	26.346	27.623	488.477
1994–95						
Lancashire	200.410	211.902	18.264	25.773	23.593	479.942
Essex	214.362	246.484	34.373	28.051	25.248	548.518
Kent	211.578	240.234	48.900	27.953	24.857	553.522
Hampshire	213.330	224.759	11.244	28.230	25.427	502.990
1995–96						
Lancashire	204.835	211.310	17.384	26.372	24.078	483.978
Essex	218.850	235.083	31.779	28.851	25.892	540.456
Kent	217.906	237.703	49.414	28.640	25.400	559.063
Hampshire	217.771	221.297	9.239	28.678	25.572	502.556
1996–97						
Lancashire	216.964	223.726	18.074	28.439	23.246	510.448
Essex	230.935	248.624	31.758	30.963	24.701	566.981
Kent	229.337	246.442	51.288	30.520	24.147	581.733
Hampshire	229.349	230.093	10.680	30.660	24.371	525.153

Newbury Bypass

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment the Health and Safety Executive has made of whether health and safety arrangements made by contractors and security companies employed to clear the route of the Newbury bypass are sufficient to minimise risks to the public. [12745]

Sir Paul Beresford: Health and Safety Executive inspectors are working closely with the contractors, security company, the Highways Agency, police and local authorities and are monitoring site activities to ensure that risks to the health and safety of the public are minimised.

Right to Buy (Discounts)

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each year since 1980–81 the total value of discounts to public sector tenants in England exercising their right to buy. [13090]

Mr. Clappison: Figures for discounts given to council tenants exercising their right-to-buy were not collected by the Department before 1994, nor were such data collected in respect of new town tenants. However, information is available for the total value of discounts allowed from all sales of council dwellings for owner-occupation in England and this is shown in the table:

Value of discounts allowed on completed disposals by local authorities and New Towns

England	*1980–81 to 1994–95 £ million*
1980–81	430.8
1981–82	926.4
1982–83	1,316.4
1983–84	960.2
1984–85	885.1
1985–86	914.8
1986–87	1,089.9
1987–88	1,557.0
1988–89	2,688.2
1989–90	2,865.2
1990–91	1,800.2
1991–92	1,167.9
1992–93	880.1
1993–94	1,011.6
1994–95	918.4

The number of public sector sales for owner-occupation during this period was about 1.450 million, and 85 per cent. of such sales resulted from tenants exercising their right-to-buy.

Whales

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many whales have become stranded and have died around the shore of the United Kingdom in each year since 1990; what research he has commissioned into the causes; and what advice he has issued to local authorities on the disposal of the carcases. [13143]

Mr. Clappison: The numbers of whales, including dolphins and porpoises, recorded as stranded around the United Kingdom since 1990 are shown in the table.

The marine mammals stranding project, funded by the Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office, includes post mortems to study gross pathology, bacteriology and virology. Results of post mortems have been used to consider contaminant levels and incidences of bycatch in fishing nets.

The project co-ordinators and veterinarians offer advice to local authorities on disposal of carcases according to individual circumstances including the location, the size of carcase, and matters affecting public health and safety.

Numbers of whales (including dolphins and porpoises) stranded and perished around the shores of the United Kingdom since 1990

Year	*Total strandings*	*Confirmed live when stranded*	*Live strandings which subsequently perished*
1990	147	8	8
1991	192	14	10
1992	423	15	5
1993	321	25	16
1994	368	55	31
1995[1]	252	20	15
1996[1]	36	0	0

[1] Provisional (some data still to be assimilated).

Departmental Property

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report,* columns *648–50,* if he will provide a breakdown of the total costs of holding common user estate space vacant in 1995–96, to show how much of the cost is due to space vacated by each Government Department. [13742]

Sir Paul Beresford: Vacant space is managed by Property Holdings as an entity. Once space has been surrendered to Property Holdings in accordance with the established rules, the identity of the former occupant or occupants becomes unimportant. In consequence, financial information on vacant space costs does not identify the last occupant. This information is therefore not available.

Water Companies (Delayed Payments)

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the cost to council tax payers of water companies' delaying payment for works undertaken on their behalf by local authorities. [13201]

Sir Paul Beresford: None. Any arrangements between local authorities and water companies are a matter for the individual parties concerned.

Planning (Warminster)

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all those *(a)* organisations and *(b)* individuals who have made representations to his Department concerning planning application no. W95/0535 at Folly lane, Warminster. [12928]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Secretary of State has received representations from

(a) MAFF, and

(b) WD Gregory (enclosing petition containing 365 signatures)

Mr. and Mrs. J. F. Burton

Mrs. R. D. Irwin

Mrs. P. M. Robertson

Mrs. L. P. Anderson

Councillor John Syme, Wiltshire CC

C. Bell

C. R. Bell

M. G. Bryant

A. M. Kinman

Garry Jones

Michael Hibbs

S. D. Pick

A. Pick

J. M. May

G. T. Sprangle

N. Hill

A. Burt

G. Hill

A. M. Stewart

David Faber MP

There have also been four representations received where an address was not given. They therefore cannot be acknowledged and consequently have not been taken into account.

Standard Spending Assessment (Buckinghamshire)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the standard spending assessment in each year since 1990–91 for (i) Buckinghamshire county council, (ii) Aylesbury Vale district council, (iii) Chiltern district council and (iv) Wycombe district council. [13351]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is given in the table.

Table to show the total SSA for the years 1990–91 to 1996–97 inclusive

	Total SSA local authority			
Year	*Buckinghamshire*	*Aylesbury Vale*	*Chiltern*	*Wycombe*
1990–91	324.970	9.593	4.213	9.510
1991–92	385.943	12.541	5.333	12.181
1992–93	418.926	13.435	5.606	13.090
1993–94	409.877	13.595	6.105	13.506
1994–95	427.261	13.401	7.185	14.223
1995–96	393.493	13.414	7.226	14.231
1996–97	408.220	12.685	7.078	13.404

Government Accommodation

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of Government accommodation in *(a)* the SW1 postal district of London and *(b)* the remainder of the United Kingdom is currently vacant. [13741]

Sir Paul Beresford: Property Holdings is responsible for the whole of the Government common user (office) estate in which Government Departments and their agencies are housed. At 31 December 1995:

(a) The total area of the CUE offices in SW1 was 856,377 sq metres of which 66,271 sq metres was vacant. (7.7 per cent.)

(b) The total area of the CUE was 7,496,713 sq metres of which 1,017,304 sq metres was vacant (13.6 per cent.) When the SW1 area is excluded from the national figure, the CUE area of the remainder of the United Kingdom reduces to 6,613,336 sq metres of which 951,033 sq metres (14.4 per cent.) was vacant.

Furs

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to implement European Union regulation 3254/91 requiring a ban on the import of furs from animals caught in leghold traps; and if he will make a statement. [13590]

Mr. Clappison: The UK wishes to see leghold traps phased out as quickly as possible, and has strongly supported the EU regulation introduced in 1991 for this purpose. We have expressed our disappointment with the Commission's proposal to postpone the ban on import of furs caught by leghold traps, and have urged it to bring forward stronger measures. However, the 1991 regulation requires the Commission to determine which countries have met the conditions to import furs into the Community. Since this has not been done, and the necessary implementing measures have not been adopted, there is some doubt as to whether member states would be acting lawfully if they attempted to implement a fur import ban on 1 January 1996. In view of this, and the absence of routine controls in intra-Community trade, the Government have reluctantly concluded that it would not be appropriate to implement the ban.

Rough Sleepers, London

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the number of deaths of rough sleepers during the very cold spell over Christmas and the new year; if he will estimate the number who died from causes directly attributed to the cold weather; and if he will make a statement. [9970]

Mr. Curry *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* This information is not held centrally.

Council Houses

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council houses in the United Kingdom are currently unfit for habitation. [10501]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* The 1991 English house condition survey found 307,000—7.7 per cent.—local authority dwellings in England to be unfit under section 604 of the Housing Act 1985, as amended by schedule 9 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Scotland does not operate a comparable standard of fitness. The figures for Wales and Northern Ireland may be available from the respective Secretaries of State.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisons (Transsexuals)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the guidelines for the treatment of transsexuals in prison; what plans he has to review these; and what is the time scale for the review. [12842]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 5 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about what guidelines there are for the treatment of transsexuals in prison, what plans there are to review them and what is the timescale for any review.

No formal guidelines have been issued to Prison Service establishments on the care, management and treatment of transsexuals in prison. Clinicians have, however, always been able to call on advice from the Prison Service's directorate of health care to assist them in dealing with individual cases.

The general principles underlying such advice were set out in letters to you of 29 June 1994 and 22 May 1995, from the former Director General, copies of which will be placed in the Library of the House.

The directorate of health care does intend to draw up some formal guidelines to assist clinicians in the field, who may have to deal with transsexuals. It does however, have many competing priorities for its resources and I cannot say when the work will be completed.

Young Offenders

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls to the age of 18 years who are at present serving prison sentences in England and Wales (i) for murder and (ii) for manslaughter of children. [12851]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 5 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking, what is the number of (a) boys and (b) girls to the age of 18 years who are at present serving prison sentences in England and Wales (i) for murder and (ii) for manslaughter of children.

The latest information is for 30 January 1996 and is given in the attached table.

Population of persons aged under 18 years[1] currently serving prison sentences in England and Wales for murder of children and manslaughter of children, by sex, on 30 January 1996[2]

Offence	*Boys*	*Girls*
Murder of children	3	—
Manslaughter of children	—	1
Total	3	1

[1] The age interpretation used is where age is currently under 18, convicted of murder/manslaughter of someone who was also under 18.

[2] Includes those in Prison Service establishments and local authority secure accommodation.

British Citizenship (Hong Kong)

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the deadline for applications from Hong Kong residents for British citizenship; and what arrangements govern applications made after that date. [13145]

Mr. Kirkhope: Applications from principal beneficiaries for the governor's recommendation for registration as a British citizen under section 1(1) of the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act 1990 were to be made before 31 March 1994 or, in the case of an application made in response to an invitation from the governor, before the date specified in the invitation. Applications for recommendation for registration as a British citizen as the spouse or minor child of a principle beneficiary under section 1(4) are to be made before 31 December 1996. Thereafter, the sole avenue to British citizenship for Hong Kong residents who do not already hold that status will be by way of an application for registration or naturalisation under the British Nationality Act 1981. Such applications are not subject to any deadline.

Civil Defence Grant

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list in respect of civil defence grant allocations for the financial year 1996–97 for each metropolitan fire and civil defence authority, each metropolitan borough, each London borough, each county council and each unitary authority, the expenditure approved by him for grant aid at a rate of 100 per cent. on *(a)* emergency planning staff, *(b)* other employees' expenses, *(c)* rent, rates and premises service charges, *(d)* other premises-related expenses, *(e)* offices expenses, *(f)* departmental recharges, *(g)* miscellaneous supplies and services and *(h)* training and exercising costs and the expenditure on activities eligible for grant aid at a rate of 75 per cent.; and if he will make a statement. [13106]

Mr. Sackville: Civil defence grant is provided to local authorities as a contribution towards their expenses in meeting their civil defence responsibilities. The following table sets out the total approved expenditure for 1996–97 in respect of each fire and civil defence authority, metropolitan district, London borough, county council and unitary authority. I regret that it would be possible to provide a meaningful breakdown of this expenditure for all the authorities in the nine categories requested only at disproportionate cost.

Authority	*Expenditure*
Counties	
Bedfordshire	196,125
Berkshire	224,465
Buckinghamshire	210,860
Cambridgeshire	225,275
Cheshire	252,340
Cornwall	238,050
Cumbria	224,000
Derbyshire	266,450
Devon	281,575
Dorset	252,000
Durham	252,000
Essex	336,575
East Sussex	238,550
Gloucestershire	226,112

Authority	Expenditure
Hampshire	329,250
Hereford and Worcester	266,462
Hertfordshire	280,250
Kent	338,000
Lancashire	307,730
Leicestershire	266,000
Lincolnshire	238,000
Norfolk	238,000
Northamptonshire	238,000
Northumberland	224,550
North Yorkshire	197,530
Nottinghamshire	253,362
Oxfordshire	213,125
Shropshire	224,000
Somerset	212,570
Staffordshire	266,000
Suffolk	238,000
Surrey	294,740
Warwickshire	211,593
West Sussex	238,350
Wiltshire	211,875
FCDAs	
Greater Manchester	334,000
London	not yet approved
Merseyside	369,000
South Yorkshire	229,000
Tyne and Wear	369,000
West Midlands	194,000
West Yorkshire	195,775
Districts	
Barking	35,000
Barnet	35,000
Bexley	35,000
Brent	35,000
Bromley	35,233
Camden	35,000
Corporation	35,000
Croydon	35,000
Ealing	35,000
Enfield	35,000
Greenwich	35,000
Hackney	35,000
Hammersmith and Fulham	35,000
Haringey	35,000
Harrow	35,000
Havering	35,000
Hillingdon	35,000
Hounslow	not yet approved
Islington	35,000
Kensington and Chelsea	35,000
Kingston	35,000
Lambeth	35,000
Lewisham	35,000
Merton	35,000
Newham	not yet approved
Redbridge	35,000
Richmond	35,000
Southwark	35,000
Sutton	35,000
Tower Hamlets	35,000
Waltham Forest	35,000
Wandsworth	35,000
Westminster	35,000
Bradford	35,000
Calderdale	35,000
Kirklees	35,000
Leeds	35,000
Wakefield	35,000
Birmingham	35,000
Coventry	35,000
Dudley	35,000
Sandwell	35,000
Solihull	35,000
Walsall	35,000
Wolverhampton	35,000
Barnsley	35,000
Doncaster	35,000
Rotherham	35,000
Bolton	35,000
Bury	35,000
Manchester	35,750
Oldham	35,000
Rochdale	35,000
Trafford	35,000
Bristol	56,000
Bath and North-East Somerset	56,000
South Gloucester	56,000
North Somerset	56,000
Hartlepool	196,000
Middlesborough	see Hartlepool
Stockton	see Hartlepool
Redcar and Cleveland	see Hartlepool
Hull	not yet approved
North Lincoln	not yet approved
North-East Lincoln	not yet approved
East Riding of Yorkshire	not yet approved
Isle of Wight	168,662
York	55,400
Denbighshire	not yet approved
Flintshire	not yet approved
Wrexham	not yet approved
Cardiganshire	not yet approved
Carmarthenshire	not yet approved
Pembrokeshire	not yet approved
Blaenau Gwent	not yet approved
Monmouthshire	not yet approved
Newport	not yet approved
Torfaen	not yet approved
Aberconwy and Colwyn Bay	not yet approved
Anglesey	not yet approved
Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire	not yet approved
Cardiff	not yet approved
Vale of Glamorgan	not yet approved
Caerphilly	not yet approved
Bridgend	not yet approved
Merthyr Tydfil	not yet approved
Rhondda Cynon and Taff	not yet approved
Neath and Port Talbot	not yet approved
Swansea	not yet approved
Powys	not yet approved

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *56*, if he will make a statement on the outcome of the cases of Tamil asylum seekers involved in the incident of 13 February 1989. [13095]

Mr. Kirkhope: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave him on 22 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *56*. If he would care to provide further details of the incident he has in mind to enable the cases to be identified, I will arrange for inquiries to be made.

Prison Population

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the projected prison population for England and Wales for *(a)* 30 June 1996, *(b)* 30 June 1997, *(c)* 30 June 1998 and *(d)* 30 June 1999. [13279]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth, dated 5 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking for the projected prison population of England and Wales for 1996–99.

The latest long term prison population projections were published in Home Office Statistical Bulletin 4/95 'Projections of the Long Term Trends in the Prison Population to 2002', a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The next update of the long term projections is due to be published in spring 1996.

Revised short term projections that cover a period of 18 months were produced in October 1995, based on an assessment of current trends. The population is expected to be about 52,700 by June 1996.

Prison Service Costs

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the planned expenditure on the Prison Service for *(a)* capital and *(b)* running costs in (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1997–98 and (iii) 1998–99. [13386]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A.J. Pearson to Mr. Jack Straw, dated 5 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the planned expenditure on the Prison Service for the next three years.

The provision agreed in the 1995 Public Expenditure Survey is given below.

The figures shown are for conventional capital funding. We are now exploring the scope for private finance of capital investment.

£ million

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Current	1,404	1,389	1,433
Capital	117	110	112
Total	1,521	1,499	1,545

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give figures for each prison establishment showing *(a)* the projected current expenditure for 1995–96, *(b)* the projected current expenditure for 1996–97 and *(c)* both the percentage and absolute change in each case. [12766]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 5 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about projected current expenditure for each prison establishment.

The information, by area, is given in the attached table.

Establishment	*Projected amount expenditure 1995–96, (£ million rounded)*	*Provisional allocation for 1996–97, (£ million rounded)*	*Percentage variation*	*Actual variation*
East Midlands				
Lincoln	10.8	10.5	–2.6	–280k
Lindholme	10.8	10.7	–1.1	–120k
Moorland	10.9	11.2	+2.7	+295k
Morton Hall	2.3	2.4	+4.1	+95k
North Sea Camp	2.9	2.9	+1.5	+43k
Nottingham	5.7	6.7	+19.1	+1.1m
Ranby	6.8	8.3	+22.4	+1.5m
Stocken	6.4	6.3	–1.9	–125k
Whatton	4.0	3.9	–1.8	–70k
North-east				
Acklington	9.1	8.5	–7.4	–680k
Castington	5.8	5.6	–3.5	–202k
Durham	15.2	17.2	+13.2	+2.0m
Frankland	15.4	15.2	–0.8	–130k
Full Sutton	19.7	19.1	–3.1	–614k
Holme House	12.2	13.3	+8.9	+1.1m
Kirklevington	2.0	1.9	–2.2	–44k
Low Newton	5.3	5.1	–2.9	–154k
North-west				
Garth	9.9	9.9	+0.1	+12k
Haverigg	7.4	6.9	–6.0	–442k
Hindley	7.9	10.0	+26.6	+2.1m
Kirkham	6.9	6.7	–2.7	–187k
Lancaster Castle	4.2	4.3	+2.8	+115k
Lancaster Farms	8.0	9.5	+18.5	+1.5m
Preston	11.4	11.1	–3.0	–348k
Thorn Cross	4.3	5.5	+27.6	+1.2m
Wymott	9.5	13.5	+42.2	+4.0m
Trans Pennine				
Leeds	18.9	17.3	–8.4	–1.6m
Liverpool	21.6	21.3	–1.3	–290k
Manchester	21.1	20.4	–3.2	–668k
New Hall	5.6	5.6	–0.8	–44lk
Risley	15.4	14.7	–4.0	–622k
Styal	6.2	6.1	–1.1	–71k
Wakefield	17.1	16.9	–1.3	–219k
Yorkshire				
Askham Grange	2.3	2.2	–2.3	–53k
Deerbolt	7.6	7.3	–4.0	–307k
Everthorpe	6.2	6.7	+8.1	+503k
Hatfield	3.7	3.5	–6.3	–235k
Hull	11.5	12.0	+4.3	+497k
Northallerton	4.7	4.5	–4.0	–188k
Wealstun	7.9	8.9	+11.8	+936k
Wetherby	3.7	3.5	–4.3	–158k
Central				
Ashwell	5.7	5.6	–1.7	–98k
Birmingham	16.6	16.1	–3.1	–517k
Brinsford	9.2	8.8	–4.4	–408k
Featherstone	8.9	8.4	–5.8	–521k
Gartree	8.0	7.9	–1.0	–82k
Glen Parva	13.4	12.9	–4.3	–583k
Leicester	8.4	8.4	+0.6	+48k
Long Lartin	14.3	13.8	–3.4	–485k
Stafford	10.1	9.6	–4.7	–470k
Mercia				
Brockhill	3.3	3.4	+3.3	109k
Drake Hall	3.9	3.7	–3.7	–142k
Hewell Grange	2.6	2.7	+2.7	+69k
Shrewsbury	5.9	5.5	–5.5	–320k
Stoke Heath	6.1	6.0	–1.8	–111k
Sudbury/Foston	6.2	6.1	–0.6	–35k
Swinfen Hall	4.5	4.3	–2.8	–127k
Werrington	2.4	2.3	–2.4	–57k
East Anglia				
Blundeston	7.9	7.6	–4.0	–315k
Bullwood Hall	3.7	3.6	–1.4	–44k
Chelmsford	8.2	9.1	+10.1	+836k

Establishment	Projected amount expenditure 1995–96, (£ million rounded)	Provisional allocation for 1996–97, (£ million rounded)	Percentage variation	Actual variation
Highpoint	10.2	9.6	–6.2	–632k
Hollesley Bay	9.7	9.5	–2.2	–215k
Norwich	11.0	11.5	+4.4	+488k
Wayland	8.1	8.0	–0.6	–47k
Kent				
Aldington	2.2	2.3	+4.1	+93k
Blantyre House	2.1	2.1	+1.0	+21k
Canterbury	6.3	6.1	–4.2	–266k
Cookham Wood	2.9	2.9	+1.2	+36k
Dover	5.6	5.5	–1.8	–104k
East Sutton Park	1.7	1.7	–0.3	–6k
Elmley	11.5	11.5	+0.2	+20k
Maidstone	9.8	9.7	–1.0	–102k
Rochester	7.9	7.8	–1.4	–111k
Standford Hill	5.7	5.4	–6.0	–346k
Swaleside	9.3	9.1	–1.7	–157k
London North				
Bedford	7.1	6.9	–3.4	–241k
Grendon	8.7	8.5	–1.3	–110k
Holloway	15.5	15.9	+2.6	+406k
Littlehey	8.6	8.5	–0.4	–33k
Pentonville	16.2	16.2	–0.2	–40k
Wellingborough	4.5	5.7	–1.3	–74k
Whitemoor	18.5	19.1	+2.9	+541
Woodhill	13.7	14.2	+3.6	+489k
Wormwood Scrubs	20.1	20.1	+0.3	+59k
London South				
Albany	8.5	8.3	–2.1	–180k
Belmarsh	21.9	22.5	+2.6	+572k
Brixton	18.3	18.0	–1.6	–297k
Camp Hill	8.1	7.8	–2.8	–228k
Feltham	15.4	15.1	–1.7	–259k
Latchmere House	2.2	2.2	+2.3	+51k
Parkhurst	15.1	12.7	–15.8	–24k
Wandsworth	21.2	19.6	–7.8	–1.652m
South Coast				
Downview	5.6	5.6	–0.7	–40k
Ford	5.6	5.8	+3.1	+173k
Haslar	2.5	2.5	–0.8	–21k
Highdown	12.6	12.4	–1.3	–168k
Kingston	3.7	3.6	–1.1	–42k
Lewes	8.7	8.5	–2.1	–181k
Send	2.4	2.4	+0.6	+16k
Winchester	11.8	11.2	–4.7	–554k
Chilterns				
Aylesbury	7.1	7.5	+4.6	+332k
Bullingdon[1]	12.5	11.7	–6.1	–758k
Coldingley	6.1	6.1	–0.9	–53k
Huntercombe	5.5	5.9	+7.2	+398k
The Mount	7.8	8.1	+3.2	+249k
Omley	7.6	7.5	–1.3	–96k
Oxford[1]	1.7	1.2	–29.8	–516k
Reading	5.1	5.0	–2.0	–103k
Wales and West				
Bristol	12.9	12.6	–2.9	–371k
Cardiff	9.8	10.9	+11.1	+1.0m
Eastwood Park[2]	0.4	2.7	+544.6	+2.3m
Erlestoke	5.2	5.0	–4.6	–242k
Gloucester	6.2	6.0	–2.6	–163k
Leyhill	6.1	6.1	+0.2	+9k
Pucklechurch[2]	2.6	—	—	–2.6m
Swansea	6.0	6.0	–0.4	–27k
Usk	5.3	5.1	–2.8	–145k
Wessex				
Channings Wood	8.4	8.4	+0.5	+44k
Dartmoor	11.8	11.6	–1.1	–132k
Dorchester	4.4	4.3	–2.8	–125k
Exeter	9.3	8.9	–4.6	–432k
Guys Marsh	5.2	5.2	+0.2	+13k
Portland	8.5	8.5	+0.3	+29k
Shepton Mallet	3.9	3.9	–0.5	–21k
The Verne	8.3	8.2	–1.2	–102k
[1]Bullingdon/Oxford as one:	14.2	12.9	–9.0	–1.3m
[2]Eastwood/Pucklechurch as one:	3.1	2.7	–10.9	–0.4m

Some funds are held centrally and allocated for operational difficulties.

Private Prisons

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to revise the existing contracts for private prisons in respect of cost reductions in the state sector. [13277]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 5 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the revision of contractual requirements for the contractually-managed prisons in regard to cost reductions in the public sector.

No decision has been taken about whether the services provided by contractually-managed prisons should be changed. However, consideration is being given to whether this can contribute to the Prison Service's cost-reduction strategy for 1996–99.

Resettlement Grants

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have *(a)* applied for and *(b)* been granted a resettlement grant to meet their repatriation costs to their country of origin; what has been the average cost of such grants; and how many were to non-United Kingdom citizens. [13735]

Mr. Kirkhope: Resettlement grants are not available under the voluntary repatriation scheme run by the International Social Service of the United Kingdom on behalf of the Home Office. The scheme provides limited financial assistance towards travel and baggage costs. A total of 7,390 applications have been received under the scheme between 1972 and 1995 inclusive, and 2,545 individuals have been assisted financially during that period. The average cost per individual assisted in 1994–95 was £1,200. British citizens are not eligible for assistance.

Ethnic Minority Business Advisory Group

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the ethnic minority business advisory group was established; how many times it met;

what were the results of its meetings; and what factors led to its being disbanded. [13100]

Mr. Kirkhope: The first meeting of the ethnic minority business advisory group was held on 8 December 1992. There were four more meetings. It provided a forum in which issues of concern to ethnic minority businesses could be raised with mainstream business support organisations and relevant Government Departments. The transfer of the ethnic minority business initiative grant scheme into the single regeneration budget and the establishment of the Government offices for the regions, which moved the focus of activity from central to regional level, were the principal factors in the disbandment of EMBAG.

Holloway Prison

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the annual expenditure on education at Her Majesty's prison Holloway for each of the past 10 years, the total weekly teaching hours available and the number of teachers in post; and if he will make a statement. [12272]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 31 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 5 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about education expenditure at Holloway Prison.

Information for the last six years is given in table one, attached. Information is not available before then.

The weekly teaching hours and teachers in post for the years 1993–94 and 1994–95 are given in table two.

Information before then is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Table one: Annual expenditure education (includes salaries, material and capital)

	£
1989–90	354,024
1990–91	346,182
1991–92	523,297
1992–93	429,526
1993–94	390,223
1994–95	441,805

Table two

	Weekly teaching hours	*Teachers in post*
1993–94	228	7 full time 31 part time
1994–95	270	7 full time 27 part time

	Salaries £	*Materials (VT, CIT, pre-release)* £	*Education capital* £
1990–91	285,525	53,122	7,535
1991–92	403,129	87,634	32,534
1992–93	343,837	67,553	18,136
1993–94	321,817	68,406	nil
1994–95	383,871	47,967	9,967
1995–96	348,000	58,900	2,000

Women Prisoners

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date the Prison Service first issued instructions for the use of restraints on women prisoners attending hospital; and if he will list the dates of subsequent instructions issued. [12420]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 31 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 5 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking on what date the Prison Service first issued instructions for the use of restraints on women prisoners attending hospital, and the dates of subsequent instructions.

The policy on the use of restraints on all prisoners in hospital, including women prisoners, is a long standing one. Guidance on the use of restraints under Prison Rule 46 was set out in a variety of circular instructions, standing orders and letters to individual governors. These instructions were issued over many years.

The Security Manual, which codified security instructions was first issued in autumn 1991. A section bringing together instructions on handcuffing, including handcuffing of women prisoner generally and prisoners of either sex in hospital was added in October 1992. Amendments in April 1994 gave further guidance about handcuffing women. In April 1995 an amendment to the manual gave guidance about complying with medical requests when handcuffing women prisoners attending hospital, including for childbirth. In November 1995 a letter was sent to governors which reiterated the policy that women in labour and childbirth should not be restrained.

On 18 January, the Home Secretary Announced a revised policy to the House. This took into account the meeting I had with representatives of the Royal College of Midwives on 15 January. Instructions reflecting the new arrangements were sent to governors on 19 January.

Release of Offenders

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on informing police authorities of the release of offenders convicted of manslaughter and murder. [13004]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 1 February 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Ms Ann Coffey, dated 5 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General, to reply to your recent Question about the policy on informing police authorities of the release of offenders convicted of manslaughter and murder.

The current procedure for informing the police of the final discharge of all prisoners on completion of sentence is that on or about 28 days before discharge, the establishment where the prisoner is serving completes a Form 99. This form is then sent to the National Identification Service (formerly National Identification Bureau) at New Scotland Yard.

The form gives all personal details of the prisoner, including, if known, his CRS number. Details of the present conviction, offence, committing courts and sentence are also included as is the discharge address, if known.

The relevant instructions to establishments to carry out this procedure are contained in Prison Service Standing Order 11 (Discharge of Prisoners), paragraph 11 and Prison Service Circular Instruction 40/1992, paragraph 8.

Under the arrangements introduced in April 1995 governing the release on temporary licence of prisoners, the Prison Service must notify the police about such releases in cases where the post trial report prepared by the police indicates that notification is required. Post trial reports are completed on any offender serving a custodial sentence (of any length) involving sex, violence or drugs and in respect of any prisoner serving a custodial sentence of 12 months or more.

The notice of temporary release is faxed to the Force Intelligence Bureau (FIB) of the police service in whose area the prison is located, at least 5 working days before the temporary release is due to take place. The force FIB will then relay the information either to the police service which originally dealt with the offences and/or the police service to which the prisoner will be going on temporary release.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the *(a)* mean, and *(b)* median income for (i) single male pensioners who are aged (1) 65 to 69, (2) 70 to 74, (3) 75 to 79 and (4) 80 years and over, (ii) single female pensioners in groups 1 to 4, (iii) pensioner couples who are in groups 1 to 4, (iv) all pensioners who are (5) aged 60/65 years to 74 years and (6) aged 75 years and over and (v) all pensioners. [12155]

Mr. Heald: The available information is in the tables:

Table 1: Average income—single male pensioners: £ per week at July 1993 prices

Age	65 to 74	75+
Mean	169.80	143.50
Median	108.30	103.00

Table 2: Average income—single female pensioners: £ per week at July 1993 prices

Age	65 to 69	70 to 74	75 to 79	80+
Mean	150.70	111.50	108.30	108.10
Median	105.10	96.30	94.70	97.50

Table 3: Average income—pensioner couples: £ per week at July 1993 prices

Age	65 to 69	70 to 74	75 to 79	80+
Mean	274.40	233.40	214.10	189.70
Median	207.80	178.30	161.90	160.00

Table 4: Average income—all pensioner units: £ per week at July 1993 prices

Age	Mean	Median
60-65 to 74	192.50	139.50
75+	139.70	106.40
60-65+	170.20	123.80

Source:

Family Expenditure Survey 1993.

Notes:

1. Income figures are gross income before housing costs.

2. A pensioner unit is defined as a single person over State Pension Age (SPA) or a couple where the husband, or head, is over SPA.

3. Due to insufficient sample sizes reliable estimates of further age breakdowns for single male pensioners are not available at Table 1.

Child Rearing Costs

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *213*, if he will list the specific evidence evaluated by his Department which supported his conclusion concerning the relative costs of bringing up children by lone parents and by couples. [13398]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 30 January, *Official Report*, columns *745-46*.

There is a wide range of research on the costs of a child. There is no consistent evidence of a difference in these costs for lone parents and couples, other than a potentially greater need for child care for working lone parents.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the locations which provide the temperature information upon which decisions on severe weather payments are based. [13300]

Mr. Roger Evans: All weather stations and the areas they cover are listed in the schedules to the Social Fund Cold Weather Payments Regulations, a copy of which is in the Library. The weather station at Whithorn, which is listed in the regulations, has closed. The weather station at Dumfries has been used to cover the postcode areas specified for Whithorn.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of staff employed by his Department or related agencies in each of the travel-to-work areas of Carmarthen, South Pembrokeshire, Haverfordwest, Fishguard and Cardigan on *(a)* 31 March 1979, *(b)* 31 March 1990, *(c)* 31 March 1992, *(d)* 31 March 1995, *(e)* the latest available figure and *(f)* the estimate for 31 March 1997. [13293]

Mr. Burt: The information requested is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Staff in post in DSS agencies

Areas	31 March 1992 Benefits agency[1]	31 March 1992 Contributions agency[2]	31 March 1992 Child support agency[3]	31 March 1995 Benefits agency[1]	31 March 1995 Contributions agency[2]	31 March 1995 Child support agency[3]
Carmarthen South	54	5	0	56	6	0
Pembrokeshire	50	4	0	51	0	0
Haverfordwest	63	5	0	64	7	5
Fishguard	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cardigan	1	0	0	1	0	0

Staff in post in DSS agencies

Areas	31 January 1996 Benefits agency[1]	31 January 1996 Contributions agency[2]	31 January 1996 Child support agency[3]	[4]31 March 1997 Benefits agency[1]	[4]31 March 1997 Contributions agency[2]	[4]31 March 1997 Child support agency[3]
Carmarthen South	56	3	0	55	0	0
Pembrokeshire	59	0	0	59	0	0
Haverfordwest	69	4	5	68	5	6
Fishguard	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cardigan	1	0	0	1	0	0

Source:
Personnel data from individual agencies.
Notes:
[1] *Launched April 1991.*
[2] Launched April 1991.
[3] Launched April 1993.
[4] Estimate.
1. Resettlement Agency (RA) Information Technology Services Agency (ITSA) and War Pensions Agency (WPA) have no staff in these areas at the specified dates.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the class 1A national insurance contributions collected though *(a)* the Contributions Agency and *(b)* the Inland Revenue for (i) 1993–94 and (ii) 1994–95. [13744]

Mr. Heald: The information requested is in the table.

£ million

	Estimated total of class 1A collection	Actual contributions agency (APM) collection	Estimated inland revenue portion
1993–94	419	246	173
1994–95	476	283	193

1. Figures shown for Contributions Agency class 1A collection via the alternative payment method—APM—for both financial years are actual collection totals.

2. Figures shown for total class 1A collection and the Inland Revenue portion are based on provisional estimates provided by the Government Actuary's Department and are subject to change.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library the report undertaken by the Contributions Agency of a random sample of employers to provide information on error rates in the collection of national insurance mentioned in the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General on the national insurance fund 1993–94. [13746]

Mr. Heald: The report, referred to in the 1993–94 report of the Comptroller and Auditor General on the national insurance fund report, was produced by the Department's analytical services division in August 1994. I have today arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Upper Waiting Hall Exhibitions

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to timeshare to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall. [13376]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 18 March to Friday 22 March 1996.

Lobby Journalists

Mr. Parry: To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has to require lobby journalists to declare their salaries, employers' pension contributions, allowances and other forms of income as a condition of their retaining lobby passes. [13701]

Mr. Newton: I have no such plans.

WALES

Public Transport

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives his Department is pursuing to encourage the use of public transport in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [10705]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: County councils have been given powers to promote the use of public transport in their areas. Grant assistance is available to them from the Welsh Office in the form of transport grant for major projects; revenue support grant and non-domestic rate income; and grants for public transport operators in the rural areas under the rural transport innovation scheme. Other support can be given under the strategic development scheme and the bus priority scheme, the most recent examples of which I announced on 4 January. They include:

£6.8 million over three years to help Rhondda Cynon Taff and Cardiff councils to improve rail links between the valleys and Cardiff;

£1.3 million to complete rail signalling between Pontypridd and Taffs Well;

£150,000 for a traffic signalling project to improve bus journey times between Pontypridd and Caerphilly; and

£52,000 for a bus-only route at Swansea.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each unitary authority area and for Wales as a whole in 1996 prices the estimated revenue cost of local government reorganisation for 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [12429]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the costs of reorganisation to each local authority is not held centrally.

My right hon. Friend will provide supplementary credit approvals totalling £41,394,000 to unitary authorities for 1996–97 to cover a proportion of councils' expenditure on compensation, accommodation and information technology.

The figures for accommodation and information technology are broken down as follows:

Council	*Information technology* £	*Accommodation* £
Aberconwy and Colwyn	348,219	600,000
Anglesey	338,546	1,000,000
Blaenau Gwent	562,180	217,000
Bridgend	673,427	—
Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire	889,342	—
Caerphilly	482,142	—
Cardiff	456,987	—
Cardiganshire	445,457	—
Carmarthenshire	366,847	—
Denbighshire	436,048	2,214,750
Flintshire	725,309	—
Merthyr Tydfil	220,000	—
Monmouthshire	460,131	—
Neath and Port Talbot	895,107	—
Newport	505,725	—
Pembrokeshire	236,789	800,000
Powys	488,431	—
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	812,304	—
Swansea	576,000	—
Torfaen	752,037	—
Wrexham	424,512	1,440,000
The Vale of Glamorgan	668,710	—
Total	11,764,250	6,271,750

No such breakdown is available for compensation costs in 1996–97. SCAs will be authorised upon receipt of audited claims for actual expenditure, up to a limit of £23,538,000.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales under what terms and conditions additional resources will be made available to local authorities in Wales for the year 1996–97; and under what criteria these resources will be distributed. [12885]

Mr. Hague: I refer to the answer which I gave to the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) on 30 January, *Official Report*, columns *682-83*.

Agricultural Marketing and Processing

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the amount of aid for agricultural marketing and processing by each county and for Wales as a whole for each of the last three years. [12813]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The amount of aid offered for agricultural marketing and processing schemes is as follows:

County	*1993–94* £	*1994–95* £	*[1]1995–96* £
Clwyd	255,000	73,033	74,250
Dyfed	380,630	294,298	791,828
Gwent	—	392,750	—
Gwynedd	625,188	1,745	183,479
Mid Glamorgan	—	—	—
Powys	46,330	120,473	2,500
South Glamorgan	—	—	56,500
West Glamorgan	53,550	36,889	5,000
Total	1,360,698	919,188	1,113,557

[1] Up to 31 December 1995.

These figures represent the offers which the Welsh Office made to companies in these years. There is a slight time lag between offers being made and expenditure being incurred.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of staff employed by his

Department or related agencies in each of the travel-to-work areas of Carmarthern, South Pembrokeshire, Haverfordwest, Fishguard and Cardigan on *(a)* 31 March 1979, *(b)* 31 March 1990, *(c)* 31 March 1992, *(d)* 31 March 1995, *(e)* the latest available figures and *(f)* the estimate for 31 March 1997. [13297]

Mr. Hague: The information is as follows:

Date	*Carmarthen TTWA*	*South Pembrokeshire TTWA*	*Haverfordwest TTWA*	*Cardigan TTWA*
30 September 1980[1]	92	—	15	1
31 March 1990	102	2	9	—
31 March 1992	123	2	6	—
31 March 1995	146	—	7	—
31 January 1996[2]	152	—	7	—

1. Estimates are not available for March 1997.
[1] Does not include Ancient Monument Staff.
[2] Excludes temporary staff—(ie, staff employed for less than three months).

Welsh Joint Education Committee

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what accreditation role he has with respect to the setting of standards by, and response to, requests for *(a)* remarkings and *(b)* independent review of the Welsh Joint Education Committee. [13740]

Mr. Hague: Requests for remarking are matters for consideration by individual examination boards. Individual appeals relating to GCSE, A and AS-level examinations can, with the support of the examination centre concerned, be made to the Independent Appeals Authority for School Examinations. These arrangements apply to the Welsh Joint Education Committee, as they do to other GCSE, A and AS-level examination boards.

Training for Work Programmes

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report,* columns *820–22* if he will give comparable figures for non-vocational qualifications levels for those undertaking training for work for *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1994. [13760]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is contained in the following table. The figures quoted are for complete financial years—that is April to March—whereas the figures quoted in my answer of 31 January were for the period 27 March 1995 to 3 December 1995, the latest then available. Finalised figures for 1995–96 will be available in September 1996.

NVQs	*Gwent*	*Mid Glamorgan*	*North-east Wales*	*Powys*	*South Glamorgan*	*Targed*	*West Wales*	*Total*
1993–94								
Sub level 1	107	123	9	7	42	7	42	337
Level 1	400	253	150	52	361	245	952	2,413
Level 2	481	696	308	129	455	244	857	3,170
Level 3	105	40	12	5	22	96	74	354
Level 4+	12	6	0	0	25	1	41	85
Total	1,105	1,118	479	193	905	593	1,966	6,359
1994–95								
Sub level 1	101	454	0	4	80	24	46	709
Level 1	539	415	259	28	278	211	1,103	2,833
Level 2	482	622	259	55	596	268	715	2,997
Level 3	120	94	6	20	49	86	82	457
Level 4+	48	29	13	3	26	21	33	173
Total	1,290	1,614	537	110	1,029	610	1,979	7,169

Source:
TEC Management Information Statistics

Conservation Schemes

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the annual expenditure figures and forecasts for the *(a)* countryside access scheme, *(b)* environmentally sensitive areas, *(c)* farm conservation grant scheme, *(d)* farm woodland premium scheme, *(e)* habitat scheme, *(f)* nitrate sensitive areas, *(g)* moorland scheme, *(h)* organic aid scheme and *(i)* countryside stewardship for each year between 1990–91 and 1997–98. [13633]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is set out in the following table.

£ thousands

Scheme	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Countryside access scheme	—	—	—	—	—	2	2	2
Environmentally sensitive areas[1]	882	1,458	1,503	1,542	1,536	3,029	8,527	8,201
Farm conservation grant scheme	3,867	6,224	5,537	6,249	5,251	4,500	4,722	4,222
Farm woodland scheme[2]	27	35	40	41	40	50	78	78
Farm woodland premium scheme	—	—	—	57	117	160	271	284
Habitat scheme	—	—	—	—	—	8	516	516
Nitrate sensitive areas[3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Moorland scheme	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,640	1,140
Organic aid scheme	—	—	—	—	—	34	348	348
Tir Cymen[4]	—	—	—	1,540	2,940	3,500	4,980	6,370

1. Years 1990–91 to 1994–95 inclusive, are actual outturn figures as shown in the respective Appropriation Accounts for those years.
2. Year 1995–96 is forecast outturn and may be subject to change.
3. Years 1996–97 and 1997–98 are planned expenditure and may be subject to change.

[1] Includes figures for Public Access in Environmentally Sensitive Areas.
[2] The Farm Woodland Premium Scheme replaced the Farm Woodland Scheme.
[3] There are no Nitrate Sensitive Areas in Wales.
[4] In Wales the pilot scheme "Tir Cymen" is considered to be the nearest equivalent to the Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 17 January 1996 to the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney), *Official Report*, columns *624-25*, (1) if he will set out the rights of those farmers not wishing to sell or lease their land to the Land Authority for Wales as compensatory feeding grounds for those lost behind the Cardiff bay barrage; [11906]

(2) if he will name each of the farms in the proposed compensation area east of the River Usk for the loss of inter-tidal feeding grounds at Cardiff bay; and whether they *(a)* have been bought by voluntary means, *(b)* are under negotiation for voluntary purchase, *(c)* are under negotiation for management agreement of *(d)* are expected to be bought by compulsory order; [11907]

(3) what estimate he has made of the length of time required to complete the arrangements for the setting up of the bird reserve east of the River Usk to compensate for the loss of feeding grounds at Cardiff bay on the basis of *(a)* voluntary purchase of the requisite farm, *(b)* management agreements with land owners and *(c)* compulsory purchase; and if he will make a statement. [11904]

Mr. Hague *[holding answer Thursday 25 January]:* These are operational matters for the Cardiff Bay development corporation. The chief executive has replied and a copy of his letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Access Centres

30. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received relating to access centres for children of separated parents; what was his response; and if he will make a statement. [11788]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I have recently received an enquiry about the funding of access and child contact centres in connection with the Government's proposals for reform of divorce law and the legal aid system. Under the Government's proposals, services providing mediation in disputes relating to family matters may become eligible to receive funding through the legal aid system. If centres consider that they provide such services, it may become open to them to apply for such funding.

Contact centres play a valuable role in facilitating contact with children following family breakdown, and can provide a variety of services. There are at present a range of local family centres, some of which are run by charitable organisations, which receive funding from the voluntary sector and from local authorities.

Legal Aid

35. **Mr. Merchant:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much was spent on state-funded legal aid in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other European Union member states in the last year for which figures are available. [11793]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Excluding administration costs, in 1994–95 the net cost of legal aid in the United Kingdom was £1.4 billion. It is not possible to make direct comparisons with other EU member states since the legal systems are different and the coverage and nature of their legal aid schemes vary considerably.

36. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the cost of legal aid received by asylum seekers in the last financial year for which figures are available. [11794]

Mr. Evans: No separate figures are kept for the legal aid costs attributable to asylum matters alone. In 1994–95, total legal aid expenditure for advice and assistance on immigration and nationality cases was less than £14.6 million, representing just over 1 per cent. of the total cost of legal aid.

37. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has recently received about legal aid. [11796]

Mr. Evans: I have received many representations about the legal aid scheme.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to broaden the eligibility rules for legal aid; and if he will make a statement. [11795]

Mr. Evans: The Lord Chancellor published a Green Paper setting out proposals for the reform of legal aid in May 1995. Both financial eligibility and merits assessment are being examined as part of this process. The Lord Chancellor intends to make an announcement on the future of the Green Paper proposals in the spring.

Census Returns

38. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what arrangements he is making for continued public access to the census returns following the closure of the Public Record Office, Chancery Lane. [11797]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Following the closure of the Public Record Office, Chancery lane, public access to the census returns now consulted there will be continued at another central London site, for which negotiations are proceeding.

Divorce

39. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent representations he has received on the question of fault in divorce law reform. [11798]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I have received a large number of representations relating to the question of divorce law reform. The records kept do not specify how many of these raised the issue of fault.

40. **Mr. Sims:** To ask the parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proposals he has to make additional funding available for mediation services. [11799]

Mr. Evans: The Government have no plans to make additional funding directly available to mediation services. However, under the proposals set out in the Family Law Bill, it is intended that legal aid will be made available for mediation to eligible parties in appropriate cases.

Mrs. Elaine Steele

41. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what sums of legal aid were expended in the case of Elaine Steele of Workington. [11800]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Legal aid payments to counsel and solicitors for the criminal proceedings with which Mrs. Steele was faced totalled £31,436.09. In a civil case for which Mrs. Steele was granted legal aid, a final bill has not been received, and the legal aid costs have not yet been assessed.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the number of staff employed by his Department or related agencies in each of the travel-to-work areas of Carmarthen, south Pembrokeshire, Haverfordwest, Fishguard and Cardigan on *(a)* 31 March 1979, *(b)* 31 March 1990, *(c)* 31 March 1992, *(d)* 31 March 1995, *(e)* the latest available figure and *(f)* the estimate for 31 March 1997. [13296]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information requested for 31 March 1979 and 31 March 1990 is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. For the periods 31 March 1992 and 31 March 1995 no staff were employed in the Lord Chancellor's Department or related agencies in south Pembrokeshire, Fishguard or Cardigan. For Carmarthen and Haverfordwest the information is set out in the table.

The remaining parts of the question relate to information on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Number of staff employed by the Lord Chancellor's Department

Area	*Courts*	*District Probate Registry*
31 March 1992		
Carmarthen	10.5	4
Haverfordwest	10	n/a
31 March 1995		
Carmarthen	10.5	2.5
Haverfordwest	10	n/a

Letter from M. D. Heubner to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 5 February 1996:

NUMBER OF STAFF EMPLOYED IN TRAVEL-TO-WORK AREAS OF CARMARTHEN, SOUTH PEMBROKESHIRE, HAVERFORD WEST, FISHGUARD AND CARDIGAN

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of staff employed in these areas.

The Court Service does not hold information about staff employed in travel-to-work areas, and it could be collated only at a disproportionate cost. However, at present there are no Court Service staff employed in Fishguard, South Pembrokeshire or Cardigan and there are no plans for staff to be employed in these areas in the future. There are 24 members of Court Service staff, 21 full time and 2 part-time, employed in Haverfordwest and Carmarthen and it is estimated that 22 full time members of staff will be employed in these areas on 31 March 1997.

Probate Offices

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many interviews took place at each probate office in England and Wales in each year from 1990 to 1995; and if he will make a statement. [13494]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from M. D. Heubner to Mr. David Lidington, dated 5 February 1996:

NUMBER OF PROBATE OFFICE INTERVIEWS 1990–1995

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to the above Question about the number of Probate Office interviews in the years 1990–95.

I attach a schedule which details this information. As the table accompanying this letter is too long to be printed in the Official Report, arrangements will be made for a copy to be deposited in the Library of the House.

Number of interviews arranged at Probate Offices

Probate Office staffed from:	*Probate Office*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Birmingham	Coventry	382	421	489	533	530	595
	Kidderminster	163	161	225	258	217	265
	Litchfield	170	208	143	253	266	281
	Northampton	223	281	336	359	362	429
	Wolverhampton	459	438	492	577	467	539
Stoke on Trent	Crewe	132	104	153	154	137	276
	Shrewsbury	225	225	299	258	275	347
	Stafford	168	188	196	191	166	146
Brighton	Chichester	—	54	141	255	295	287
	Crawley	276	254	333	395	406	411
	Hastings	161	197	232	266	244	254
	Worthing	268	184	—	—	—	—
Maidstone	Canterbury	368	351	391	349	434	450
	Chatham	219	145	—	302	250	152
	Folkestone	119	109	153	192	192	176
	Tunbridge Wells	258	266	284	403	370	375
Bristol	Bath	339	349	354	422	488	485
	Taunton	159	189	189	218	247	290
	Weston Super Mare	146	158	159	200	196	182
Bodmin	Penzance	44	39	57	44	50	8
	Plymouth	298	300	352	442	385	445
	Truro	197	229	250	213	263	298
Exeter	Barnstable	79	75	72	100	126	116
	Newton Abbott	162	133	170	175	170	167
	Yeovil	110	111	135	144	133	162
Ipswich	Chelmsford	361	471	568	694	783	810
	Colchester	299	289	352	422	455	406
Norwich	Lowestoft	71	75	104	100	127	119
Peterborough	Cambridge	275	383	396	430	503	486
	King's Lynn	74	64	97	125	149	148
Leeds	Bradford	184	229	209	287	281	309
	Harrogate	69	70	95	132	134	131
	Huddersfield	190	249	257	254	315	334
	Wakefield	163	190	203	240	279	318
Lincoln	Grimsby	68	53	72	80	103	102
Sheffield	Chesterfield	96	110	131	137	170	168
	Doncaster	129	169	203	204	243	251
Liverpool	St. Helen's	209	224	244	273	289	248
	Southport	135	159	176	221	272	243
	Wallasey	145	141	187	218	211	200
Chester	Rhyl	73	67	61	78	68	57
	Wrexham	60	53	73	64	66	32
Lancaster	Barrow	48	48	64	73	89	85
	Blackpool	230	239	263	323	293	323
	Preston	299	327	375	393	452	418
Manchester	Bolton	609	601	651	738	718	457
	Nelson	127	134	145	156	160	213
	Oldham	294	409	422	465	484	582
	Stockport	496	489	520	634	521	—
	Warrington	241	218	272	279	311	342
	Wigan	169	175	277	220	251	248
Nottingham	Derby	233	231	249	299	350	302
	Mansfield	76	87	97	121	150	149
Newcastle	Morpeth	54	57	59	58	40	15
	Sunderland	154	126	140	119	70	49

Number of interviews arranged at Probate Offices

Probate Office staffed from:	*Probate Office*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Carlisle	Workington	104	96	77	—	—	—
Middlesbrough	Darlington	107	96	99	134	168	101
	Durham	148	146	142	93	93	59
York	Hull	307	284	346	348	351	400
	Scarborough	72	88	88	82	114	116
Oxford	Aylesbury	200	217	259	228	233	264
	Banbury	7	6	—	—	—	—
	High Wycombe	290	292	350	414	254	367
	Reading	518	536	596	562	371	807
	Slough	526	561	596	637	591	670
	Swindon	141	137	173	195	137	310
Leicester	Bedford	205	217	287	282	331	380
	Kettering	105	92	130	154	94	—
Winchester	Basingstoke	199	240	224	278	306	279
	Bournemouth	530	561	628	703	712	755
	Dorchester	170	144	161	177	197	184
	Guildford	640	744	851	846	980	942
	Newport, Isle of Wight	101	97	97	151	149	143
	Portsmouth	434	491	491	528	568	540
	Salisbury	93	92	97	151	149	143
	Southampton	340	327	441	433	448	402
Probate Registry of Wales	Bridgend	183	181	190	212	217	269
	Newport	402	378	491	499	525	549
	Pontypridd	261	319	284	365	378	398
Carmarthen	Aberystwyth	39	31	43	37	48	49
	Haverfordwest	66	69	79	69	62	96
	Swansea	364	368	437	451	456	458
Gloucester	Cheltenham	233	227	246	257	240	239
	Hereford	128	163	179	154	189	181
	Worcester	190	217	247	232	230	218
Principal Registry of the Family Division	Croydon	1,186	1,169	1,266	1,383	827	1,424
	Edmonton	789	764	866	949	563	968
	Harlow	263	344	423	509	399	605
	Kingston	1,142	1,131	1,311	1,454	932	1,505
	Luton	507	592	712	814	588	871
	Southend	560	641	691	787	673	830
	Woolwich	580	583	702	770	520	742

Probate Offices

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the probate offices which the court service plans to close; and if he will make a statement. [13495]

Mr. Evans: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. David Lidington, dated 5 February 1996

PROPOSED CLOSURE OF PROBATE OFFICES

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question about Probate Offices.

The recommendation that a number of Probate Offices should close follows a review of the locations in England and Wales where a probate service is provided to personal applicants. A public consultation about these proposals began on 23 January 1996 and will conclude on 1 March 1996. Full consideration will be given to all comments received during the public consultation before the Lord Chancellor decides whether to proceed with these proposals.

The Probate Offices recommended for closure are:

Coventry
Kidderminister
Wolverhampton
Lichfield
Crewe
Stafford
Chichester
Chatham
Folkestone
Bath
Penzance
Newton Abbott
Colchester
Lowestoft
King's Lynn
Bradford
Harrogate
Huddersfield

Wakefield
Grimsby
Chesterfield
Doncaster
St. Helens
Southport
Wallasey
Barrow
Oldham
Stockport
Warrington
Wigan
Derby
Mansfield
Morpeth
Sunderland
Nelson
Workington
Scarborough
Darlington
Blackpool
Durham
Aylesbury
Bedford
Kettering
Cheltenham
Worcester
Basingstoke
Dorchester
Salisbury
Southampton
Bridgend
Newport
Pontypridd
Rhyl
Aberystwyth
Haverfordwest

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has for probate registries and probate offices to open to the public on Saturdays. [13496]

Mr. Evans: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. David Lidington, dated 5 February 1996:

PLANS FOR PROBATE REGISTRIES AND PROBATE OFFICES TO OPEN ON SATURDAYS

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question about probate registries and offices.

There are no plans to open any Court Service offices, including Probate Registries and Probate Offices, to the public on Saturdays.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Access to Work

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many of those successfully applying for access to work over the past year were employed when applying; and how many were unemployed. [13135]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. David Blunkett, dated 5 February 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the numbers of employed and unemployed people successfully applying for Access to Work.

During the period January to December 1995 there were 9,393 new Access to Work beneficiaries. Of these 7,566 were employed and 1,827 were unemployed. For these purposes we count as "unemployed" those who did not have a job when they applied for Access to Work, and newly employed people who had gained that employment with help from Access to Work.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of access to work funding was given to those who *(a)* were employed when the applied for assistance and *(b)* were previously unemployed. [13134]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. David Blunkett, dated 5 February 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the proportion of Access to Work funding given to those who were *(a)* employed and *(b)* unemployed when they applied for assistance.

The Employment Service does not collect information about the proportion of funding given to employed and unemployed applicants. However, during the period January to December 1995, 81 per cent. of new Access to work beneficiaries were employed and 19 per cent. were unemployed. For these purposes we count as "unemployed" those who did not have a job when they applied for Access to Work, and newly employed people who had gained that employment with help from Access to Work.

I hope this is helpful.

Workstart

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what evaluation studies were carried out by her Department into the success of the workstart pilots; and if she will place copies in the Library. [13408]

Mr. Forth: I plan to publish the evaluation report on the current pilots, located in the west midlands and the north-west, at the end of this year. The evaluation reports of the initial pilots were published on 12 December 1994 and copies are available from the Library.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will update the estimates given in the Department of Employment press release of 6 April 1995 on *(a)* the effect on public revenues of the workstart pilots and *(b)* the estimated numbers who will benefit from the scheme in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97, (iii) 1997–98 and (iv) 1998–99. [13410]

Mr. Forth: The two workstart pilots which began in April 1995 will continue to help long-term unemployed people into jobs until the end of March 1996. By then, it is estimated that those pilots will have helped some 800 people at an estimated final cost of £1.02 million.

Jobfinder Grant Scheme

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will update the estimates given by the Department of Employment press release of 29 November 1994 on *(a)* the effect on public revenues of the jobfinder grant scheme and pilots and *(b)* the estimated numbers who will benefit from the scheme in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97, (iii) 1997–98 and (iv) 1998–99. [13407]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Chris Smith, dated 5 February 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question which seeks an update on the estimated effect on public revenues and the number of people who will benefit from the Jobfinder's Grant in each of the following years 1995–96, 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99.

The table below sets out the expenditure and number of opportunities for this programme.

	[1]1995–96	[2]1996–97	[2]1997–98	[2]1998–99
Expenditure £ million	3.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
Opportunities	13,000	25,000	25,000	25,000

[1] Estimated outturn.
[2] Plan.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what evaluation studies were carried out by her Department into the success rate of the jobfinder grant pilots; and if she will place copies in the Library. [13406]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fodgen to Mr. Chris Smith, dated 5 February 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the Jobfinder Grant pilots.

The following evaluation study has been carried out into the success of the Jobfinder Grant pilots:

Evaluation of the Jobfinders' Grant
Demonstration Pilot Project
by Joanne Moore, Peter Dickinson
The Research Partnership
September 1995

This report will be lodged in the House of Commons Library. It is currently available from the Research and Evaluation Division, Employment Service, Rockingham House, 123, West Street, Sheffield.

I hope this is helpful.

Jobmatch Scheme

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment is she will update the estimates given in the Department of Employment press release of 29 March 1995 on *(a)* the effect on public revenues of the jobmatch pilots and *(b)* the estimated numbers who will benefit from the scheme, giving figures for (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97, (iii) 1997–98 and (iv) 1998–99. [13405]

Mr. Forth: The jobmatch programme started in April 1995 and is a three-year pilot. The total budget for 1995–96 is £5 million, and will benefit an estimated 3,000 people. The programme budget in 1996–97 will be £4.359 million, and for 1997–98, £4.354 million. In each of these years, jobmatch should continue to benefit an estimated 3,000 people.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what evaluation studies were carried out by her Department into the success of the jobmatch pilots; and if she will place copies in the Library. [13404]

Mr. Forth: "A Qualitative Study of Jobmatch", which sought to provide early feedback on the progress and operation of the pilots has been carried out. Copies of this report will be placed in the Library in March. Further evaluation of jobmatch is currently being conducted.

Class Sizes (Greater Manchester)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children in primary schools in the Greater Manchester area were educated in class sizes of 40 and above in 1994–95; and what proportion this figure represents of all primary children educated in classes of this size in the United Kingdom. [13165]

Mr. Robin Squire: In January 1995, 1,595 pupils were being taught in single-teacher classes of 40 or more pupils in maintained primary schools in Greater Manchester area. This represented 9 per cent. of pupils in single-teacher classes of 40 or more in maintained primary schools in England.

Information about schools in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales, for Scotland and for Northern Ireland respectively.

Student Debts

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the average debt of students on completion of their studies in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993, *(c)* 1994 and *(d)* 1995. [13166]

Mr. Forth: Information on total student indebtedness is not collected centrally. I have asked the chief executive of the Student Loans Company to write to the hon. Member providing the approximate average debt to the Student Loans Company of borrowers entering repayment status on 1 April of each of the years listed.

Work Trials

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what evaluation studies were carried out by her Department into the success of work trials; and if she will place copies in the Library. [13413]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Chris Smith, dated 5 February 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the evaluation of work trials.

The following evaluation reports have been published by the Employment Service into the success of work trials:

CEI Consultants Ltd (1990), Evaluation of Work Trials, volumes 1 and 2, July, CEI.

DVL Smith Business Research (1993), Evaluation of Work Trials—Employer Survey, November, DVL Smith.

These reports are available from the House of Commons Library.

I hope this is helpful.

Job Interview Guarantee Scheme

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what evaluation studies were carried out by her Department into the success of the job interview guarantee scheme; and if she will place copies in the Library. [13411]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Chris Smith, dated 5 February 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the Evaluation of the Job Interview Guarantee Scheme.

The following evaluation studies have been carried out into the success of the Job Interview Guarantee Scheme:

Job Interview Guarantee Scheme:
Analysis of monitoring information
By Kay Pattinson
RED Report No. 58 November 1990

Job Interview Guarantee Evaluation:
Report on a survey of JIG participants
British Market Research Bureau Limited
May 1992

Job Interview Guarantee Evaluation:
Report on survey of JIG employers
British Market Research Bureau Limited
May 1992

These reports are available from the House of Commons Library.

I hope this is helpful.

Work Scheme Costs

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will update the estimates given in Cm. 2805 on *(a)* the effect on public revenues of work trials and *(b)* the estimated numbers who will benefit from the scheme in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97, (iii) 1997–98 and (iv) 1998–99. [13414]

(2) if she will update the estimates given in Cm. 2805 on *(a)* the effect on public revenues of the job interview guarantee scheme and *(b)* the estimated numbers who will benefit from the scheme in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97, (iii) 1997–98 and (iv) 1998–99. [13412]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Chris Smith, dated 5 February 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about updating the estimates given in Cm. 2805 (the Departmental Report) for the effect on public revenues and the estimated number of people who will benefit from Work Trials and Job Interview Guarantee (JIG) Scheme in each of the following years 1995–96, 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99.

The tables below set out both expenditure and the number of opportunities for each of the programmes in a similar format to the 1995 Departmental Report to allow comparisons to be made.

Work Trials

	[1]1995–96	[2]1996–97	[2]1997–98	[2]1998–99
Expenditure £ million[3]	1.8	2.4	2.4	2.4
Opportunities	30,000	40,000	40,000	40,000

[1] Estimated outturn.
[2] Plan.
[3] This expenditure only represents the programme expenditure for Work Trials which is used for paying participants travel and other expenses. Work Trials is also supported by administrative running costs for ES people.

Job Interview Guarantee Scheme

	[1]1995–96	[2]1996–97	[2]1997–98	[2]1998–99
Expenditure (£ million)[3]	0.9	1.3	1.3	1.3
Opportunities	300,000	300,000	300,000	300,000

[1] Estimated outturn.
[2] Plan.
[3] Programme expenditure is used to fund Job Preparation Courses. Running Cost expenditure for the other elements of JIG are not included in this table.

Education SSA (Buckinghamshire)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the education standing spending assessment for Buckinghamshire county council for each year since 1990–91; and if she will make a statement. [13350]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is set out in the list. The figures are in cash terms and therefore unadjusted for local education authorities' loss of responsibility for certain functions, notably most further education 1993–94, and for the reform of inter-authority recoupment in 1995–96.

1990–91 £206.348 million

1991–92 £241.804 million

1992–93 £259.972 million

1993–94 £242.179 million

1994–95 £249.922 million

1995–96 £244.491 million

1996–97 £252.855 million

Universities

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many vice-chancellors have been sent a formal invitation to meet her to discuss *(a)* their institutions and *(b)* the university sector. [13347]

Mr. Forth: It is not generally my right hon. Friend's practice to send individual vice-chancellors formal invitations to meet her. She does meet them and visit universities from time to time at their invitation and she has regular contact with their representative bodies. She wrote to the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals on 1 February inviting them to meet her shortly.

Older Workers

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when the evaluation of the Government's policy to promote the skills of the over-45's in the workplace will *(a)* be completed and *(b)* be published. [13261]

Mr. Forth: The evaluation of the Department's campaign for older workers, which includes a survey of employers' policies, practices and attitudes towards older workers, will be *(a)* completed by the end of April and *(b)* published during September 1996.

Information Technology (Consultation)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has for consulting the teaching profession before the moratorium on curriculum changes ends on the effect which the increasing use of information technology, both in school and in the home, will have on the national curriculum and assessment methods. [13558]

Mr. Robin Squire: None. There was widespread consultation about technology during Sir Ron Dearing's review of the national curriculum. One outcome was that information technology became a national curriculum subject on its own; this was generally welcomed. The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority has a programme for monitoring the implementation of the revised national curriculum subject orders, including IT, during the moratorium period. It will consider, in the light of evidence received as part of this monitoring programme, whether there is a need for further review when the moratorium expires.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the number of staff employed by his Department or related agencies in each of the travel-to-work areas of Carmarthen, South Pembrokeshire, Haverfordwest, Fishguard and Cardigan on *(a)* 31 March 1979, *(b)* 31 March 1990, *(c)* 31 March 1992, *(d)* 31 March 1995, *(e)* the latest available figure and *(f)* the estimate for 31 March 1997. [13294]

Mr. Robin Squire: The only part of the Department with staff in these areas is the Employment Service, for which this information is not available either in the form requested or before 1994. Full-time equivalent ES staff numbers of 14 April 1995, the nearest available to 31 March 1995, and for 12 January 1996, are shown in the following table. The estimate for March 1997 is not yet available.

	12 January 1996	*14 April 1995*
Cardigan[1]	17	19
Carmarthen	20	19
Haverfordwest[2]	27	29
Milford Haven	17	17
Pembroke Dock[3]	27	28
Total	108	112

[1] Cardigan includes Llandysul ES jobcentre.

[2] Haverfordwest includes Fishguard ES jobcentre.

[3] Pembroke Dock includes Tenby ES jobcentre.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Concessionary Fares Scheme

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are currently issued with travel passes under the concessionary fares scheme in Northern Ireland, broken down by category. [12695]

Mr. Moss: This information is not currently available, but has been collected since July 1995 in respect of new passes issued.

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had, and with which bodies, over the possibility of making travel passes issued under the concessionary fares scheme in Northern Ireland valid in the Republic of Ireland and vice versa. [12696]

Mr. Moss: There have been no discussions on this issue at ministerial level. However, officials were involved in discussions with the Department of Social Welfare in the Republic of Ireland about the establishment of the Republic's free cross-border travel scheme for senior citizens, which came into effect on 1 July 1995. That scheme entitles concessionary pass holders in either Northern Ireland or the Republic to travel free on a journey from any point within one jurisdiction to any point within the other.

Fishing Industry (Portavogie)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the impact of the weather conditions in the past two months on the fishing industry in Portavogie; what proposals he has for severe weather compensation for the fishing fleet; and if he will make a statement. [12515]

Mr. Ancram: In November and December the total value of fish landed in Portavogie was lower than in recent past years, which is partly due to the reductions of vessels based at Portavogie of which 30 have been decommissioned since the UK introduced decommissioning schemes in 1993. However, the total value of landings in 1995 is only marginally less than that

in 1993 and is in keeping with an overall general decline in the value of landings at Portavogie. There are no plans to give severe weather compensation. The vagaries of the weather is one of the several factors which fishermen have to take into account in the evaluation of their operations on a longer-term basis.

Arms Decommissioning

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what have been the costs of the Mitchell decommissioning body; what public money the Government paid towards those costs; and what arrangements have been made with the Eire Government for sharing those costs and in what proportions. [12823]

Sir John Wheeler: The cost of providing office accommodation, equipment and furnishings in Belfast and Dublin for the international body on decommissioning is being met by the British and Irish Governments separately; all other costs are being met jointly and equally by the two Governments. It is not yet possible to give details of the costs; but as soon as they are available I shall write to the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Cultural Traditions Group

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will require the Cultural Traditions Group to include the word "Fowkgates" in its logo. [12824]

Mr. Ancram: No. I am aware that the Cultural Traditions Group is keen to give greater expression to the Scottish strand in Northern Ireland's cultural heritage and I will give it every encouragement in this respect.

Firearm Certificates

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of the adult male population in Northern Ireland holds a firearm certificate. [12845]

Sir John Wheeler: At 30 November 1995, 88,092 persons held firearm certificates issued under the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. A male/female breakdown of this figure could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, it represents approximately 15.65 per cent. of the adult population[1] of Northern Ireland.

[1] Based on the General Register Office, 1994 mid-year estimate.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures he has taken, or proposes to take, to reduce the number of people who hold a firearm certificate. [12847]

Sir John Wheeler: The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has not taken, nor is he proposing to take at this time, any measures specifically aimed at reducing the number of people who would otherwise be permitted to hold firearm certificates. The current review of the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 aims to ensure that the law strikes the right balance between individual and public safety and the maintenance of order, and reasonable expectations of those who wish to use firearms in a responsible and legitimate manner.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many holders of firearm certificates have used their weapons in incidents which led to their facing criminal charges in the past five years. [12848]

Sir John Wheeler: This information is not available in the form requested and to obtain it would incur disproportionate cost. However, the Chief Constable has advised that the number of incidents in which licensed firearm holders have used their own guns in the commission of a crime, within the past five years, is negligible.

Planning (Donaghadee)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what factors led to the woodlands known as "The Walks" at Moat street, Donaghadee being white zoned; and if he will review that decision. [12826]

Mr. Moss: The woodlands, which are within the development limits of Donaghadee, are not zoned for a specific use but are referred to as "white land" in the North Down and Ards area plan 1984 to 1995. The Department proposes to commence preparation of a new plan for the Ards borough council area later this year, which will involve the review of existing land use zonings, development limits and planning policies.

Employment

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the change in the number of people annually who will *(a)* not get action for community employment in North Down and *(b)* not obtain alternative employment as a result of proposed budget reductions. [12829]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Mr. Robert McCartney, dated 5 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency to reply to your questions about the Action for Community Employment (ACE) programme.

(a) The Agency estimates that in North Down there will be 74 fewer places available for ACE workers in 1996/97 than were available in 1995/96;

(b) This is impossible to judge precisely. However, the performance of the Northern Ireland economy provides good cause for optimism. Unemployment is at its lowest level for 14 years and employment at record levels. Job vacancies being notified by employers to the Training and Employment Agency's local offices are at record levels—currently standing at 7,500. The opportunities for jobseekers to find work are better now than they have been for some considerable time.

I hope that you find this reply useful. I will of course be pleased to provide further information if you would find it helpful.

Family Credit

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the average hourly wage earned by family heads in receipt of family credit in *(a)* Northern Ireland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Wales. [12545]

Mr. Moss: The average hourly wage earned by family heads in receipt of family credit in Northern Ireland, England and Scotland and Wales at 31 January 1995, the latest date for which comparable data are available, are shown in the table.

Average hourly wage earned by family heads in receipt of Family Credit[1]

	Average hourly wage (£)
Northern Ireland	3.22
England	3.63
Scotland	3.70
Wales	3.50

[1] Figures at 31 January 1995.

Child Support Agency

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the operation in Northern Ireland of the review procedure of the Child Support Agency. [12546]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Child Support Agency under its chief executive, Patrick Devlin. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from P. Devlin to Rev. William McCrea, dated 5 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your question about the operation in Northern Ireland of the review procedure of the Child Support Agency.

The procedures used by the Agency in reviewing child maintenance assessments are governed by the provisions of the Child Support (NI) Order 1991; the Child Support (Maintenance Assessment Procedure) Regulations (NI) 1992 and the Child Support (NI) Order 1995.

Where either parent is not satisfied with a decision of a Child Support Officer he or she may ask for it to be reviewed. The case is then reconsidered by a different Child Support Officer who may refuse to review the decision; or may review and confirm or review and revise the assessment.

If either party remains aggrieved by the decision of a Child Support Officer in respect of a review or a refusal to refuse an assessment, he or she may appeal to a Child Support Appeal Tribunal.

During the period 6 April 1995 to 18 January 1996 the Agency reviewed 2273 maintenance assessments. In the same period the Agency referred 78 appeals to the Independent Tribunal Service (ITS).

I hope you find this information useful.

Child Rearing Costs

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the current costs of bringing up children to *(a)* lone parents and *(b)* couples. [12547]

Mr. Moss: Where a lone parent is in employment there is a potentially greater need to pay for child care. Apart from this, there is no consistent evidence that the financial requirements of a lone-parent household in bringing up a child are different from those of a two-parent household.

Suicides

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many suicides there have been in the Province in each of the last 10 years. [12548]

Sir John Wheeler: The number of deaths registered as suicides in the Province in each of the last 10 years is set out in the list. Deaths are recorded according to date of registration and not by date of occurrence.

1985: 117

1986: 145

1987: 86

1988: 153

1989: 116

1990: 158

1991: 129

1992: 107

1993: 129

1994: 138

1995: 55 up to 30 June

Social Security (Fraud)

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many fraud investigation officers were employed in social security offices in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years; [12549]

(2) what priority has been given to tackling fraud in the social service reforms. [12550]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Alec Wylie. I have asked him to arrange for a response to be given.

Letter from Alec Wylie to Rev. William McCrea, dated 1 February 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your recent questions on fraud investigation officers and social security fraud.

You asked for information on the number of fraud investigation officers employed in social security offices in each of the last 10 years. I'm sorry that records are only available from the 1988/89 financial year and I have set these out in the attached table. I should explain that wile these officers cover social security office areas they are managed centrally by the Agency's Fraud and Prosecutions Unit in a regional office structure and not by SSO management.

You also wished to know the level of priority given to tackling fraud in social security benefits. I would wish to assure your that providing safeguards against fraud and abuse in the social security system has been and continues to be one of the Agency's top priorities. This stems from the main aims and objectives set out in the Agency's Framework Document and annual Business plans and through my responsibilities as an Accounting Officer. Each year the Agency is set targets for benefit savings from anti-fraud work and these have increased from £7.84m in 1991/92 to £14m for 1995/96. Despite the difficult security conditions in which our investigation officers have had to operate, the Agency has met all its fraud savings targets up to the end of 1994/95 and has saved some £44m in total.

Recently, responsibility for formulating the policy for social security fraud has been transferred from the Department to the Agency and at the beginning of January this year the Department issued a corporate statement on fraud to all its business areas. The statement contains a set of principles which include the duty to ensure that steps are taken to prevent, deter and detect fraud and, where appropriate, to prosecute offenders. The Agency is in the process of developing a new security strategy for social security benefits which will shift the focus of fraud work from detection and investigation to prevention of offences before they occur. An important element of the new anti-fraud strategy is the introduction of a benefit payment card which will provide a much more secure payment system as well as more efficient accounting arrangements.

Finally, the Social Security Agency will continue to review its operational procedures, savings targets and objectives to ensure that they meet our main aim that only the right amount of benefit is paid to the right person.

I hope this explains the position for you but I would be happy to provide you with any further information you may require.

Number of investigation officers employed on social security fraud

Year	*Number of investigators*
1988–89	41
1989–90	45
1990–91	73
1991–92	71
1992–93	74
1993–94	73
1994–95[1]	66
1995–96[1]	61

[1] The reduction in staff in 1994–95 and 1995–96 was due to problems the Agency had in filling vacancies.

School Curriculum

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the quality and diversity of the curriculum in school education. [12551]

Mr. Ancram: For pupils aged four to 16, the Northern Ireland curriculum provides a broad range of subjects offering high-quality programmes of study and ensuring a curriculum of appropriate breadth, balance and depth. The requirements for all compulsory subjects—apart from the statutory core syllabus for religious education, the content of which has not been reviewed—have recently been reduced to give teachers and pupils at all ages more flexibility to study subjects and topics in which they are interested beyond the requirements. The revised programmes will come into effect from September 1996, and I am confident that teachers will welcome them.

For pupils aged 16 to 19 in schools, there is no compulsory curriculum beyond religious education; each school with a sixth form offers a range of subjects according to its own strengths and students' needs. The Dearing review will be reporting within the next few months on ways to strengthen, consolidate and improve the national framework of qualifications for young people aged 16-plus which of course also applies in Northern Ireland.

Stormont Parliament Building

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress made in restoring the Chamber at Stormont and other parts of the Parliament building damaged or destroyed by fire. [12919]

Mr. Moss: The first priority, after the weatherproofing and salvage had been carried out, was to ensure that the Chamber was structurally sound. This was achieved by demolishing unstable masonry and repairing damaged roof structural steelwork. This was completed in October 1995. The condition of the structure continues to be monitored to establish when conditions have stabilised sufficiently to allow the commencement of the interior fit out of the Chamber. Work is well under way to restore those other areas of the building damaged by the fire and to refurbish the remainder of the building. The contract should be completed by spring 1997.

Suckled Calves (Prices)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the price paid for suckled calves in the main Northern Ireland markets in actual and in real terms over each of the last 25 years or for as long a period as is readily available to him. [13447]

Mr. Ancram: Estimates of prices paid for suckled calves in a sample of the main markets in Northern Ireland in each of the last 25 years are given in the table, in current prices and in real terms.

Suckled calf prices in Northern Ireland

£/head

Year	*Current prices*	*Prices in real terms using 1995 as the base year*
1971	47.34	347.55
1972	80.53	553.41
1973	78.51	493.61
1974	32.80	177.84
1975	72.17	314.78
1976	164.23	614.30
1977	165.54	534.61
1978	204.20	609.51
1979	176.74	465.27
1980	159.11	354.85
1981	227.41	453.29
1982	257.47	472.56
1983	258.60	453.51
1984	267.10	446.55
1985	230.88	363.87
1986	227.73	346.88
1987	298.87	437.21
1988	357.32	498.64
1989	330.27	427.11
1990	278.97	329.74
1991	263.82	294.46
1992	305.36	328.72
1993	329.91	349.73
1994	374.87	387.66
1995	426.14	426.14

Potatoes

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken to ensure that diseased potatoes from elsewhere in the European Community are not imported into Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [13448]

Mr. Ancram: Council directive 77/93/EEC, implemented in Northern Ireland by the Plant Health Order (Northern Ireland) 1993, sets out the plant health requirements which have to be met before potatoes can be moved into Northern Ireland.

Commission directive 93/17/EEC, implemented in Northern Ireland by the Seed Potatoes (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1994, provides a series of measures which set high-quality standards for seed potatoes being imported into Northern Ireland.

More recently, as a result of outbreaks of the potato disease brown rot in the Netherlands, the EU has laid down requirements to be met by the Dutch authorities to prevent the spread of the disease, Commission decision 95/506/EC. The Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland used enabling powers provided by this Commission decision to require the pre-notification of all Dutch potatoes being imported into Northern Ireland. Should any Dutch potatoes be imported they will be subject to detention, inspection and testing.

Mr. Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the tonnage of seed potatoes exported from Northern Ireland to *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* elsewhere from the (i) 1994 crop, (ii) 1995 crop, or his estimate of the 1995 crop, (iii) 1985 crop and (iv) the 1975 crop. [13449]

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

	Tonnage shipped to:	
Crop year	*Great Britain*	*Elsewhere*
1975	10,884	39,358
1985	7,453	42,348
1994	4,167	21,163
1995	[1]4,000	[1]20,000

[1] Estimated.

SCOTLAND

Positive about Disabled People Symbol

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for his Department and each of the agencies for which he is responsible if it uses the Employment Services's positive about disabled people symbol for *(a)* external recruitment and *(b)* internal recruitment and promotion. [11911]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: None of my departments or agencies currently use the Employment Services's positive about disabled people symbol. However, my Department and agencies are giving further consideration to becoming symbol users.

Scottish Grand Committee (Costs)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the cost to public funds to his Department of each meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee in the current Session, and what estimate he has made of the cost of each meeting which is due to take place; and if he will itemise the costs. [12016]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The cost of hiring venues, catering, security and use of equipment and so on, is borne by the House authorities. Scottish Office officials supporting Ministers in connection with Committee meetings do so as part of their normal duties and no additional staff costs are incurred.

Agriculture Department

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many full-time members of staff are currently employed by the Scottish Office Agriculture Department in Edinburgh; and at what grades are they employed. [12306]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The numbers and grades of staff employed on a full-time basis in the agricultural divisions of the Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department who are based in Edinburgh are shown in the table. The table reflects the position as at 1 January 1996.

Full-time staff employed in agricultural divisions of the Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department in Edinburgh

Position as at 1 January 1996

Grade	*Permanent*	*Casual*	*Total*
Professional and Technical Staff			
Grade 4: Chief Agricultural Officer	1	—	1
Grade 5: Deputy Chief Agricultural Officer	1	—	1
Grade 6: Assistant Chief Agricultural Officer	4	—	4
Grade 7: Surveyor	2	—	2
Principal Agricultural/Horticultural Officer	3	—	3
Senior Agricultural/Horticultural Officer	10	—	10
Higher Agricultural/Horticultural Officer	5	—	5
Higher Marketing Officer	2	—	2
Agricultural/Horticultural Officer	4	—	4
Marketing Officer	4	—	4
Food and Dairy Officer	2	—	2
Senior Professional and Technical Officer	2	—	2
Higher Professional and Technical Officer	1	—	1
Professional and Technical Officer	6	—	6
TG2—Tracer	2	—	2
Administrative Staff			
Grade 3: Under Secretary	1	—	1
Grade 5: Assistant Secretary	5	—	5
Grade 7: Principal	18	—	18
Senior Executive Officer	5	—	5
Higher Executive Officer	32	—	32
Executive Officer	37	—	37
Administrative Officer	51	—	51
Administrative Assistant	33	8	41
Personal Secretary	14	—	14
Typist	8	—	8
Industrial Staff	1	—	1
Totals	254	8	262

Parliamentary Electorates

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the electorates of the new parliamentary constituencies in Scotland as at 16 February 1995. [12730]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The electorates of the new parliamentary constituencies as at 16 February 1995 are not known, as the Parliamentary Constituencies (Scotland) Order 1995 was not made until 11 April 1995.

Information was collected as at 2 June 1995, however, for the purposes of the European Parliamentary constituencies review, as follows:

Parliamentary constituency	*Total electors 1995*
Aberdeen Central	56,278
Aberdeen North	54,869
Aberdeen South	61,296
Airdrie and Shotts	59,047
Angus	60,219
Argyll and Bute	49,981
Ayr	56,138
Banff and Buchan	59,781
Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross	41,801
Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley	66,967
Central Fife	58,680
Clydebank and Milngavie	52,245
Clydesdale	63,781
Coatbridge and Chryston	52,645
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	47,895
Cunninghame North	56,073
Cunninghame South	49,826
Dumbarton	57,569
Dumfries	63,149
Dundee East	58,569
Dundee West	57,340
Dunfermline East	51,481
Dunfermline West	53,255
East Kilbride	65,519
East Lothian	57,232
Eastwood	66,280
Edinburgh Central	62,072
Edinburgh East and Musselburgh	59,640
Edinburgh North and Leith	60,715
Edinburgh Pentlands	59,265
Edinburgh South	62,522
Edinburgh West	61,682
Falkirk East	56,993
Falkirk West	53,558
Galloway and Upper Nithsdale	53,440
Glasgow Anniesland	53,574
Glasgow Baillieston	51,158
Glasgow Cathcart	50,578
Glasgow Govan	50,339
Glasgow Kelvin	55,722
Glasgow Maryhill	53,193
Glasgow Pollok	50,729
Glasgow Rutherglen	51,782
Glasgow Shettleston	49,845
Glasgow Springburn	53,598
Gordon	58,998
Greenock and Inverclyde	50,300
Hamilton North and Bellshill	53,970
Hamilton South	47,146
Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber	64,755
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	62,610
Kirkcaldy	52,018
Linlithgow	53,674
Livingston	59,226
Midlothian	47,873
Moray	59,401
Motherwell and Wishaw	52,847
North-east Fife	58,390
North Tayside	61,166
Ochil	57,191
Orkney and Shetland	32,421
Paisley North	49,548
Paisley South	53,467
Perth	59,995
Ross, Skye and Inverness West	55,638
Roxburgh and Berwickshire	47,318
Stirling	52,588
Strathkelvin and Bearsden	63,495
Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale	51,085
West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine	58,248
West Renfrewshire	52,927
Western Isles	23,313

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to vet private health companies which tender for contracts to run NHS services under the Government's private finance initiative. [12611]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: All private sector organisations wishing to become involved in NHS schemes must, under European procurement legislation, pass through a prequalification stage under which their financial position, legal status and competence to carry out the task are explored. All companies which succeed in reaching tender stage of a project will have demonstrated their soundness in all these areas. It is the responsibility of NHS trusts and health boards to establish the suitability of prospective partners.

GP Fundholding

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been spent on the management allowances of general practitioner fundholding practices; and how much this represented for each GP fundholder practice in operation in each financial year since the introduction of GP fundholding for each health board area in Scotland. [12505]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Expenditure on management allowances for general practitioner fundholding practices in Scotland in the period 1990–91 to 1994–95 is set out in the table. Details of management allowances for individual GP fundholding practices are not held centrally.

GP fundholder management allowance

£000

Health board	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Argyll and Clyde	5	17	134	170	211
Ayrshire and Arran	—	—	77	132	133
Borders	—	—	26	55	71
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	—	33	92
Fife	—	—	36	85	125
Forth Valley	—	32	86	127	165
Grampian	—	85	539	1,006	1,310
Greater Glasgow	—	35	90	275	552
Highland	—	—	34	101	105

GP fundholder management allowance

£000

Health board	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Lanarkshire	—	—	178	418	535
Lothian	16	33	168	429	697
Orkney	—	—	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—	—	—
Tayside	4	50	186	283	337
Western Isles	—	—	—	—	—
Scotland	25	252	1,554	3,114	4,333

[1] Provisional.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what have been at the end of each financial year since the introduction of general practitioner fundholding for each health board area in Scotland the amounts retained by general practitioner fundholding practices. [12507]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information in the table sets out GP fundhoider savings which are retained by the health board on the fundholder's behalf to be used for the benefit of patients.

£000

Health board	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Argyll and Clyde	56	nil	55	214
Ayrshire and Arran	—	—	330	214
Borders	—	—	65	291
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	—	76
Fife	—	—	96	150
Forth Valley	—	—	23	101
Grampian	103	95	551	1,207
Greater Glasgow	—	13	185	888
Highland	—	—	87	—
Lanarkshire	—	—	458	1,360
Lothian	29	39	354	868
Orkney	—	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—	—
Tayside	—	12	278	363
Western Isles	—	—	—	—
Scotland	188	159	2,482	5,732

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial support is available to general practitioner fundholding practices from *(a)* Scottish health boards, *(b)* his Department and *(c)* the NHS Management Executive in addition to management allowances paid to general practitioner fundholding practices. [12509]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In addition to the management allowance, GP fundholders can receive reimbursement for the purchase of computer systems required for fundholding purposes. This provision allows for GP fundholders to receive 75 per cent. of the cost of computer hardware and 100 per cent. of the cost of the software.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the maximum level of the management allowances payable to general practitioner fundholding practices has been set at in each financial year since the introduction of fundholding; and what additional expenditure incurred by general practitioner fundholders the management allowances is supposed to cover. [12513]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table.

Year	*Maximum amount of management allowance £*
1990–91	16,000
1991–92	33,000
1992–93	34,500
1993–94	35,000
1994–95	35,000

From 1 April 1995:

Standard fundholding practices

	£
Fixed standard fundholding allowance (per fund)	27,258
List size allowance per patient	
for the first 0–6,999	1.88
then 7,000–10,999	1.61
11,000–14,999	1.52
15,000–20,999	1.17
21,000+	1.02
Site allowance (for each major branch surgery)	650
Standard fundholding group allowance (for each practice in excess of one in a single fund)	1,400

Primary care purchasing practices

	£
Fixed primary care purchasing allowance (per fund)	14,135
Site allowance (for each major branch surgery)	650
Standard primary care purchasing group allowance (for each practice in excess of one in a single fund)	1,250

Management expenses are defined in the National Health Service (Fund-Holding Practices) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1995 as:

(a) the cost of employing staff in connection with the management of the allotted sum;

(b) the cost of training members of the practice or their staff in connection with the management of the allotted sum;

(c) the cost of either—

(i) employing or engaging (as an assistant or deputy) a registered medical practitioner to provide general medical services to the patients of a member of the practice who is engaged in the management of the allotted sum, or

(ii) paying a member of the practice for his time in connection with the management of the allotted sum;

(d) the cost of acquiring office equipment (excluding computers) required for the purposes of the management of the allotted sum;

(e) the upkeep and running costs of office equipment required for the purposes of the management of the allotted sum, including computer hardware and software running costs;

(f) the cost of specialist advice required in connection with the management of the allotted sum; and

(g) the cost of minor internal modifications to any premises from which the members of the practice carry on their practice which are required to provide office accommodation for staff employed in connection with the management of the allotted sum.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been retained out of surplus in their budgets by each general practitioner fundholding practice in Scotland at the end of each financial year. [12508]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what responsibility health boards and the NHS Management Executive have in respect of monitoring the use made of general practitioner fundholding practices of any surpluses retained by their practices at the end of the financial year. [12510]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Under the National Health Service (Fundholding Practices) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1995, it is the responsibility of health boards to be satisfied that expenditure by GP fundholders on audited savings is for the benefit of the patients of the members of practice and represents value for money.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many general practitioner fundholding practices have been in operation, giving the number of patients covered by general practitioner fundholding practices; and what percentage this represented of the health board's total population for each financial year since the introduction of general practitioner fundholding for each health board area in Scotland. [12506]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table:

	1991–92			*1992–93*		
	Practices[1]	*Patients*[2]	*Percentage of all patients*[3]	*Total*[1]	*Patients*[2]	*Percentage of all patients*[3]
Argyll and Clyde	—	—	—	1	9,017	2.0
Ayrshire and Arran	—	—	—	—	—	—
Borders	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fife	—	—	—	—	—	—
Forth Valley	—	—	—	—	—	—
Grampian	6	65,656	12.5	6	66,355	12.5
Greater Glasgow	—	—	—	2	20,054	2.0
Highland	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lanarkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lothian	2	10,649	1.3	2	10,587	1.3
Orkney	—	—	—	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tayside	3	19,195	4.7	3	19,432	4.7
Western Isles	—	—	—	—	—	—

	1993–94			*1994–95*		
	Total[1]	*Patients*[2]	*Percentage of all patients*[3]	*Total*[1]	*Patients*[2]	*Percentage of all patients*[3]
Argyll and Clyde	5	36,508	8.2	5	35,996	8.2
Ayrshire and Arran	4	25,479	6.5	5	34,773	8.9
Borders	1	7,003	6.5	3	15,984	14.8
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	—	1	7,071	4.6
Fife	3	31,274	8.9	4	39,959	11.3
Forth Valley	2	12,390	4.3	4	31,392	10.8
Grampian	26	251,404	46.9	39	332,484	61.7
Greater Glasgow	6	39,208	3.9	13	90,096	9.0
Highland	3	12,218	5.8	7	29,084	13.7
Lanarkshire	9	93,685	16.1	16	174,059	29.8
Lothian	12	78,898	9.8	26	159,457	19.8
Orkney	—	—	—	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tayside	10	73,121	17.8	11	83,880	20.4
Western Isles	—	—	—	—	—	—

[1] GP practices which were 'live' fundholders for all or part of the financial year, ie excludes practices in the preparatory stage of fundholding. There were none in the year ended 31 March 1991.

[2] All patients on the lists of practices, as defined above, including those living outwith the health board area, as at 1 April immediately following the end of the financial year.

[3] Patients, as defined above, as a percentage of all patients of all principals contracted to the health board, as at 1 April immediately following the end of the financial year. Includes patients living outwith the health board area and excludes patients who reside in the health board area but are on the lists of principals contracted to other health boards.

Edzell Base

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what studies he has commissioned regarding the effects of closure of Edzell base on the local economy; and if he will make a statement; [13687]

(2) what forms of *(a)* financial and *(b)* other assistance from his Department will be available to address the effects of the closure of Edzell base; [13691]

(3) what additional finance he has provided to *(a)* Edzell base and *(b)* the local economy during the transition phase to closure; and if he will make a statement. [13686]

Mr. Kynoch: The Scottish Office has assisted in planning for the rundown through membership of the Ministry of Defence joint working group and the Edzell task force. In addition, the Scottish Office contributed to the costs of a consultancy study, assessing the likely impact of the closure, which has been commissioned on behalf of the task force. The need for additional finance from the Scottish Office or any other source to address the effects of the closure of the Edzell base can be assessed only once the consultancy report has been considered and proposals to tackle any problems have been developed. The task force will be considering the consultants' draft report shortly.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whom he has met to discuss the closure of the Edzell base; what alternative uses have been proposed for the base after its closure; and if he will make a statement. [13689]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has not been involved in any meetings specifically concerned with the closure of the RAF base at Edzell. However, he is represented by officials on the Ministry of Defence joint working group, which is considering issues related to the disposal of the base. In addition, a Scottish Office official chairs the Edzell task force, which is considering the need for measures to address the impact of the closure on the local economy. Several possible alternative uses for the base have been proposed by members of the public and bodies with an interest in the area. The task force provides an appropriate forum in which to consider these suggestions.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimates he has made of *(a)* the employment and *(b)* other economic effects arising from the closure of Edzell base. [13688]

Mr. Kynoch: When the closure was announced in July 1995, Scottish Office economists prepared a rough estimate, based on limited provisional information, of the likely impact of the closure on local employment and unemployment. This suggested a reduction in employment of about 400 and a likely increase of about 270 in registered unemployment in the Brechin and Montrose travel-to-work area. Consultants commissioned on behalf of the Edzell task force are currently preparing more refined estimates, based on the results of local surveys, and the preliminary indication is that the initial estimates overstate both the loss of jobs and the impact on unemployment.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has made to the United States authorities regarding the retention of infrastructure, buildings and other assets after the closure of the Edzell base. [13690]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has made no direct representations to the United States authorities regarding the retention of infrastructure, buildings and other assets after the closure of the RAF base at Edzell. However, my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces wrote to the United States ambassador in July 1995 on a range of issues, including the infrastructure to be retained at Edzell, relevant to minimising the impact of the closure. On behalf of my right hon. Friend, I also wrote to the ambassador in July expressing my support for the approach taken in the letter from my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. The response from the ambassador confirms my expectation that the United States authorities will adopt a flexible approach on these issues.

Scottish Office Media Monitoring

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *94*, if he will list those agencies or companies which submitted tenders for *(a)* the trial media monitoring service and *(b)* the long-term media monitoring service. [12740]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* Tenders have been invited for a press cuttings service. This service is the identification, selection and compilation of any articles in daily or Sunday newspapers on matters for which the Scottish Office is responsible. It is not possible to identify those press cuttings agencies which have either provided this service on a trial basis or submitted tenders, as this information is classed as restricted-commercial.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *94*, if he will list the independent press cuttings agencies which have been providing a trail media monitoring service to the Scottish Office since October 1995; and what has been the cost to date of such expenditure, including the tender process. [12739]

Mr. Forsyth *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* This information is classed as restricted-commercial.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *94*, to whom the companies and agencies engaged in media monitoring activities will be directly responsible on a daily basis; and if he will make a statement. [12771]

Mr. Forsyth *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* The company which wins the contract will, like the company at present providing the service on a trial basis, be responsible on a daily basis to the head of the secretariat in the information directorate of the Scottish Office.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *94*, on what dates he invited the tenders for the media monitoring service on *(a)* a trial and *(b)* long-term basis; and what form the invitations took. [12741]

Mr. Forsyth *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* Tenders for providing the press cuttings service for a period of three years—with the possibility of an extension to five years—were issued on 8 December 1995 and are in accordance with standard invitation to tender documents used by the Scottish Office.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *94*, what guidance was given to the press cuttings agencies which have been providing a media monitoring service since October 1995 to ensure that the media monitoring activities were limited to coverage of official Scottish Office activities. [12769]

Mr. Forsyth *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* I understand that the agencies which have provided a press cuttings service on a trial basis were asked in writing to select only articles on matters for which the Scottish Office is responsible.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *94*, if he will make a statement on the criteria to be used in selecting the companies or agencies, during the current tender exercise, to provide the media monitoring service to the Scottish Office. [12743]

Mr. Forsyth *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* The criteria will be the price, the delivery of the service, the quality of the service, experience of similar contracts and customer service.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *94*, if he will make a statement on the criteria which were used in selecting the press cutting agencies to provide the trial media monitoring service to the Scottish Office. [12742]

Mr. Forsyth *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* I understand that both companies approached the Scottish Office offering to provide a press cuttings service. It was decided to offer both companies a trial period to evaluate the quality of their service against that of the in-house one and to ensure value for money.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, columns *94*, what conventions or guidelines apply to outside agencies or companies engaged in media monitoring activities on behalf of the Scottish Office; and if he will make a statement. [12770]

Mr. Forsyth *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* When the contract is awarded, the successful company will provide the press cuttings service in accordance with the tender specification and will comply with Scottish Office terms and conditions of contract.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *94*, if he will publish the remit which was given to the press cuttings agencies which have been providing a media monitoring service since October 1995. [12744]

Mr. Forsyth *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* The companies have been asked to provide cuttings from daily and Sunday newspapers on articles on matters for which the Scottish Office is responsible and to deliver the cuttings to St. Andrew's house, Edinburgh or Dover house, London by specified times.

Highlands and Islands Veterinary Services Scheme

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the level of expenditure on the highlands and islands veterinary services scheme in 1994–95; and what is the estimated expenditure in 1995–96 and 1996–97. [12574]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 1 February 1996]:* In the financial year 1994–95 a total of £231,717 was expended on the Highlands and Islands veterinary services scheme. Planned provision in 1995–96 and 1996–97 is just under £300,000.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many practices have resigned from the highlands and islands veterinary services scheme since 1 January 1995. [12575]

Mr. Forsyth *[holding answer 1 February 1996]:* There have been no resignations from the highlands and islands veterinary services scheme since 1 January 1995.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when it was decided to fund the new Scottish ambulance communication system through a private finance initiative; when tenders were sought on this basis; when they were submitted to the Scottish Office; how many were received; and when he expects the result of this to be announced. [12958]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 1 February 1996]:* Recognising that private sector capabilities and skills might more effectively manage the installation and operation of modern telecommunications systems, early replacement of the remaining old ambulance radio system was included as a key element of a procurement exercise initiated in October 1994. This open procurement, conducted under European Community rules, resulted in keen competition. The proposals of three potential suppliers were evaluated and subjected to field trials in early 1995, following which detailed contract negotiations have continued with a single consortium. It was invited to submit a tender on 28 December 1995; this was submitted on 15 January 1996 and it is expected that a decision will be announced at the end of February.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the decision to equip the Scottish ambulance service with a new command and control communication system was announced; and when he expects it to be fully operational. [12957]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 1 February 1996]:* The decision to provide a new radio system, and associated command and control computer system for the Scottish ambulance service was announced to the Scottish Grand Committee on 7 March 1989, *Official Report*, column *4*. The radio system became operational in the Grampian region in December 1993 and was successfully linked to the command and control system in March 1994. Extension of the system to

Highland region and the western isles was completed by the end of 1994; present installation work in Tayside is nearing completion.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many incidents there have been in each year since 1988 when ambulances have been unable to be contacted in emergencies because they were out of contact with the control headquarters. [12959]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 1 February 1996]:* A comprehensive record of the numbers of such incidents is not maintained by the Scottish Ambulance Service NHS trust. Ambulance performance for emergency calls is measured in terms of the time taken for an ambulance to reach the patient. Performance against response time targets has improved consistently across Scotland including in those areas where the new radio communications system has still to be installed.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

15. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many prizes have been paid out by the national lottery. [11772]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To date, the total number of prizes that have been paid out by the national lottery is 315,155,491. Of this amount, 73,730,101 are from the on-line game, and 241,425,390 from instants.

16. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what recent representations she has received on the subject of the size of national lottery jackpots. [11773]

Mrs. Bottomley: I have received a number of representations on the size of national lottery jackpots.

17. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many art galleries have been awarded funds from the national lottery. [11774]

Mr. Sproat: Twenty art galleries throughout the United Kingdom have received grants from the national lottery totalling £58.6 million.

20. **Mr. Olner:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans her Department has to enable small, rural communities to apply for national lottery funds. [11777]

Mrs. Bottomley: The Government and the distributors want to see lottery funds going to communities throughout the UK. The proposals I announced on Monday 22 January, *Official Report*, columns *41–42*, would enable the national lottery to support projects giving greater access to the arts and sport, including in rural areas.

22. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many museums have been awarded funds from the national lottery. [11779]

Mr. Sproat: Forty-one museums throughout the United Kingdom have received grants from the national lottery totalling £38.5 million.

23. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what further discussions she expects to have with Camelot regarding the national lottery. [11780]

Mrs. Bottomley: I plan to visit Camelot's operations centre in Watford on 22 February.

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on recent developments in the national lottery. [11764]

Mr. Sproat: The changes which I propose to make are a natural development of the national lottery. I intend to make it possible for the distributors to support new initiatives particularly aimed at youth, talent, access and participation. I shall be encouraging the arts councils to make awards that help innovation—for example, to aspiring new playwrights or composers.

Sport (Young People)

18. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps she is taking to promote sport among young people. [11775]

Mr. Sproat: The Government published the sports policy statement "Sport: Raising the Game" last July which detailed plans for improving the opportunities for young people to take part in sport. The Department of National Heritage, the Department for Education and Employment and the Sports Council are now implementing the initiatives outlined in the document.

Arts (Business Sponsorship)

19. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps she is taking to promote business sponsorship of the arts. [11776]

Mr. Sproat: My Department actively encourages private sector support of the arts, particularly through its pairing scheme which to date has brought in more than £96 million in new money to the arts since it was introduced in 1984. My right hon. Friend recently announced changes to the scheme which will now be even more attractive for longer-term sponsors and initiatives that aim to attract new and younger audiences.

Millennium Projects

21. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many projects in Wales have been, or are being, considered by the Millennium Commission. [11778]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In the first round of the competition, the commission received 31 full applications for grant for millennium schemes in Wales including three umbrella projects that incorporate projects in Wales. Of these, 10 projects have been awarded grants totalling £35 million, one is under negotiation and one has been granted an extended deadline to submit further information for consideration in February.

In the second application round the commission has received 71 outline proposals from organisations in Wales. The closing date for full applications is 12 February.

24. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she expects to *(a)* receive a further edition of proposals from Imagination Group Ltd. concerning the forthcoming millennium exhibition in London, *(b)* make those proposals and any further decisions public and *(c)* publish the terms and conditions of any agreement or contract with that company. [11782]

Mrs. Bottomley: The Millennium Commission expects to receive in the next few days the result of additional work undertaken at its request by Imagination Group Ltd. so that the commission can make a decision regarding the two potential sites for the national exhibition, Greenwich and the national exhibition centre. It is hoped that an announcement will be made within the next few weeks. Terms and conditions of any contract would not be negotiated in detail until mid-1996.

The Millennium Commission makes all funding decisions entirely independently of Government, and conditions of contract relating to grants are a matter for the commission.

25. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans have been made to celebrate the millennium. [11783]

Mrs. Bottomley: Twenty per cent. of the net proceeds from the national lottery is distributed by the Millennium Commission to projects which celebrate the year 2000 and the beginning of the new millennium. To date, £336 million has been committed to 303 awards, including four landmark projects. The commission will soon announce details of the site for a year-long exhibition, to be held throughout the year 2000, as part of the UK-wide millennium festival.

Sport Broadcasts (Digital Technology)

26. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if her Department has examined the likely impact of digital technology on the broadcasting of sporting events; and if she will make a statement. [11784]

Mr. Sproat: More channels will mean that there will be more opportunities for the coverage of sport on television, giving viewers more choice.

Welsh National Opera House

27. **Mrs Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many representations she has received on the funding of the Welsh national opera house. [11785]

Mr. Sproat: The decision on this project was, of course, a matter for the Millennium Commission.

Olympic Games (Televising)

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what action she is taking to prevent a single broadcaster buying up exclusive rights to televise the Olympic games. [11762]

Mr. Sproat: The Government have said that, with the exception of listed sporting events including the Olympic games which cannot be shown live on pay-per-view, sporting bodies should in general be free to sell their broadcasting rights in the interests of their sport. We are strongly aware of the public debate on this issue and are keeping it under close review.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 6 February 1996

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. Steen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the level of public funds granted in the last five years in legal aid to *(a)* people living abroad and *(b)* foreigners living in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement as to what checks are made by the Legal Aid Board as to the verifying the accuracy of financial statements made by *(a)* and *(b)* and their financial position in their own countries. [13499]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Information on legal aid expenditure granted to people living abroad is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Information on the nationality of applicants for legal aid is not separately recorded. It is therefore not possible to say how much legal aid was paid in respect of foreign nationals.

Applications from people living abroad and foreigners living in the United Kingdom are subject to the same tests as applications from British citizens resident in England and Wales.

WALES

Community Hospital Project (Porthmadog)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on progress on the community hospital project, to be based at Porthmadog, since the meeting on 26 January between representatives of the Gwynedd community health trust and Welsh Office officials. [12884]

Mr. Hague: The trust is finalising its outline business case for the proposed hospital in light of comments made by my officials. Producing a satisfactory business case is a matter for the trust in discussion with its main purchasers.

Arts Projects

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many letters he has received *(a)* from organisations and individuals in Wales and *(b)* from hon. members representing Welsh constituencies concerning adverse effects following on the failure to secure millennium fund backing for the national opera house/Lyric theatre in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [12902]

Mr. Hague: The numbers of letters received in each category are:

(a) fewer than a dozen.

(b) two

Exel Logistics

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultation he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority concerning changes to the specification of the materials management contract awarded to Exel Logistics in the course of the market testing of the authority, subsequent to the publication of the specification and exclusively for Exel Logistics and without informing other bidders. [13794]

Mr. Hague: None. There have been no changes to the specification.

Cardiff Bay

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *624*, and the letter to the hon. Member by the chief executive of the Cardiff Bay development corporation of 29 January, under what statutory authority the Land Authority for Wales uses its compulsory purchase powers on behalf of another non-departmental public body. [13907]

Mr. Hague: The Land Authority for Wales compulsory purchase powers are provided subject to my authorisation, under section 104 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980.

Internet

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to eliminate his predecessor's name and text from the Welsh Office Internet entry; if he will update the contents in the Welsh Office Internet box; and if he will make a statement. [13982]

Mr. Hague: I have no immediate plans to remove the text of my Department's brochures from the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency's Government information service.

Medical Staff (Suspensions)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* consultants, *(b)* junior doctors and *(c)* general practitioners have been suspended on full pay in each of the last three years. [13983]

Mr. Hague: This information is not available centrally. However, with effect from 1 April 1995 employing authorities/trusts must notify the Department when a consultant has been suspended on full pay for six months. There have been no such notifications since then.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Saudi Arabia (Arms Deals)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of Andrew Green in respect of arms deals with Saudi Arabia during his terms of office there; and if he will make a statement. [13097]

Mr. Hanley: All senior Foreign Office officials are required to promote British exports. Mr. Green was engaged in such work during a posting to Riyadh as deputy head of mission from 1985 to 1988. I am confident

that he will continue to uphold British interests admirably during his forthcoming posting as our ambassador to Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of David Gore-Booth in respect of arms deals with Saudi Arabia during his term of office in that country; and if he will make a statement. [13075]

Mr. Hanley: All heads of mission are required to promote British exports. Ambassador Gore-Booth has done so extremely effectively.

Gedhun Chokyi Nyima

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to *(a)* the Chinese Government and *(b)* the Dalai Lama on his visit to London in July in respect of the whereabouts of Gedhun Chokyi Nyima. [13171]

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary raised a range of human rights issues with the Chinese during his visit to Peking in January. In particular, he expressed our concerns about reports of abuses in Tibet. The whereabouts of Gedhun Chokyi Nyima and his tutor was raised during the recent EU-China human rights dialogue which took place in Peking from 21 to 24 January. The Dalai Lama has also expressed his concerns.

Law of the Sea Convention

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the necessary procedures in respect of ratifying the agreement of, and acceding to, the United Nations law of the sea convention described in his answer of 20 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *236*, will be completed; and when it is Her Majesty's Government's intention to ratify and accede. [13572]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The legislation we intend to have in place before accession will be complete when the orders on privileges and immunities for the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea and the International Sea-Bed Authority, and the Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Pollution) Order 1995, have been made. These were approved by Parliament on 24 and 25 January. A number of other necessary procedures are outstanding. Once these are complete, we will be in position to accede to the UN convention on the law of the sea and to ratify the part XI implementation agreement.

Sudan

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions Her Majesty's Government have initiated with *(a)* the European Union, *(b)* the Commonwealth and *(c)* the United Nations regarding moves to achieve peace in Sudan. [13632]

Mr. Hanley: Moves to achieve peace in Sudan have centred on the initiative launched in 1994 by the Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Development, including Kenya and Uganda, which we have fully supported. The UK has also played an active part in stimulating a critical dialogue between the EU and Sudan. At the UN, the UK has been active in securing the passing of resolutions critical of Sudan's human rights record.

Kosovo

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what account is being taken of the situation in Kosovo in determining diplomatic recognition of Serbia by the European Union. [13444]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Member states of the European Union, in considering recognition of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, are taking full account of the situation in Kosovo. The development of good relations between the FRY and the EU and the FRY's position within the international community after recognition would depend, inter alia, on full respect for human rights, including minority rights, and the granting of a large degree of autonomy for Kosvo within the FRY.

International Criminal Court

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received on and what is his policy regarding the establishment of an international criminal court. [13631]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We have received a wide range of representations on this subject.

Following the ad hoc committee meetings to discuss this issue, a preparatory committee has been set up to undertake work in March and in August on a draft statute for an international criminal court. We have made it clear that our support for the establishment of a court is dependent, among other things, on its being a court of last resort for certain serious crimes where states are unable or unwilling to act and also on its being generally accepted by the international community.

The final decision as to whether to become party to the statute establishing such a court will only be taken once we know what the statute will look like.

Kashmir

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of current relations between India and Pakistan concerning Kashmir; and if he will make a statement. [12462]

Mr. Hanley: We remain concerned that the issue of Kashmir damages relations between India and Pakistan. We continue to urge both parties to show restraint and resolve their differences through peaceful negotiation. We are disappointed that the talks between India and Pakistan in Islamabad in January 1994 have yet to be continued.

Pakistan

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of the 24 January, *Official Report*, column *227*, how many people have been killed in Karachi and Sindh between 1 January and the latest available date. [12485]

Mr. Hanley: The official Pakistani police figures for killings in Sindh and Karachi from 1 January, up to and including 30 January, are:

Sindh (including Karachi): 178

Karachi: 86

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has made to the Government of Pakistan about child bonded labour in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [13368]

Mr. Hanley: We regularly express our concerns to the Government of Pakistan about child and bonded labour. We welcome recent steps they have taken to improve the situation, such as widening access to schooling and the establishment of rehabilitation centres. However, we recognise that much remains to be done.

China

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he raised the cases of *(a)* Wei Jingsheng, *(b)* Tong Yi and *(c)* Dai Xuezhong during his visit to China; and if he will make a statement. [13220]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 5 February 1996]:* My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary raised our concerns about a range of human rights issues during his recent visit to Peking. In particular, he mentioned the case of Mr. Wei Jingsheng and urged his early release. He also asked for a response to the list of individual cases handed over during Foreign Minister Qian's visit to the UK in October 1995; Tong Yi was included in that list.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Members' Pay

Mr. Tracy: To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has to review the arrangements for the pay of hon. Members and Ministers. [14237]

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has today written to Sir Michael Perry, the chairman of the Senior Salaries Review Body, in the following terms:

"As you know, changes in the structure of civil servants' pay mean that new arrangements need to be found for determining Members' pay from 1997 onwards.

I would be grateful if you and your colleagues on the Senior Salaries Review Body, under your standing terms of reference, undertake a comprehensive review, with the following remit.

'The Senior Salaries Review Body is asked to undertake a comprehensive review of the level and structure of Parliamentary pay and allowances and to make recommendations for the future. The review should cover each of the following terms:

(i) the salary of Members of the House of Commons;

(ii) the salaries of Ministers and other office-holders;

(iii) all allowances, comprising the Office Costs Allowance, Motor Mileage Allowance, Additional Cost Allowance and the London Supplement;

(iv) the severance pay and pension arrangements for MPs and Ministers;

(v) the rates of Peers' expenses allowances and the Secretarial Allowance for Ministers and other paid office-holders in the House of Lords; and

(iv) a linkage to provide the basis for annual uprating in future years without the need for Parliamentary decision.'

I realise that such a review will be time consuming and needs to be fitted in with your other work. Nonetheless, I would be grateful if it could be completed in time for you to make recommendations, if at all possible, by the end of June."

ENVIRONMENT

Land (Yorkshire and Humberside)

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much land in Leeds, and Yorkshire and Humberside is currently recorded on the land registers; and how much has been sold since the inception of the land registers *(a)* in total and *(b)* on his direction. [10423]

Sir Paul Beresford: Since October 1989 local authorities and certain other public bodies have been required to compile and maintain registers of unused and underused land in their ownership. Local authorities have been asked to submit annually to the Department aggregated information from their registers.

The latest complete information on land held by local authorities in Yorkshire and Humberside is for March 1994. Information on land sold between 1989 and 1994 is incomplete. No directions have been issued over this period.

	Land recorded on land register at 31 March 1994 Hectare	*Land sold between October 1989 and 31 March 1994 Hectare*
Leeds	241.1	250
Yorkshire and Humberside (including Leeds)	2,799.1	1,030.3

Gritting Lorries

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authority gritting lorries there were in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993, *(c)* 1994 and *(d)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [13168]

Sir Paul Beresford: This information is not held centrally.

Sewerage Pipes

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the sewerage undertakers which have decided to exclude plastic as an approved material for waste-water pipework; [13186]

(2) when he last met the representatives of *(a)* the pipe making industry, *(b)* the British Standards Institution and *(c)* the European Commission to discuss the specification for sewerage pipes. [13185]

Mr. Clappison: The specification for sewerage pipes is a matter for the sewerage undertakers.

Antarctic Ice Shelves

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what talks he has had with his EU counterparts regarding the disintegration of Antarctic ice shelves. [13271]

Mr. Clappison: British Antarctic Survey scientists, reporting recently in the scientific journal *Nature*, Vol. 379, about the disintegration of Antarctic ice shelves, were unable to determine whether this was a result of global climate change due to greenhouse gases or part of a long-term natural oscillation.

The Council of Environment Ministers at their last meeting in December noted that the recent findings of the intergovernmental panel on climate change concerning the threat of damage from climate change underline the necessity for urgent action at the widest possible level. If the disintegration of Antarctic ice shelves should prove to be due to greenhouse gas warming, the Council would need to consider what further action to take.

Water Abstraction (Conservation Areas)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he has given the National Rivers Authority on the review of extant abstraction licences which may affect sites designated as special protection areas under the birds directive or as candidate special areas of conservation under the habitats directive. [13666]

Mr. Clappison: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) on 23 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *198*.

Job Advertisements

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many jobs have been advertised in each grade in his Department during the last three months for which records are available; and how many people have applied for each such job. [13832]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department of the Environment, central, has advertised the following permanent administrative and specialist jobs during the last three months:

Type of Posts	*Number applied*
Senior planning officer x 2	62
Senior professional and technological officer x 3	97
Administrative officer, Hemel Hempstead x 1	26

My Department is currently advertising for two assistant librarians.

Water Companies (Profits)

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the formula used by the water industry regulator to determine how much profit is given as returns to shareholders. [13909]

Mr. Clappison: The price cap system of economic regulation of the water industry places a limit on prices, rather than controlling profits or dividends. The regulator monitors the dividends paid by the regulated businesses to their group companies. It is for the group companies to decide on the level of dividends paid to shareholders.

Wind Turbines

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what response he has made to the Countryside Commission's call of 15 January for a review of planning policy guidance 22 in relation to the location of wind turbines; [13702]

(2) what representations his Department has received about the proposed location of 16 wind turbines on Gunson Height in Furness, Cumbria. [13703]

Sir Paul Beresford: My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency has met and written to the chairman of the Countryside Commission explaining how the contents of PPG22 already deal with the environmental concerns raised by the commission in relation to wind turbines.

A planning application together with an environmental assessment for 16 wind turbines on Gunson Height has been made to South Lakeland district council, which is carrying out the usual consultations. So far as is known, no representations have been made direct to my Department at this stage.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list *(a)* the local authorities which will benefit from the area cost adjustment in 1996–97 and *(b)* the amount by which each such authority will benefit in that year. [13944]

Sir Paul Beresford: A table listing the contribution to SSAs from the area cost adjustment has been placed in the Library.

The contribution of the area cost adjustment is not the same as the amount an authority would gain or lose if there was not an area cost adjustment in the standard spending assessment system. If the area cost adjustment were removed, it would be necessary to revise the analyses on which the SSA formulae are based, and we would wish to consult the local authority associations on what would then be the most appropriate formulae.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the planned yield from council tax in England for the financial year from 1995–96 to 1998–99 based on the view of local authority behaviour taken in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97" expressed in *(a)* millions of pounds, *(b)* in pounds divided by the band D council tax base used for 1995–96 tax setting and *(c)* in pounds divided by the total number of chargeable dwellings in England in 1995–96; [13972]

(2) what is *(a)* the Treasury's estimate of the likely increase in the total yield of council tax in England in 1996–97, expressed in pound million and as a percentage based on the view of local authority behaviour taken in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97", *(b)* the detailed worked mathematical calculation that

informs that estimate, *(c)* the Treasury's estimate of the increase in aggregate budgets as adjusted for the purposes of 1996–97 capping, expressed in millions of pounds and as a percentage based on the view of local authority behaviour taken in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97" and *(d)* the planned increase in aggregate Government total external support for local authorities in England in 1996–97, compared to 1995–96 total external support adjusted for 1995–96 community care special transitional grant and further changes in local authority responsibilities, expressed in millions of pounds and as a percentage. [13973]

Mr. Gummer: The Government do not set plans for the yield of council tax, which depends upon decisions made by individual authorities. The figures in chapter 4 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report", HC 30, which relate to 1996–97 and preceding years only, show an estimate of the contribution of council tax, net of council tax benefit, to the total of general Government revenues.

The costs of council tax benefit fall largely to the Exchequer. In order to reduce the chance that local authorities' budgeting decisions will have an adverse effect on the public finances. Estimates of council tax growth are set on the pessimistic side.

The table shows the calculation of gross council tax yield for England consistent with chapter 4 of HC 30. The calculation takes account of estimates of the council tax base, the assumed average level of council taxes and the average council tax collection rate.

	1995–96	*1996–97*
Estimated council tax base before collection rate adjustment (million band D equivalents)	16.50	16.55
Assumed average band D council tax level, £	609	656
Percentage estimate of assumed collection rate	97.2	97.4
Estimated yield gross of council tax benefit, £ million	9,780	10,574
Estimated increase in gross yield £ million	—	794
Per cent.	—	8.1
Gross yield divided by 1995–96 tax setting tax base, £	—	659
Gross yield divided by 1995–96 chargeable dwellings, £	—	538

No separate estimate is made of the increase in aggregate budgeted local authority revenue expenditure in England.

Aggregate external finance has been increased by £549 million (1.6 per cent.) above the 1995–96 level, adjusted for community care special grant and other changes in local authority responsibilities.

Nuclear Electric plc

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new discharge authorisations will be required following the separation of Nuclear Electric plc from Nuclear Electric Ltd. from Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution; how many have been granted; and what is the timetable for the remainder. [13292]

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 2 February 1996]:* Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has received the following applications for new discharge authorisations submitted on behalf of the AGR and PWR Co. Ltd:

		Number of authorisations applied for		
Power station	*Type*	*Waste gases, mists and dusts*	*Liquid waste*	*Combustible wastes*
Dungeness B	AGR	1	1	0
Hartlepool	AGR	1	1	1
Heysham 1	AGR	1	1	1
Heysham 2	AGR	1	1	1
Hinkley Point B	AGR	1	1	1
Sizewell B	PWR	1	1	1

AGR=Advanced gas-cooled reactor.
PWR=Pressure water reactor.

None of the authorisations has so far been granted. HMIP aims to publish its decision on each of the applications early in March 1996. Before the decision is published, the applicant has the right to appeal to the Secretary of State for the Environment under section 26 of the Radioactive Substances Act 1993, or request a hearing from the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under section 28 of the Act, with respect to a refusal of an authorisation or any limitations and conditions imposed. In addition, such local authorities or other persons whom the Secretary of State and the Minister consider appropriate may be afforded a hearing. No firm timetable for publishing the decision can therefore be given.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Knives (Sheffield)

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many knives were handed in in *(a)* the Sheffield area and *(b)* the Hallam constituency during the recent knives amnesty; and if he will make a statement; [13072]

(2) how many offences were committed in the Sheffield area for each of the last three years involving knives; and if he will make a statement. [13073]

Mr. Maclean: The running of the recent knives amnesty was an operational responsibility for chief officers of police and the information was collected by police force areas. The number of knives and potentially dangerous weapons handed in in the Sheffield area was 225. The information requested on the numbers of offences involving knives is not collected centrally.

Reconvictions

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the percentage of offenders convicted of offences carrying a discretionary life sentence who are reconvicted of a second offence of similar seriousness; what is the average sentence imposed on those reconvicted of offences carrying a discretionary life sentence; what is the average time served by those reconvicted for (i) all categories of such offences, (ii) manslaughter, (iii) rape, (iv) robbery, (v) buggery,

(vi) assault causing grievious bodily harm, (vii) aggravated burglary, (viii) firearms offences carrying life sentence as a maximum penalty and (ix) other offences carrying a maximum life sentence. [12909]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not collected routinely. A sample of those convicted of indictable offences in five weeks in 1993–94 included 600 offenders convicted of sexual or violent offences carrying a discretionary life sentence, 198—33 per cent.—of whom had previous convictions for such offences. A total of 169 of the offenders with previous convictions for such offences were given a custodial sentence, five of whom were sentenced to life imprisonment. The table shows the average sentence imposed, excluding life sentences, by offence group. Information is not available on sentences actually served by the offenders included in the sample.

Offence	*Number sentenced to immediate custody on second or greater occasion*	*Average custodial sentence imposed (months)*
Manslaughter	5	45
Rape	8	81
Robbery	92	42
Buggery	4	75
Wounding with intent to do grievous bodily harm	31	49
Aggravated burglary	3	74
Firearms offences	1	48
Other offences	20	34
Total	164	46

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the average sentence served by *(a)* burglars and *(b)* drug dealers imprisoned for a third such sentence; [12911]

(2) what percentage of *(a)* burglars and *(b)* drug dealers receive a prison sentence on their third conviction for a similar offence. [12910]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not collected routinely. The results from a sample of those convicted of indictable offences in three weeks of 1993 are given in the table which shows the average sentence imposed. Information is not available on sentences actually served by the offenders included in the sample.

Sentencing of burglars and drug dealers[1] convicted for the third or greater time

Offence	*Number convicted on a third or greater occasion*	*Percentage sentenced to immediate custody*	*Average custodial sentence imposed (months)*
Burglary	1,135	43	11
Drug dealing[1]	8	75	30

[1] Based on drug trafficking offences monitored and reported in the Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Statistics of Drugs Seizures and Offenders dealt with, United Kingdom, 1994". These are offences of unlawful production of drugs other than cannabis, unlawful supply, possession with intent to supply unlawfully and unlawful import or export.

Police Authorities (Funding)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the *(a)* capital funding and *(b)* supplementary credit approvals awarded to police authorities for 1996–97. [12930]

Mr. Maclean: The information is listed in the table.

Police capital programme 1996–97

Police force	*Total funding £ million*	*Supplementary credit approval*
Avon and Somerset[1]	4.610	1.427
Bedfordshire	2.288	0.708
Cambridgeshire	1.233	0.298
Cheshire	1.885	0.584
City of London	0.825	0.255
Cleveland	1.451	0.449
Cumbria	1.147	0.315
Derbyshire	2.200	0.616
Devon and Cornwall	3.739	0.773
Dorset	1.305	0.404
Durham	1.706	0.528
Dyfed Powys	0.936	0.290
Essex	7.310	2.079
Gloucestershire	1.991	0.595
Greater Manchester	8.404	2.602
Gwent	1.334	0.367
Hampshire	5.707	1.530
Hertfordshire	2.697	0.835
Humberside	3.123	0.967
Kent[1]	8.006	2.495
Lancashire	3.331	1.031
Leicestershire	3.886	1.203
Lincolnshire	2.873	0.890
Merseyside[1]	6.812	1.981
Norfolk	2.515	0.773
Northamptonshire	1.718	0.532
Northumbria	8.499	2.620
North Wales	2.115	0.559
North Yorkshire[1]	2.780	0.926
Nottinghamshire	5.965	1.847
South Wales[1]	7.146	2.146
South Yorkshire	5.472	1.694
Staffordshire	3.505	0.815
Suffolk	1.195	0.337
Surrey	5.923	1.834
Sussex	7.345	2.252
Thames Valley	6.883	2.058
Warwickshire	1.022	0.311
West Mercia	3.993	1.070
West Midlands[1]	9.409	2.900
West Yorkshire	7.682	2.290
Wiltshire	1.464	0.417
Metropolitan Police	54.410	16.459
Grand total	217.790	65.060

[1] Includes allocation for Regional Crime Squads.

Prisons (Capital Expenditure)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what capital expenditure for the financial year 1996–97 for prisons in England and Wales will be dropped or revised as a result of the recent cost reductions; and what proportion this represents of total capital expenditure. [13278]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth, dated 6 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about what capital expenditure for the financial year 1996–97 for prisons in England and Wales will be dropped or revised as a result of the recent cost reductions; and what proportion this represents of total capital expenditure.

The provisional capital budget for 1996–97 was £204 million. The final settlement was £117 million, representing a fall of 43% from the provisional budget. The Prison Service is currently deciding which projects to start in 1996–97 within its capital allocation and which capital projects can be started under the Private Finance Initiative.

"Prevention of Illegal Working"

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library copies of all the submissions he has received as a result of his consultation exercise on his document "Prevention of Illegal Working". [13346]

Miss Widdecombe: I have made available to the House a list of those who have responded in writing to the consultation document and a summary of the main points made in those responses. It is for those who responded to decide whether to make their submissions public.

Police (Publicity Costs)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the cost to his Department of the communications directorate campaign to publicise successful police operations. [13272]

Mr. Howard: The Department has no specific campaign to publicise successful police operations. Examples of good police work are included in press releases, articles and speeches to demonstrate successes in the fight against crime. The minimal costs involved cannot be identified separately.

Keith Mann

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what considerations led to Keith Mann being given category A status. [13383]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 6 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about what considerations led to Keith Mann being given category A status.

Category A is applied to those prisoners whose escape would be highly dangerous to the public or the police or the security of the state no matter how unlikely that escape might be; and for whom the aim must be to make escape impossible.

Keith Mann was convicted of arson in June 1993. He escaped from prison custody while awaiting sentence and was unlawfully at large until his re-arrest in April 1994. On arrest he was found to be in possession of what was reported by police to be material which could be used for making explosives and incendiary devices. He was subsequently charged with a number of offences including attempted arson, incitement to commit arson and having explosive substance under suspicious circumstances.

In accordance with procedures laid down in the Prison Service Manual on Security, Keith Mann was, on his reception into prison custody, reported to Prison Service headquarters as a potential category A prisoner. Having regard to the nature and circumstances of the alleged offence, information received from the police and in the light of an assessment provided by a specialist police adviser, it was decided that Mr. Mann should be provisionally classified category A pending conviction and sentence.

On 19 December 1994 at the Central Criminal Court, Mr. Mann was sentenced to fourteen years imprisonment for damaging property, attempted incitement to commit arson, attempted incitement to commit criminal damage, attempted incitement to steal and having explosive substance under suspicious circumstances. A review of his security category was completed by the Prison Service Category A committee in September 1995. It was decided that Mr. Mann should remain a category A prisoner but this decision was further reviewed following the outcome of his appeal against sentence. It was subsequently decided that Mr. Mann's security category could be downgraded to category B.

Traffic Police (Training)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of state for the Home Department if he will list the number of staff employed by the police *(a)* full time and *(b)* as part of the other duties to train traffic police in *(a)* tachograph and *(b)* construction and use regulations relevant to heavy goods vehicles. [13276]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not held centrally.

Juvenile Crime (Seaham and Peterlee)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many juveniles were convicted of *(a)* theft and *(b)* burglary in the Seaham and Peterlee courts each year since 1991. [13199]

Mr. Maclean: Information regarding cases heard at individual court buildings within a petty sessional division is not collected centrally. Data from 1991 to 1994—latest available—are given for the Easington petty sessional division in the table.

Number of persons aged 10 to under 18 years convicted in the Easington Petty Sessional Division of indictable offences of theft and handling stolen goods and burglary, 1991–1994

Offence	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Theft and handling stolen goods	23	31	43	60
Burglary	36	28	39	58

Firearms (Durham)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many legally held firearms are held in the Peterlee sub-division of the Durham constabulary; of which type; and if he will list the figures for each of the last five years. [13229]

Mr. Maclean: Information received from the Durham constabulary indicates that a total of 1,495 firearms were covered by certificates in force on 31 January 1996 in the Peterlee sub-division—356 firearms, which includes rifles, pistols, revolvers, large magazine smooth bore guns and specially dangerous air weapons, and 1,139 shot guns.

Information for earlier years is not available apart from that contained in the answer given to the hon. Member's similar question on 21 January 1993, *Official Report*, column *332*.

Stalking

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the law on stalking. [13269]

Mr. Maclean: The Government have recently completed an examination of the anti-stalking laws passed in the United States, Australia and Canada and are currently considering whether workable and effective legislation to combat stalkers can be introduced in the United Kingdom.

Entry Clearance Applications

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many entry clearance applications have been delayed because papers have been lost in transit between posts abroad and the immigration service in each of the last three years. [13478]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not held and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Police (Ethnic Minorities)

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the total staff establishment from ethnic minorities for the police service in England and Wales by each grade or rank in *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1995; [13462]

(2) how many police officers in England and Wales were from an ethnic minority in *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1995. [13461]

Mr. Maclean: There were 1,306 police officers from an ethnic minority in England and Wales at the end of 1989. Records of the ranks held by these officers were not kept centrally. On 30 September 1995, there were 2,223 police officers from an ethnic minority in England and Wales, made up of 2,020 constables, 158 sergeants, 36 inspectors, eight chief inspectors and one superintendent.

Police Cautions (Burglary)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *708*, on how many occasions since the publication of Home Office circular 18/1994, the police have sought the opinion of the Crown Prosecution Service as to whether a prosecution should be brought or a caution given in a particular case; [13429]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *708*, on how many occasions each year the views of victims have been sought, in accordance with the guidance given at paragraph 7 of circular 18/1994, prior to or in contemplation of, the police issuing a caution to the perpetrator of an offence instead of initiating a prosecution. [13428]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not collected.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *708*, how many times a caution was administered in respect of a most serious offence triable only on indictment in each year since 1992. [13433]

Mr. Maclean: The information is given in the table.

Number of persons cautioned for indictable only (excluding triable either way) offences in the Metropolitan Police Area and England and Wales, 1992–1994.

Area	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Metropolitan Police	186	236	222
England and Wales	1,735	1,599	1,542

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *708*, what monitoring has been given to the correctness of issuing cautions for less grave offences, in accordance with paragraph 6 of circular 18/1994, since the publication of that circular; and if he will make a statement. [13430]

Mr. Maclean: There are no national arrangements for monitoring decisions to administer a caution, but in the course of examining forces' cautioning policy Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary looks, where appropriate, at sampled cases in order to determine whether the policy is being observed. Moreover, a number of forces have established monitoring arrangements on a local basis.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *708*, how many times cautions have been given for crimes of *(a)* attempted murder and *(b)* rape, since the publication of circular 18/1994. [13432]

Mr. Maclean: The information is given in the table.

Number of persons cautioned for (a) attempted murder and (b) rape following the publication of the Home Office Circular 18/1994[1] in England and Wales 1994

Offence	*1994 January–March*	*1994 April–December*	*Total 1994*
Attempted murder	—	1	1
Rape	9	10	19
Man having unlawful intercourse with a woman who is a defective	2	3	5
Substantive rape	7	6	13
Attempted rape	—	1	1

[1] The Home Office Circular 18/1994 'The Cautioning of Offenders' was issued on 15 March 1994. Cautioning data held centrally only identify the month of the caution, not the date.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *708*, (1) what action has been taken since the publication of Home Office circular 18/1994 to reduce the inconsistency between police forces about circumstances in which they consider it appropriate to administer a caution, that is referred to at paragraph 4 of that circular; [13424]

(2) what action has been taken since the publication of Home Office circular 18/1994 to minimise the differing

perceptions between police forces as to the boundary between *(a)* informal warnings and formal cautions and *(b)* formal cautions and prosecutions; and if he will make a statement. [13427]

Mr. Maclean: Improving consistency between police forces in their disposal of cases was one of the main purposes of the circular. In March 1995, the Association of Chief Police Officers issued guidelines as to the weight which it was suggested should be attached to a range of offences. The guidance has been adopted by a substantial number of forces. It is too early to determine how far it has helped to improve consistency of decision making.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *708*, to what extent all cautions are accurately recorded in accordance with paragraph 11 of Home Office circular 18/1994. [13426]

Mr. Maclean: Up to 1 November 1995 records of caution were generally kept only by the force that issued them. Since that date, records of all cautions for reportable offences have been entered by forces on to the Phoenix database of the police national computer.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *708*, what monitoring of results in accordance with paragraph 4 of circular 18/1994 has been given to caution plus schemes. [13425]

Mr. Maclean: Most of the 24 forces which operate some form of caution plus scheme have established monitoring arrangements. The results are being evaluated as part of a research study which is now in progress.

Opposed Measures

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a list of all the measures approved by Parliament since 1979 on law and order, prison sentences, illegal drugs use and terrorism which were opposed *(a)* on Second or Third Reading, *(b)* in Committee and *(c)* on Report by Her Majesty's Opposition. [13120]

Mr. Howard: The list of measures which the Opposition have voted against on Second Reading includes:

the 1984 Police and Criminal Evidence Act, which strengthened police powers to stop and search suspects;

the 1986 Public Order Act, which gave the police more powers to deal with street disorder;

the 1988 Criminal Justice Act, which raised the maximum sentences for a number of serious crimes and gave the Attorney-General a right of appeal against over lenient sentences;

the 1991 Criminal Justice Act, which made parents more responsible for their children's actions and ensured that all prisoners serve at least half of their sentence in custody;

the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, which introduced new measures to deal with bogus asylum seekers; and

the annual renewal of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act every year since 1983.

A full list of all the measures approved by Parliament since 1979 on law and order at Second and Third Reading, in Committee or on Report by Her Majesty's Opposition is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The details of votes cast in parliamentary Divisions are a matter of public record, published in the *Official Report*.

Asylum Seekers

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information is exchanged between the Governments of all European Union states on asylum seekers; and what rules of confidentiality are applied. [13159]

Mr. Kirkhope: General information on asylum matters is exchanged through the Centre for Information, Reflection and Exchange on Asylum working group, established by the Council of the European Union. CIREA's discussions are normally confidential and do not include individual cases.

Discounts for Guilty Pleas

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy towards magistrates courts offering discounts for guilty pleas. [13118]

Mr. Maclean: In common with the Crown court, magistrates courts are required by section 48 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to take account, when passing sentence, of the timing and other circumstances of a plea of guilty; and, where a discount is given, to indicate the fact This provision gave statutory force to existing practice; the principle that an early plea of guilty should attract a discount on sentence has long been reflected in the sentencing guidelines issued by the Magistrates Association.

The Government hope that this provision will help to make defendants who are guilty aware of the advantages of pleading guilty at an early stage.

Under-age Alcohol Sales

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many licence holders have been prosecuted in the Peterlee and Seaham courts for selling alcoholic liquor to persons who were under age in each year since 1991. [13465]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 2 February 1996]:* Information regarding cases heard at individual court buildings within a petty sessional division is not collected centrally.

Data for the Easington petty sessional division show no prosecutions for the offence of a licence holder selling or supplying intoxicating liquor to persons under 18—section 1 of the Licensing Act 1964—from 1991 to 1994.

Secure Training Centres

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the contracts for the secure training centres are being resubmitted to his Department. [13753]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 5 January 1996]:* Tender proposals for the provision of the first two secure training centres at Gringley, Nottinghamshire and Cookham Wood, Kent, were received on 14 June 1995. Negotiations are continuing with the tenderers and as part of this process tenderers are being asked to revise certain aspects of their bids prior to the final assessment and selection of preferred bidders. Contracts will be signed as soon as possible once the terms of the contractual agreement have been finalised.

Visas (El Salvador)

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many visas were granted to representatives of the army and police of El Salvador to visit the United Kingdom in 1995. [13197]

Mr. Hanley: I have been asked to reply.

One.

TREASURY

Tax Allowances

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many workers *(a)* in total, *(b)* who are single, *(c)* who are married and *(d)* with children do not claim the full value of their tax allowances due to low earnings; and if he will estimate the value of the unclaimed allowances. [9936]

Mr. Jack: The table shows the number of individuals in 1995–96 with some earnings from employment or self-employment, including individuals under 18 and pensioners, who have no income tax liability. Some of the people in the table have gross earnings in excess of the basic tax allowance but have no tax liability due to tax reliefs and deductions which can be set against taxable income. About 1.8 million of the 2.9 million non-taxpaying married individuals have taxpaying spouses.

Individual's marital status	*Number millions*
Single with no children	0.8
Single with children	0.3
Married with no children	1.3
Married with children	1.6
Total	4.0

The estimates are based on information projected from the 1993 family expenditure survey and are therefore provisional.

It is not possible to provide a meaningful total of unused allowances without a specification of the method to be used for combining allowances available at the marginal tax rate and those available at 15 per cent.

Taxpayers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the number and percentage of *(a)* basic rate and *(b)* higher rate taxpayers in each English county for the most recent year for which figures are available. [12604]

Mr. Jack: The table provides estimates for 1993–94, the latest available year for which information can be provided below the United Kingdom level.

Basic and higher rate taxpayers, 1993–94

	Taxpayers liable at basic rate but not higher rate		*Taxpayers liable at higher rate*	
	Thousands	*Percentage*[1]	*Thousands*	*Percentage*[1]
Cleveland	155	72.5	11	5.1
Cumbria	146	67.9	13	5.9
Durham	176	73.1	11	4.4
Northumberland	100	70.6	8	5.6
Tyne and Wear	276	68.6	15	3.7
Humberside	265	73.3	17	4.6
North Yorkshire	258	74.5	25	7.2
South Yorkshire	359	73.5	20	4.2
West Yorkshire	614	72.4	41	4.8
Cheshire	302	70.7	36	8.3
Greater Manchester	751	71.3	45	4.3
Lancashire	413	73.0	25	4.5
Merseyside	356	71.4	22	4.3
Derbyshire	300	73.8	20	5.0
Leicestershire	309	74.8	17	4.0
Lincolnshire	208	70.6	15	5.0
Northamptonshire	203	78.9	18	7.0
Nottinghamshire	324	69.7	25	5.3
Hereford and Worcester	222	73.6	21	6.9
Shropshire	147	73.7	14	6.8
Staffordshire	311	77.1	22	5.5
Warwickshire	162	70.1	21	8.9
West Midlands	753	75.6	36	3.6
Cambridgeshire	225	73.4	25	8.2
Norfolk	236	74.1	16	4.9
Suffolk	197	70.6	23	8.1
Bedfordshire	198	78.0	18	7.2
Berkshire	270	69.8	49	12.7
Buckinghamshire	217	70.8	49	15.9
East Sussex	198	64.5	22	7.1
Essex	549	72.3	64	8.5
Greater London	2,140	72.2	341	11.5
Hampshire	531	71.3	57	7.7
Hertfordshire	333	70.0	54	11.4
Kent	489	72.6	51	7.6
Oxfordshire	212	72.5	31	10.5
Surrey	335	64.3	82	15.7
West Sussex	261	75.7	30	8.7
Isle of Wight	41	66.1	2	3.0
Avon	348	74.9	25	5.4
Cornwall	123	61.9	7	3.6
Devon	357	72.1	19	3.8
Dorset	218	73.1	15	5.0
Gloucestershire	183	70.8	21	8.0
Somerset	164	75.2	10	4.5
Wiltshire	224	75.0	21	7.0

[1]Of total numbers of taxpayers including those liable to only the lower rate of tax.

Employment Statistics (Lancashire)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the average *(a)* weekly earnings, *(b)* total hours and *(c)* average hourly pay rates for all part-time (i) male and (ii) female workers in each borough in Lancashire. [12840]

Mrs. Angela Knight: It is not possible to provide data for county boroughs.

Earnings for part-time women workers in Lancashire are shown in the table. There are not enough part-time men workers in the sample to provide a reliable estimate.

Part-time women workers on adult rates, pay not affected by absence: April 1995

Lancashire	
Average gross weekly earnings	£104.66
Hourly earnings excluding overtime	£5.08
Average total hours worked	19.6

Labour Statistics

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list on the basis of (i) the Government's unemployment benefit count and (ii) the labour force survey *(a)* the number in employment in the United Kingdom, *(b)* the number unemployed, *(c)* the number economically inactive and *(d)* the unemployment rates in the United Kingdom, for each quarter between 1979 and the end of 1984. [13076]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Estimates available from the labour force survey are shown in the table.

Economic activity in the United Kingdom

	In employment	*Unemployed*	*Economically inactive*	*Unemployment rates (percentage)*
Spring 1979	24,765,000	[2]1,490,000	15,924,000	5.7
Spring 1981	24,153,000	[2]2,583,000	16,274,000	9.7
Spring 1983	23,490,000	[2]2,957,000	17,065,000	11.2
Spring 1984	24,019,000	[3]3,030,000	16,794,000	11.2
Spring 1984[1]	—	[3]3,216,000	16,608,000	11.8

[1] Since 1984 the definitions used in the Labour Force Survey have been fully in line with international recommendations. Prior to 1984 the definition of unemployment was based on a one week job search period and from 1984 was based on a four week job search.

[2] The Labour Force definition of unemployment is based on a one-week job search period.

[3] The ILO (International Labour Organisation) definition of unemployment is based on a four week job search period.

Information from the monthly claimant unemployment count on levels and rates of unemployment in the United Kingdom can be obtained from the Nomis database accessed by the House of Commons Library.

Unemployment

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to produce figures on the number of individuals who have been out of work for more than six months, who do not appear in unemployment statistics. [13354]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Analyses of the number of people who have been out of work for more than six months are routinely available for both official measures of unemployment—the claimant count and the internationally standard ILO definition. Copies of the relevant publications can be obtained from the House of Commons Library.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchquer what projections his Department has made of the impact on employment of entry into economic and monetary union by Britain. [13440]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 25 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *312–13*.

Women's Earnings

Ms Jowell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the estimated number of women by region earning less than *(a)* £1.75 per hour, *(b)* £2 per hour, *(c)* £2.50 per hour and *(d)* £3 per hour in each year since 1990. [11492]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 31 January 1996]:* The information requested is set out in the table.

New earnings survey 1990–1995 (GB): Hourly earnings for all female employees on adult rates, pay not affected by absence

Region	*Percentage earning less than: £1.75*	*£2.00*	*£2.50*	*£3.00*
1990				
South-east	0.4	0.6	2.5	10.5
Greater London	0.2	0.4	1.5	4.6
Rest of South-east	0.5	0.7	3.4	15.3
East Anglia	1.0	1.6	7.0	22.7
South-west	0.7	1.0	5.7	22.9
West Midlands	0.8	1.3	6.8	25.1
East Midlands	0.7	1.1	6.7	25.0
Yorkshire and Humberside	0.6	1.1	6.5	25.0
North-west	0.8	1.3	6.1	22.7
North	0.7	1.4	8.3	30.4
Wales	0.9	1.6	8.6	27.0
Scotland	0.8	1.4	6.5	22.9
1991				
South-east	0.6	0.8	1.7	5.8
Greater London	0.3	0.4	1.0	2.7
Rest of South-east	0.8	1.1	2.3	8.3
East Anglia	0.6	1.2	3.5	12.0
South-west	0.7	1.3	3.3	13.5
West Midlands	0.9	1.3	3.9	14.3
East Midlands	0.6	1.0	3.5	15.0
Yorkshire and Humberside	0.8	1.3	3.4	14.5
North-west	0.6	0.9	3.0	11.5
North	1.0	1.4	4.9	18.2
Wales	0.8	1.4	4.5	15.6
Scotland	0.9	1.2	3.1	13.1
1992				
South-east	0.5	0.6	1.4	3.4
Greater London	0.3	0.4	0.9	2.0
Rest of South-east	0.6	0.8	1.8	4.6
East Anglia	0.4	0.5	1.5	6.0
South-west	0.6	0.8	2.0	7.6
West Midlands	0.6	0.9	2.4	9.3
East Midlands	0.4	0.7	2.2	8.7
Yorkshire and Humberside	0.6	0.7	2.3	9.1
North-west	0.3	0.5	2.2	7.4
North	0.4	0.7	2.7	10.4
Wales	0.7	0.9	2.7	9.4
Scotland	0.6	0.7	2.2	8.2
1993				
South-east	0.4	0.6	1.3	3.1
Greater London	0.3	0.4	0.9	1.8
Rest of South-east	0.5	0.8	1.6	4.1
East Anglia	1.0	1.3	2.5	6.6
South-west	0.5	0.6	1.7	5.4
West Midlands	0.4	0.6	1.7	6.0
East Midlands	0.6	0.8	2.2	7.1
Yorkshire and Humberside	0.5	0.7	1.7	5.8
North-west	0.4	0.5	1.7	5.5
North	0.3	0.5	2.3	7.0
Wales	0.2	0.4	1.7	6.0
Scotland	0.4	0.6	1.6	5.4
1994				
South-east	0.3	0.5	1.0	2.6
Greater London	0.1	0.3	0.6	1.6
Rest of South-east	0.4	0.6	1.2	3.3
East Anglia	0.6	0.7	1.3	5.2
South-west	0.8	1.0	1.6	4.7
West Midlands	0.6	0.8	1.8	5.5
East Midlands	0.6	0.9	1.8	5.6

New earnings survey 1990–1995 (GB): Hourly earnings for all female employees on adult rates, pay not affected by absence

Region	Percentage earning less than: £1.75	£2.00	£2.50	£3.00
Yorkshire and Humberside	0.6	0.8	1.6	4.8
North-west	0.3	0.5	1.6	4.8
North	0.5	0.6	1.8	5.8
Wales	1.4	1.5	2.3	6.7
Scotland	0.3	0.5	1.3	4.0
1995				
South-east	1.2	1.4	1.9	3.4
Greater London	0.9	1.0	1.4	2.3
Rest of South-east	1.4	1.7	2.4	4.3
East Anglia	1.6	2.0	3.1	6.0
South-west	0.8	1.2	2.2	5.3
West Midlands	1.6	1.9	2.9	5.6
East Midlands	1.0	1.3	2.0	5.3
Yorkshire and Humberside	1.5	1.7	2.7	5.7
North-west	1.2	1.5	2.4	5.1
North	1.2	1.5	2.6	6.3
Wales	1.8	2.1	3.1	6.2
Scotland	1.0	1.2	1.9	4.2

Annual Leave Entitlement (Women)

Ms Jowell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the estimated number of women employees by region with *(a)* no contractual annual leave entitlement and *(b)* fewer than 10 days' contractual annual leave per year in each year since 1979. [11490]

Mrs. Angela Knight: *[holding answer 31 January 1996]:* Information from the labour force survey is available between autumn 1992 and autumn 1994 and is shown in the table.

Paid holiday entitlement of female employees, by region

Thousands	No paid holiday entitlement Autumn 1992	Autumn 1993	Autumn 1994	More than zero, but less than 10 days paid holiday entitlement Autumn 1992	Autumn 1993	Autumn 1994
Great Britain	1,355	1,446	1,480	356	406	393
North	70	71	76	17	21	17
Yorkshire and Humberside	134	120	141	35	38	41
East Midlands	124	119	117	24	32	30
East Anglia	66	72	76	17	20	16
Greater London	105	120	142	32	34	32
Rest of South-east	294	325	329	84	86	92
South-west	141	152	142	34	36	40
West Midlands	121	149	131	28	33	36
North-west	130	138	142	33	44	33
Wales	66	75	75	22	25	19
Scotland	104	106	110	29	37	37

Departmental Staff

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the number of staff employed by his Department or related agencies in each of the travel-to-work areas of Carmarthen, south Pembrokeshire, Haverfordwest, Fishguard and Cardigan on *(a)* 31 March 1979, *(b)* 31 March 1990, *(c)* 31 March 1992, *(d)* 31 March 1995, *(e)* the latest available figure and *(f)* the estimate for 31 March 1997. [13295]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 5 February 1996]:* The Valuation Office agency has a local office in Carmarthen.

Figures for the number of staff are:

(a) 0
(b) 0
(c) 40
(d) 35
(e) 32
(f) 32

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the annual *(a)* interest payments and *(b)* capital repayments due on the outstanding loans held by Railtrack with the national loans fund on 1 January in each of the first three years after privatisation. [13755]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 5 February 1996]:* A decision on the capital structure will be taken in due course.

PRIME MINISTER

Parliamentary Private Secretaries

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Prime Minister, if he will publish the current list of parliamentary private secretaries and the Ministers to whom each is attached. [2516]

The Prime Minister: A comprehensive list is as follows:

Parliamentary private secretaries (as at 5 February 1996)

Minister	Secretary
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	
Minister for Agriculture	
Mr. D. Hogg	Mr. G. Clifton-Brown
Minister of State (Mr. T. Baldry)	Mr. N. Evans

Parliamentary private secretaries (as at 5 February 1996)

Minister	*Secretary*
Defence	
Secretary of State (Mr. M. Portillo)	Mr. D. Amess
Ministers of State (Mr. N. Soames and Mr. J. Arbuthnot)	Mr. N. Hawkins
Cabinet Office	
Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. M. Heseltine) and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. R. Freeman)	Mr. S. Coe
Education and Employment	
Secretary of State (Mrs. G. Shephard)	Mr. A. Coombs
Ministers of State (Mr. E. Forth and Lord Henley)	Mr. J. Whittingdale
Environment	
Secretary of State (Mr. J. Gummer)	Mr. D. French
Ministers of State (Mr. D. Curry, Lord Ferrers, Robert Jones)	Mr. M. Banks
Foreign Office	
Secretary of State (Mr. M. Rifkind)	Mr. H. Bellingham
Ministers of State (Mr. D. Davis, Mr. J. Hanley, Sir N. Bonsor)	Mr. P. Atkinson
Health	
Secretary of State (Mr. S. Dorrell)	Mr. D. Faber
Minister of State (Mr. G. Malone)	Mr. N. Waterson
Home Office	
Secretary of State (Mr. M. Howard)	Mr. D. Lidington
Ministers of State (Mr. D. Maclean, Baroness Blatch	Mr. D. Evennett
Minister of State (Miss A. Widdecombe)	Dr. R. Spink
Law Officers Department	
Attorney-General (Sir N. Lyell) and Solicitor-General (Sir D. Spencer)	Mr. E. Garnier
Minister without Portfolio (Mr. B. Mawhinney)	Mr. A. Duncan
National Heritage	
Secretary of State (Mrs. V. Bottomley)	Mr. P. Ainsworth
Minister of State (Mr. I. Sproat)	Mr. A. Robathan
Northern Ireland Office	
Secretary of State (Sir P. Mayhew)	Mr. J. Cran
Ministers of State (Sir J. Wheeler and Mr. M. Ancram)	Mr. H. Elletson
Prime Minister	Mr. J. Ward The Lord McColl
Privy Council Office	
Lord President and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. T. Newton)	Mr. J. Couchman
Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Lords (The Viscount Cranborne)	Mr. J. Sykes
Scottish Office	
Secretary of State (Mr. M. Forsyth)	The Hon. B. Jenkin
Social Security	
Secretary of State (Mr. P. Lilley)	Mr. P. Merchant
Ministers of State (Lord MacKay and Mr. A. Burt)	Mr. D. Congdon
Trade and Industry	
President of the Board (Mr. I. Lang)	Mr. S. Coombs
Minister of State (Mr. T. Eggar)	Mr. P. Luff
Ministers of State (Lord Fraser, Mr. A. Nelson)	Mr. T. Devlin
Transport	
Secretary of State (Sir G. Young)	Dr. C. Goodson-Wicks
Minister of State (Mr. J. Watts)	Mr. T. Dicks
Treasury	
Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. K. Clarke)	Mr. P. Butler
Chief Secretary (Mr. W. Waldergrave)	Mr. M. Robinson
Welsh Office	
Secretary of State (Mr. W. Hague)	Ms J. Lait

Nolan Committee

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will refer to the Nolan Committee the issue of the financial links of people who are being considered for appointment as ambassadors. [13476]

The Prime Minister: There is no need to do so. This is already covered by the terms of reference.

Local Authorities (Equity Portfolios)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 1 February *Official Report*, column 1121, on the purchase by local authorities of shares in privatised companies, what duties are owed by councils and their advisers to council tax payers which constrain their ability to build very unbalanced portfolios, with special reference excluding certain classes of equities. [13942]

The Prime Minister: Local authorities are free to invest their funds how they choose, subject to their general duty of prudence and other matters set out in professional guidance issued by the accounting bodies. Where authorities place their general funds in investments which are not approved under regulations, receipts from the disposal of those investments are treated as capital receipts. Local authorities' use of capital receipts is controlled through the capital finance system.

Libya (Sanctions)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *46*, what factors led to Her Majesty's Government being unable to estimate the cost to British trade of sanctions against Libya; and if he will make it his policy to implement structures to allow such estimates to be made in situations where sanctions are imposed in the future. [13222]

The Prime Minister: It is not possible to distinguish which elements in the overall fall in British exports to Libya over the past five years are attributable to the UN sanctions and which other factors such as the decline of the Libyan economy and lower oil prices.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 6 February. [12275]

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 6 February. [12277]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

HEALTH

Biomedical Research

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research his Department has carried out into characterisation of the enantioselective metabolism of metoprolol by CYP2D6 expressed in yeast; what results and conclusions have been arrived at to date; and if he will make a statement; [13071]

(2) what evaluation his Department has made of a template model of the CYP2D6 active site by experimental testing of compounds with a recombinant human CYP2D6; what results and conclusions have been arrived at; and if he will make a statement; [13069]

(3) what research his Department has carried out into the function of aspartic acid 301 in cytochrome P4502D6 catalyst; what results and conclusions have been arrived at to date; and if he will make a statement; [13068]

(4) what research his Department has carried out in respect of a differential regioselective metabolism of metoprolol by two human c.DNA-derived CYP2D6 proteins; what results and conclusions have been arrived at to date; and if he will make a statement. [13070]

Mr. Malone: None. Research commissioned within the Department's policy research programme is set out in "Centrally Commissioned Research Programme" and "Centrally Commissioned Research Programme: Commissions 1994–95", copies of which are available in the Library.

The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council. The MRC is an independent body receiving its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Personal Information

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the disclosure of personal medical records of individuals to outside agencies, with special reference to detective agencies; and if he will list the agencies to which such records have been disclosed in the last five years; [13416]

(2) was assessment he has made of the extent to which *(a)* general practitioners and *(b)* hospitals are selling personal medical records to private detective agencies; [13417]

(3) what representations he has received urging that measures be brought forward to prevent personal medical records being sold to private detective agencies; and if he will make a statement. [13401]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) on 5 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *196*. I have received correspondence from hon. Members and others about the confidentiality of health records and have answered a number of questions on this subject in the House. The information sought about disclosures to agencies outside the national health service is not available, but these are generally to agencies such as social services departments to enable joint care and treatment to be delivered effectively. The sale or disclosure of information to a detective agency, without a patient's consent, would be a breach of confidence and may be actionable under civil and criminal law.

Hypothermia

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths due to hypothermia were recorded in each of the health authority regions in each of the last five years. [13381]

Mr. Horam: The information is shown in the table.

Number of deaths with a mention of hypothermia (ICD[1] 991.6) by health region of usual residence, 1990–1994

Health region	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*[2]	*1994*[2]
Northern	17	29	16	37	27
Yorkshire	39	33	23	36	28
Trent	29	44	29	28	31
East Anglia	14	28	17	30	25
North-west Thames	28	37	28	30	24
North-east Thames	35	32	34	36	25
South-east Thames	29	41	24	33	20
South-west Thames	15	29	23	12	15
Wessex	21	25	19	14	16
Oxford	12	24	10	18	15
South Western	27	40	24	23	24
West Midlands	40	60	33	45	35
Mersey	11	15	10	10	9
North Western	21	25	21	28	28
Wales	22	34	18	32	22
Total	360	496	329	412	344

[1] International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision.
[2] Provisional.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total value of all schemes currently agreed in the NHS for the financial year 1995–96 under the private finance initiative; and what is the target for 1996–97. [13247]

Mr. Horam: So far, in the financial year 1995–96, £116 million-worth of schemes, each over £1 million capital value, have been approved under the private finance initiative by the national health service executive for the NHS in England. This brings the total value since the launch of the PFI to over £220 million in England. This excludes schemes whose individual capital value is

under £1 million, which are not recorded centrally. We do not impose a PFI target upon the NHS, but we expect that the sums will increase substantially in the coming year.

Secure Units

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of secure units available to accommodate juveniles who commit serious crimes, by region. [13176]

Mr. Bowis: The regional distribution of available secure units is shown in the table.

Social service inspectorate regions	*Units*
Northern	11
Central	[1]5
Southern	7
London	2
Total	25

[1] Includes Glenthorne centre in Birmingham run by the Youth Treatment Service.

In addition, two existing units in the Central region are temporarily closed for building work. Six new units are being constructed as part of the national development programme—two in Northern region, one in Central region, two in Southern region and one in Wales.

NHS (North Staffordshire)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the extent of underfunding in the NHS in North Staffordshire; and if he will make a statement. [13724]

Mr. Horam: North Staffordshire health authority's planned 1996–97 revenue allocation of £202.5 million represents a real terms increase of £2.5 million or 1.3 per cent., which was more than the national average.

This shows our commitment to bring North Staffordshire closer to its weighted capitation target of £206.2 million as soon as possible.

NHS Funding

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what replacement formula for resource allocation working party he uses to link NHS funding to local needs. [13723]

Mr. Horam: The RAWP formula was replaced by a new weighted capitation formula which uses forecast resident population figures which are then weighted for age, need and geographical variations in cost. The measure of need in the formula takes the form of two separate needs indices: one for general and acute services and the other for psychiatric services.

Cancer

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the United Kingdom have died of oral cancer since 1989; what are the figures for *(a)* lung, *(b)* breast and *(c)* prostate cancer; and how many of those who died were over the age of 60 years. [13788]

Mr. Horam: The number of deaths from oral, lung, breast and prostate cancer in the United Kingdom since 1989 are published in "World Health Statistics Annual", copies of which are available in the Library.

Opposed Measures

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a list of all the measures approved by Parliament since 1979 on patient care and choice and value for money which were opposed by Her Majesty's Opposition *(a)* on Second or Third Reading, *(b)* in Committee and *(c)* on Report; and if he will make a statement. [13121]

Mr. Horam: The list of measures which the Opposition have voted against includes:

The establishment of the general practitioner fundholding scheme—NHS and Community Care Act 1990

The establishment of national health service trusts—NHS and Community Act 1990

The abolition of regional health authorities—Health Authorities Act 1995

A full list is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Intensive Care

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many adult intensive care beds were available in each year from 1988–89 to 1990–91 in the *(a)* Northallerton, *(b)* York, *(c)* Scarborough, *(d)* Harrogate, *(e)* Bradford, *(f)* Airedale, *(g)* Calderdale, *(h)* Huddersfield, *(i)* Dewbury, *(j)* Leeds Western, *(k)* Leeds Eastern, *(l)* Wakefield, *(m)* Pontefract, *(n)* Barnsley, *(o)* Doncaster, *(p)* Rotherham and *(q)* Sheffield district health authorities. [13423]

Mr. Horam: The information is shown in the table:

Average daily number of available beds in intensive care wards other than for children or elderly patients

	1988–89	*1989–90*	*1990–91*
Northallerton	5	4	4
York	13	14	14
Scarborough	8	8	8
Harrogate	6	6	6
Bradford	5	5	5
Airedale	10	10	10
Calderdale	4	4	4
Huddersfield	12	13	15
Dewsbury	7	8	8
Leeds Western	20	17	16
Leeds Eastern	14	14	19
Wakefield	7	7	7
Pontefract	3	10	10
Barnsley	13	13	13
Doncaster	25	25	24
Rotherham	12	12	11
Sheffield	46	47	47

Source:
DH statistical return KH03.

Note:
Boundary and organisational changes may mean that the data are not strictly comparable with the latest bed availability information.

Emergency Care

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review arrangements for emergency care of patients outside hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [13595]

Mr. Horam: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked the chief medical officer to undertake a review of the organisation and delivery of emergency care services outside hospital, to ensure that care delivered to patients is seamless across the primary, secondary and community care sectors. My hon. Friend the Minister for Health informed chairmen of national health service trusts and health authorities in a letter dated 10 January, copies of the subsequent guidance (EL96)3) issued to chief executives of NHS trusts and health authorities are available in the Library.

Long-term Care Leaflet

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost of producing the leaflet on long-term care, "Moving into a Care Home". [13792]

Mr. Bowis: The cost of producing a leaflet on long-term care will depend on the arrangements for production, printing and distribution. These arrangements have yet to be finalised.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

School Places (Costs)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average cost of an *(a)* assisted place and *(b)* a place in the state secondary sector in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993, *(c)* 1994 and *(d)* 1995. [13164]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested is given in the following table for England. Data for the current year 1995–96 are not yet complete. The available figures are not directly comparable: those for maintained places exclude capital and certain other costs which may be subsumed in the assisted place figures.

	Average cost of assisted place[1]	*Average cost of maintained secondary place*[2]	
Year[3]	*£*	*age 11–15 £*	*post–16 £*
1992–93	3,405	2,724	4,358
1993–94	3,544	2,775	3,864
1994–95	3,688	2,741	3,761

[1] includes remission of annual tuition fees and incidental expenses e.g. uniform and travel grants and meals.
[2] figures represent the recurrent national average education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) per pupil.
[3] figures relate to academic years for assisted places and financial years for maintained secondary school places.

Youth Training Schemes (Greater Manchester)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many accidents and fatalities have occurred involving people placed on youth training schemes in the Greater Manchester area in the last five years. [13167]

Mr. Paice: A total of 445 accidents involving people placed on youth training programmes were reported within the area covered by the six Greater Manchester training and enterprise councils for the period 1 January 1991 to 31 January 1996. No fatalities involving people placed on youth training programmes were reported in this area during the same period.

School Selection Procedures

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of school selection procedures in individual (i) European Union and (ii) Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. [13187]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend is fully aware of the potential benefits of sharing information and good practice with our European Union and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development partners in this and other areas.

Comprehensive Schools (Streaming)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what number and percentage of comprehensive schools currently use *(a)* streaming *(b)* setting by subject and *(c)* mixed ability teaching. [13490]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information is not collected by the Department. However the Office for Standards in Education paper "Class Size and the Quality of Education" published in November 1995, a copy of which is in the Library, contains relevant information derived from the large sample of schools whose inspection data were available at that date. The report indicated that some 62 per cent. of secondary school classes were formed on the basis of ability—sets or streams. Further details are given in table 12 of the report.

Schools (Computers and Homework)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools have a computers and homework policy. [13557]

Mr. Robin Squire: Matters concerning homework are for individual schools to determine. The information is not collected centrally.

Manufacturing Apprentices (Greater Manchester)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total number of apprentices in manufacturing industry in the Greater Manchester area for each year since 1979. [13492]

Mr. Paice: The information is not available.

Overseas Students

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what annual income is generated by overseas students at United Kingdom universities. [13737]

Mr. Forth: The requested information is not held centrally. However, a recent report for the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals on the economic impact of international students in United Kingdom higher education estimated that in 1992–93 international students contributed at least £716 million to the UK economy.

Wages (Yorkshire)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will list the lowest wage advertised in Rotherham jobcentre for each month from June 1994 to the present time. [13573]

(2) what were *(a)* the lowest and *(b)* the highest wages advertised in each jobcentre in Yorkshire in each year since 1990. [13614]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Denis MacSnane, dated 5 February 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about wage rates advertised in Jobcentres in Rotherham and Yorkshire more widely.

The Employment Service does not keep a record of wage rates advertised by Jobcentres.

However, we did carry out research on vacancies in February 1994 which gave the following estimates for Great Britain, based on those vacancies for which wages and hours were given (ie not those open to an element of negotiation). These show that at that time 11% of vacancies were for hourly rates of pay of £2.50 or below, 47% for £2.51–£3.50, 27% for £3.51–£4.50, 8% for £4.51–£5.50 and 7% for over £5.50. Research on vacancy circulation is being carried out at present and is expected to be published by the summer. It is expected to give some further, limited information on wage rates of jobcentre vacancies.

I hope this is helpful.

University Students (Northumberland)

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students in the Northumberland education authority commenced university in the current academic year; and what the figure was five years ago. [13487]

Mr. Forth: Centrally held information on student numbers is not available at local education authority level. The following table shows the number of new mandatory awards and discretionary awards made to higher education students by Northumberland local education authority in the academic year 1988–89 and in 1993–94, the latest year for which data are available.

New higher education awards made by Northumberland local education authority

Academic year	*1988–89*	*1993–94*
Mandatory awards	960	1,927
Discretionary awards	113	34
All new higher education awards	1,073	1,961

Primary Education (Greater Manchester)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to increase her Department's expenditure on primary education programmes in the Greater Manchester area. [13493]

Mr. Robin Squire: Within the programme of grants for education support and training allocations to local education authorities in the Greater Manchester area focused on primary education will increase by £270,000 in 1996–97. Other GEST grants relevant to all schools, and the £43.7 million increase in education standard spending assessments, may also be used to increase spending on primary education if that is these authorities' priority.

EU Task Force on Multimedia

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are the names, countries and interests of the members of the EU task force on multimedia in education. [13556]

Mr. Robin Squire: This task force on educational software and multimedia is composed of officials from directorates general within the commission. I am writing to the hon. Member with the details.

Internet (Children's Access)

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what different approaches she has evaluated, with special reference to blocking software, for preventing children *(a)* at school and *(b)* at home from gaining access to unsuitable material via the Internet. [13924]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department has recently announced plans to evaluate Internet services for education, including software and other means of protecting children from undesirable materials. Similar evaluation is taking place under the Education Departments' super-highways initiative, which includes projects covering both schools and homes. The National Council for Educational Technology issued separate guidance for teachers and parents in February 1995.

School Places (Parents' Choice)

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent assessment she has made of the proportion of parents who gain a place at their first choice of school *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in Leeds. [13178]

Mrs. Gillan: This information is not collected centrally. Surveys commissioned by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities in 1992 and by *The Times* newspaper in 1993 suggested that some 90 per cent. of parents gained a place at their first choice school. No figures are available on the proportion of parents gaining a place at their first choice school in Leeds.

University Funding

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the change in funding to universities between 1989–90 and 1994–95 in constant prices. [13670]

Mr. Forth: Funding from the Department for Education and Employment for higher education, including maintenance grants to students, increased by more than 23 per cent. in real terms at 1993–94 prices during the period 1989–90 to 1994–95.

Jobcentres (Armed Forces Vacancies)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will make a statement concerning the use of jobcentres to advertise vacancies in the armed forces; [13366]

(2) what guidelines have been issued to the managers and staff of jobcentres concerning the proposal to advertise recruitment to the armed forces in jobcentres; if he will place a copy of these guidelines in the Library; and if he will make a statement; [13367]

(3) what training has been given to the staff of jobcentres in relation to the recruitment needs of the armed forces; and if he will make a statement. [13393]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 5 February 1996.

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about the use of Jobcentres in Armed Forces Recruitment.

Following the publication of the Defence Cost Study, "Front Line First" which proposed, amongst other things, the transfer of the initial stages of Forces recruitment to Jobcentres, the Ministry of Defence sought the help of the Employment Service in improving the cost-effectiveness of its recruitment into the three Services.

Six month recruiting trials were conducted in 1994/1995 in Liverpool, Edinburgh, Greenwich, Gloucester, Norwich and Swansea, of different ways in which Jobcentres could advise people about employment opportunities in the Forces and undertake the early stages of the recruitment process. The trials were completed successfully and although we will not be the sole source of recruits for the Forces, Jobcentres will in future play an important part.

Guidelines, outlining the new partnership arrangements were issued to my Jobcentres in November last year. These guidelines have recently been updated and are also in the process of being incorporated in our publication, the Guide to Job Broking, copies of which are available in the Library.

Briefing/training events were held for my Jobcentre people, in conjunction with Armed Forces Careers Office Project Managers', prior to the national implementation of these arrangements.

The Employment Service is keen to introduce jobseekers to all the options available to help them in their search for work and I believe that these new arrangements will both give unemployed people access to a wider range of opportunities and provide an effective service to the Armed Forces.

I hope this is helpful.

Pre-school Provision (Norfolk)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will estimate the capital cost of providing early years education for all four-year-olds in the county of Norfolk when *(a)* one quarter of such pupils attend nursery schools or classes as currently operated and half attend play groups under arrangements recognised by the Pre-School Education Alliance and *(b)* half attend each type of provision, together with the method of such funding and the type of accommodation to be provided. [13991]

Mr. Robin Squire: The capital costs of providing a nursery education place for all four-year-olds in Norfolk will depend on the circumstances of individual providers.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will estimate *(a)* the number of four-year-olds in the county of Norfolk whose parents or guardians will be eligible to apply for vouchers and *(b)* the number of full-time equivalent adults required to staff all providers at current statutory or recommended staff-pupil ratios for half-time pupils (i) when one quarter of the children are attending nursery schools or nursery classes as currently operated, and three quarters play groups operating under arrangements recognised by the Pre-School Education Alliance and (ii) when half attended each type of provision; and what is the annual salary bill in each case. [13996]

Mr. Squire: We estimate that the parents of some 9,300 four-year-olds in Norfolk will be eligible to apply for a nursery education voucher. The number of full-time equivalent adults required to staff all providers will depend on the number of providers and the size of the groups therin. The annual salary bill will depend on the salary costs of individual adults.

Nursery Education Vouchers

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if nursery education vouchers for parents of four-year-olds in receipt of income support, family credit or disability working allowance will be treated as income for the purpose of calculation of benefit. [11709]

Mr. Roger Evans: I have been asked to reply.

The answer is no.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list those regulations laid since 1990 which have required compliance cost assessments. [12863]

Mr. Freeman: Details of compliance cost assessments issued since November 1993 on regulations are set out in the following Command Papers:

1 November 1993 to 30 June 1994: Cm 2719

1 July 1994 to 31 December 1994: Cm 2881

1 January 1995 to 30 June 1995: Cm 3075

Further Command Papers listing compliance cost assessments issued in the preceding six months will be published at six-monthly intervals.

Details of compliance cost assessments issued prior to November 1993 are not centrally available.

SCOTLAND

Housing

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what restrictions are placed upon a tenant's right

to buy a local authority house if that house has been fitted with a community alarm system. [12220]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Under section 69 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, any public sector landlord may apply to the Secretary of State for consent to refuse to sell a dwelling to a tenant seeking to exercise the right to buy if the dwelling has features which make it suitable for occupation by persons of pensionable age. Each application is considered on its merits. The presence of a community alarm system is one of the factors which may be taken into account in deciding whether to grant consent.

Cruden Bay (Landfill)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list representations made in opposition to the date of the public inquiry into the planning application lodged by Caird Evered for a landfill at Cruden bay; [12250]

(2) what estimate he has made of the strength and basis of the opposition in Cruden bay to the date of the public inquiry into the planning application lodged by Caird Evered for a landfill at Cruden bay; [12249]

(3) if he will outline the history of the application being submitted by Caird Evered for a landfill at Cruden bay currently the subject of a public inquiry; and what amendments to the application have been accepted by the inquiry reporter; [12248]

(4) if he will make a statement on the interval between the lodging of a planning appeal for a landfill at Cruden bay and the holding of a public inquiry to consider this appeal. [12251]

Mr. Kynoch: The detailed information requested cannot immediately be supplied because the appeal papers are currently with the reporter.

I shall therefore write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the new unitary councils in Scotland currently negotiating with his Department over the introduction of the pilot scheme for nursery vouchers. [12516]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: In their public responses to the August 1995 consultation, the following councils expressed an interest in discussions with the Scottish Office on the possibility of involvement in the pilot:

North Ayrshire
South Ayrshire
South Lanarkshire
East Renfrewshire
Clackmannanshire
Borders
Highland
Western Isles
Argyll and Bute

Discussions have been held with these and other councils.

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much the nursery voucher scheme will cost to administer annually. [11557]

Mr. Robertson *[holding answer 14 January 1996]:* The cost of administering the nursery voucher initiative from August 1997 will depend on the cost of a contract to be let by competitive tender.

School Boards

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department has spent on overseeing the election of members of school boards in each academic year since their introduction. [12502]

Mr. Robertson: The Scottish Office does not incur expenditure directly in overseeing the election of members to school boards as, under the School Boards (Scotland) Act 1988, responsibility for school board elections is a matter for education authorities.

Water Leakage

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made over the last five years of leakage from the public water supply on a comparable basis to those figures that have been produced by the privatised water companies in England and Wales. [13421]

Mr. Kynoch: An assessment was made in the report, "An Assessment of Demands and Resources at 1994", which was published by the Scottish Office in July 1995. The figures contained in the report are broadly comparable to those published by the privatised water companies in England and Wales. Copies of the report are in the Library.

Housing Budget

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will reply to the hon. Member's letter of 27 December concerning next year's housing budget for Edinburgh. [13618]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: A reply has been sent to the hon. Member today.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been spent on external consultants in the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disggregated by (i) legal fees, (ii) publicity costs, (iii) accountancy fees and (iv) management consultancy fees. [10964]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Of the sectors in which private finance initiative projects have gone out to tender since the 1992 autumn statement, the only area in which the Scottish Office and its agencies have had direct responsibility for managing the tendering process is motorways and trunk roads. External consultancy costs were incurred in that field in relation to the advertisement, tendering and negotiation of PFI contracts only in 1995–96, and are shown in the table.

	Estimated cost £000
Legal	0
Publicity costs	30
Accountancy	330
Management consultancy	550
Total	910

Information on such costs to other public bodies in Scotland is not held centrally.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what is the aggregate total of vessel capacity units of the Anglo-Spanish vessels; [13136]

(2) what is the aggregate total of vessel capacity units of the 30 Anglo-Dutch vessels; [13137]

(3) what is the aggregate total of vessel capacity units of the United Kingdom registered and licensed fleet of over 10 fishing vessels. [13138]

Mr. Baldry: Following the introduction of the Merchant Shipping (Registration of Shipping) Regulations 1993, SI 1993 No. 3138, the Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen no longer collects details of shareholdings in UK companies owning British-registered fishing vessels. This means that it is not always possible to be sure exactly which vessels are owned by Spanish or Dutch interests. However, we estimate that at 31 December 1995 there were 103 vessels with a significant Spanish interest, accounting for around 55,000 VCUs and 39 vessels with a significant Dutch interest, accounting for some 31,000 VCUs. This compares with an aggregate total of approximately 657,000 VCUs for the UK over-10 m licensed fleet.

Munitions Dumping

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of environmental contamination of fishing grounds in the Irish sea arising from the leakage of toxic materials from wastes and surplus explosives dumped into the sea off the British coast. [13348]

Mr. Baldry: The Department carries out a routine monitoring programme to assess the level of contaminants in coastal waters, including those which are part of the Irish sea. The results are published annually and show that fish are safe to eat. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has carried out an investigation of the former Beaufort's dyke munitions dumping area. An interim report of the survey's findings was published on 8 January. Copies of the report are in the Library.

European Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on which occasions in the last three years officials have vetoed draft EC legislation on the grounds that a fiche d'impact had not been correctly prepared. [13638]

Mr. Boswell: The correct preparation of fiches d'impact is a very important part of our consideration of proposals for EC legislation. It is one of the factors taken into account when Minister consider the UK's negotiating position on a particular proposal.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he will be taking to ensure that the welfare of animals is given proper consideration at the forthcoming intergovernmental conference. [14221]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In 1992 we secured a declaration, attached to the Maastricht treaty, on the need to pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals when drafting and implementing Community legislation on the common agricultural policy, transport, the internal market and research. That was a significant advance; the time has now come to build on it. We will be asking our European partners to use the opportunity of the intergovernmental conference to add a protocol to the treaty of Rome placing a formal legal obligation on the Council of Ministers to give full regard to considerations of animal welfare in the exercise of its powers on agriculture, transport, research and the single market.

Integrated Administration and Control System

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the arrangements for IACS applications in England and Wales in 1996. [14222]

Mr. Baldry: The UK deadline for submitting IACS applications in 1996 will again be the latest possible date of 15 May.

The IACS explanatory booklets and form will be issued in March. We have consulted the industry closely on the documentation and this year, for the first time, we are introducing a separate booklet and form for livestock farmers who have no interest in the arable area payments scheme. Other changes to the format of the text have been made to make it as helpful and as easy to follow as possible, given the complex nature of the rules. As last year, farmers will be sent a full printout of their 1995 declaration of forage, arable and other land areas, which they must check to ensure the entries are still valid and enter any necessary changes. In addition, this year, they will receive a copy of this printout to keep for their records.

The latest date for applying for new field numbers so that they can be returned in time for farmers to lodge their 1996 IACS applications will be 1 March. Where changes to field boundaries occur after this date, applications for field numbers should accompany the IACS application form.

I strongly urge farmers to consider now whether they need new field numbers and not leave applying to the last minute.

Departmental Cash Limits

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes are proposed in his Department's cash limits for 1995–96. [14223]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Parliamentary approval is being sought for a supplementary estimate for class III, vote 3—Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food: operational expenditure—during which the cash limit will be increased by £6,385,000 from £402,545,000 to £408,930,000. Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit will then be reduced by £4,672,000 from £408,930,000 to £404,258,000. Within this provision, the cash limit will be reduced by £1,622,000 as a result of a transfer to vote 4, by a transfer of £2,600,000 to the Office of Science and Technology to cover the cost of redundancies arising among staff of the Biotechnology and Biological Science Research Council seconded to Horticulture Research International and by a transfer of £450,000 to the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland for the decommissioning of nephrops vessels.

In addition, vote 3—operational expenditure—will be reduced by a further £1,877,000 from £404,258,000 to £402,381,000. This is a result of a transfer to class III non-voted expenditure on supplementary credit approvals.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class III, vote 4—Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food: departmental research, advisory services and administration, executive agencies and certain other services—will be increased by £3,622,000 from £330,408,000 to £334,030,000. The £3,622,000 arises as a result of a transfer from vote 3 where it is reflected as reduced provision of £1,622,000 and by end-year flexibility of £2,000,000. The gross running costs limit for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will decrease by £11,954,000 from £334,694,000 to £322,740,000.

Conservation Schemes

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the annual expenditure figures and forecasts for the *(a)* countryside access scheme, *(b)* environmentally sensitive areas, *(c)* farm conservation grant scheme, *(d)* farm woodland premium scheme, *(e)* habitat scheme, *(f)* nitrate sensitive areas, *(g)* moorland scheme, *(h)* organic aid scheme and (i) countryside stewardship for each year between 1990–91 and 1997–98. [13636]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 5 February 1996]:* The information is as follows. Figures relate to England.

£ million

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*[1]1995–96*	*[2]1996–97*	*[2]1997–98*
FCGS[3]	22.90	29.60	28.50	28.00	21.00	11.00	4.00	3.00
Moorland scheme	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.35	0.23
Habitat scheme	—	—	—	—	—	0.95	2.00	3.00
Countryside access scheme	—	—	—	—	—	0.05	[4]2.50	[4]2.50
ESAs[5]	7.45	7.76	10.87	16.55	20.10	30.5	32.77	37.69
FWPS[6]	—	—	—	0.66	1.46	2.05	4.53	5.88
NSAs[7 8]	0.30	1.00	1.40	1.50	1.50	3.70	6.10	7.60
Organic aid scheme	—	—	—	—	0.03	0.27	0.46	0.96
Countryside stewardship	—	0.16	3.82	[4]8.30	10.80	[4]11.26	12.22	17.22

[1] 1995–96 figures are estimates.
[2] 1996–97 and 1997–98 figures are PES provisions.
[3] FCGS—farm and conservation grant scheme.
[4] Figures are subject to review.
[5] ESAs—environmentally sensitive areas.
[6] FWPS—farm woodland premium scheme.
[7] NSAs—nitrate sensitive areas.
[8] Includes expenditure under the pilot NSA scheme.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Al Yamamah II

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what financial guarantees were offered to Rolls-Royce and British Aerospace in connection with Al Yamamah II. [12984]

Mr. Oppenheim: On grounds of commercial confidentiality the Export Credits Guarantee Department does not publicise details of individual firms' business without their prior approval.

Overhead Power Lines

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will reject the application by Norweb to install overhead power lines between Claughton and Wennington; and if he will make a statement. [13563]

Mr. Page: No application has yet been received from Norweb. The position remains as given in my letter of 10 January to my hon. Friend.

Arms Trade

Mr. Simpson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the figures for the imports and exports of arms manufactures in the United Kingdom for each of the last 10 years. [13571]

Mr. Oppenheim: Information on United Kingdom trade in defence equipment is published in "UK Defence Statistics" which is available in the Library of the House.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in which parliamentary constituency the

companies receiving regional selective assistance offers of £200,000 or more since 1991–92 are located. [13900]

Mr. Oppenheim: From April 1991, the parliamentary constituencies were as follows:

Aldridge-Brownhills
Amber Valley
Barnsley Central
Barnsley East
Barnsley West and Penistone
Barrow and Furness
Bassetlaw
Batley and Spen
Beverley
Birkenhead
Birmingham Edgbaston
Birmingham Erdington
Birmingham Hodge Hill
Birmingham Ladywood
Birmingham Northfield
Birmingham Perry Barr
Birmingham Selly Oak
Birmingham Small Heath
Birmingham Sparkbrook
Birmingahm Yardley
Bishop Auckland
Blackburn
Blaydon
Blyth Valley
Bolsover
Bolton North-East
Bolton South-East
Bolton West
Bootle
Bradford North
Bradford West
Brent South
Brigg and Cleethorpes
Bromsgrove
Bury North
Bury South
Cannock and Burntwood
Chorley
City of Chester
City of Durham
Copeland
Corby
Coventry North-East
Coventry North-West
Coventry South-East
Dagenham
Denton and Reddish
Dewsbury
Doncaster Central
Doncaster North
Dover
Dudley East
Dudley West
Ealing Acton
Easington
East Lindsey
Eccles
Eddisbury
Edmonton
Ellesmere Port and Neston
Enfield North
Erith and Crayford
Falmouth and Cambourne
Faversham
Folkestone and Hythe
Gainsborough and Horncastle
Gateshead East
Gillingham
Glanford and Scunthorpe
Great Grimsby
Halton
Hartlepool
Harwich
Hemsworth
Hexham
Houghton and Washington
Hyndburn
Isle of Wight
Jarrow
Kingston upon Hull North
Kingston upon Hull West
Knowsley North
Knowsley South
Langbaurgh
Leigh
Littleborough and Saddleworth
Liverpool Broadgreen
Liverpool Garston
Liverpool Mossley Hill
Liverpool Riverside
Liverpool Walton
Ludlow
Makerfield
Manchester Central
Manchester Gorton
Mansfield
Middlesborough
Newcastle upon Tyne Central
Newcastle upon Tyne East
Newcastle upon Tyne North
Newham South
North Cornwall
North Devon
North Durham
North-East Cambridgeshire
North Thanet
North Warwickshire
North-West Durham

Nuneaton
Oldham Central and Royton
Oldham West
Penrith and the Border
Plymouth Devonport
Plymouth Drake
Plymouth Sutton
Pontefract and Castleford
Redcar
Rochdale
Rossendale and Darwen
Rother Valley
Rotherham
Rugby and Kenilworth
Salford East
Sedgefield
Sheffield Attercliffe
Sheffield Central
Sheffield Hallam
Sherwood
Shipley
South-East Cornwall
South-East Staffordshire
South Hams
South Shields
South Staffordshire
South Thanet
Southport
St. Helens North
St. Helens South
St. Ives
Stalybridge and Hyde
Stockton North
Stockton South
Stretford
Sunderland North
Sunderland South
Sutton Coldfield
The Wrekin
Torbay
Torridge and West Devon
Tottenham
Truro
Tyne Bridge
Tynemouth
Wallasey
Wallsend
Walsall North
Walsall South
Wansbeck
Warley East
Warley West
Warrington South
Wentworth
West Bromwich East
West Bromwich West
West Dorset
West Gloucestershire
West Lancashire
Wigan
Wirral South
Wirral West
Wolverhampton North-East
Wolverhampton South-East
Workington
Worsley
Wyre Forest

Office of Fair Trading

Mr. Congdon: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what changes will be made to the cash or running costs limits to the Office of Fair Trading. [14217]

Mr. Lang: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class IV, vote 8 will be increased by £345,000 from £19,450,000 to £19,795,000. The increase, which is required to meet additional costs of litigation, will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Congdon: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make an announcement on the level of ECGD cover. [14216]

Mr. Lang: I am pleased to announce that the amber zone budget, which controls the level of new commitments on markets where ECGD exposure is already concentrated or the risks are high, will be set at £3.8 billion in 1998–99.

Amber zone budget levels for 1996–97 and 1997–98—£3.2 billion and £3.5 billion respectively—were announced in the Chancellor's November 1994 Budget statement. This further confirmation of the rising trend serves to reaffirm this Government's continuing support for United Kingdom project exporters.

Departmental Cash and Running Cost Limits

Mr. Merchant: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what changes will be made to his Department's cash and running costs limits and external financing limits for 1995–96. [14219]

Mr. Lang: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class IV, vote 1—programmes and administration—will be increased by £44,811,000 from £1,233,341,000 to £1,278,152,000.

This net increase results from the provision of £52,900,000 in respect of UKAEA restructuring, £2,240,000 to reflect agreed changes to Nirex payments, £2,193,000 to meet the funding requirements of executive agencies, £227,000 to reflect the net effect of the transfer of gas and oil measurement branch to the Office of Gas Supply and transfers of £300,000 from Property Holdings in respect of the relocation of the Nottingham industrial tribunal office and £77,000 from the FCO in respect of international subscriptions. These increases are offset by reductions of £3,000,000 in energy programmes, £2,303,000 in support for business, £723,000 for laboratory privatisation and contractorisation, £1,100,000

in running costs and by the machinery of government transfer from the Department for Education and Employment—class V, vote 1—of running costs of £6 million which will be carried forward for use in 1996–97. The increase will be accounted for by a reduction in provision for the non-voted redundancy payments scheme of £19,900,000 with that remaining being charged to the reserve. As a result, there will be no increase to the planned total of public expenditure.

Within this total, the gross running cost limit for the Department of Trade and Industry is being reduced by £1,662,000 from £364,627,000 to £362,965,000. This change reflects machinery of government transfers from the former Employment Department—class V, vote 1—totalling £608,000 and the Cabinet Office: Office of Public Service—class XVIII, vote 1—totalling £1,044,000, plus an agreed reclassification of £20,000 capital expenditure as running costs. This has been offset by a transfer to class XVIII, vote 1 of £434,000, by a transfer of £1,800,000 to class IV, vote 10 in respect of the transfer of the gas and oil measurement branch to the Office of Gas Supply, and by a reduction of £1,100,000 to offset earlier claims on the reserve.

Additionally, subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XVIII, vote 2—science—will be increased by £2,600,000 from £1,292,852,000 to £1,295,452,000 to enable the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council to meet the cost of certain redundancies at Horticulture Research International. The increase is offset by a similar reduction in class III, vote 3 and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure. The opportunity of the supplementary estimate is also being taken to switch resources between certain subheads of the vote.

A reduction of £2,300,000 is made in the external financing limit of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority from minus £10,300,000 to minus £12,600,000 to support the increased provision for UKAEA restructuring.

The EFL of Nuclear Electric is reduced by £15,000,000 to £272,000,000 to £257,000,000 resulting from agreed changes to provision of Nirex payments. Nuclear Electric's EFL is currently under review and may be changed at a later date.

Office of Gas Supply

Mr. Merchant: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what changes will be made to the cash limits and running costs limits for the Office of Gas Supply. [14218]

Mr. Lang: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class IV vote 10, Office of Gas Supply, will be increased by £1,000 from £6,540,000 to £6,541,000 and the gross running costs limit by £1,975,000 from £6,190,000 to £8,165,000.

The increase is required to cover the transfer of the gas measurement branch from the Department of Trade and Industry and other running costs associated with the introduction of competition into the gas supply market. The increase in running costs is offset by fees received by GMB.

Holidays

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his most recent estimate of how many employees in the United Kingdom would receive an increase in their holiday entitlement in the event of the Government losing their case in the European Court against implementation of the European directive on working time. [13365]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The number would depend on the conditions of entitlement set by each member state. Many employees in Great Britain who are not entitled to the holiday periods specified in the directive are likely to have worked for their employers for less than a year.

Opposed Measures

Mr. David Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a list of measures approved by Parliament since 1979 on the deregulation of the market economy, competition and the economic base of the country which were opposed *(a)* at Second or Third Reading, *(b)* in Committee and *(c)* on Report by Her Majesty's Opposition; and if he will make a statement. [13123]

Mr. Lang: I regret to say that the information as requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a list of measures approved by Parliament since 1979 on industrial relations, labour market mobility and flexibility and the governance of trade unions which were opposed at *(a)* Second or Third Reading, *(b)* in Committee and *(c)* on Report by Her Majesty's Opposition; and if he will make a statement. [13119]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information as requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Nuclear Power

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the advantages of extending the availability of public information and the provision of public document retrieval rooms in the nuclear power electricity generation industry. [13391]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 2 February 1996]:* Considerable amounts of information about the nuclear power electricity generation industry are made available to the public, by the industry, by the Government in publications such as the 1995 White Paper "The Prospects for Nuclear Power in the UK" and by the industry's regulators. In addition, members of the public registering for the UK public offer will be sent information about British Energy, including an offer prospectus.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultations have taken place with the EC regarding the proposed privatisation of nuclear power generated electricity. [13390]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 2 February 1996]:* The Government advised the European Commission of their proposals for the nuclear power generation industry following the nuclear review and are keeping them informed of progress.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the advantages for the privatised part of the nuclear power generation industry to have a segregated fund to meet obligations on decommissioning and waste disposal; and what guidelines on the amounts of such funds he has issued. [13285]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 2 February 1996]:* The nuclear review, published in May last year, concluded that segregated funds are the best way of ensuring public confidence that the parts of Nuclear Electric and Scottish Nuclear to be privatised will meet their long-term decommissioning liabilities.

The Government have therefore indicated that as part of the privatisation a segregated fund will be established to cover British Energy's long-term decommissioning costs. A funding company will be established in Scotland, independent of the nuclear stations' owners. The funding company will be owned by an independent trust, and will enter into a contract with the privatised companies under which it will receive funds to meet long-term decommissioning costs. These arrangements will come into effect on privatisation. The final details, including the size of the fund, are under discussion.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the privatisation of British Nuclear Fuels plc; and what negotiations have taken place in respect of a segregated fund for the liabilities of the Magnox reactors following privatisation. [13287]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 2 February 1996]:* The White Paper "The Prospects for Nuclear Power in the UK", Cm 2860, made it clear that the Government would not want to rule out privatisation on BNFL as an aim in the longer term. It also concluded that, while a nuclear generator was publicly owned, there was no practical benefit from a segregated fund to meet nuclear liabilities. Magnox reactors will remain in the public sector after privatisation.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations his Department has received alleging that privatisation of nuclear power generation will impact adversely on safety standards. [13288]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 2 February 1996]:* Many submissions to the nuclear review raised the issue of safety and there is a continuing interest in safety issues. The advice of the independent Health and Safety Commission during the review was that the current regulatory system ensured a high level of safety and that there was no need to change it in any fundamental way on account of privatisation. In reaching the decision to privatise parts of the industry the Government considered the possible implications for safety very carefully. Safety is, and will remain, of paramount importance for both the Government and the nuclear industry.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment his Department has made of the advantage of increasing the numbers of staff employed in the nuclear installations inspectorate following nuclear privatisation; what representations he has received on the need to do this; if he will make a statement. [13289]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 2 February 1996]:* Staffing levels within the nuclear installations inspectorate are a matter for the Health and Safety Executive which is the body responsible for making arrangements for the enforcement of safety legislation. HSE does not currently consider that extra resources will be necessary to ensure safety standards are maintained in a privatised industry. In their White Paper setting out the conclusions of the nuclear review the Government confirmed that they would ensure that the NII has all the resources necessary to do its job effectively.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what comparative research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated in respect of other countries relating to (i) the statutory powers and (ii) the staff required to ensure safety in nuclear power generation. [13290]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 2 February 1996]:* No such research has been commissioned or evaluated. Nuclear safety is a national responsibility and legal and administrative arrangements for regulating and managing the nuclear power industry and for ensuring its safe operation have developed from such widely differing legal bases in the countries with nuclear power plant that such comparison is unlikely to be productive.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the work force of Nuclear Electric in each year since 1990; and what assessment his Department has made of efficiency savings that are possible without compromising safety. [13291]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 2 February 1996]:* These matters are addressed in the annual report and accounts of Nuclear Electric's efficiency savings are a matter for the company. The Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate has confirmed that there is no inherent conflict between safety and efficiency and I am confident that Nuclear Electric's current high safety standards will be maintained.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the licences that have been issued by the nuclear installations inspectorate since May 1975 to the *(a)* advanced gas-cooled reactor, *(b)* pressurised water reactor and *(c)* Magnox nuclear power generation sites; if he will list those licences that must still be issued; and if he will make a statement. [13361]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 2 February 1996]:* The tables list all the current nuclear site licences for sites of AGR, PWR and Magnox nuclear power generation plants in the UK and give the date of issue of the most recent version of the site licence. As a result of restructuring of Nuclear Electric plc and Scottish Nuclear, new licences will be required for all those sites listed which are currently operated by them. Those sites listed which are operated by BNFL will not require new licences.

Nuclear site licences for sites of UK AGR, PWR and Magnox nuclear power installations

Licence number	*Site*	*Reactor type on site*	*Date of issue*
Nuclear Electric plc			
3E	Berkeley	Magnox	1 March 1990
4A	Bradwell	Magnox	1 March 1990
5D	Hinkley Point	Magnox	30 July 1993
6B	Trawsfynydd	Magnox	1 March 1990
8D	Dungeness	Magnox and AGR	1 March 1990
11B	Oldbury	Magnox	15 October 1993
12C	Sizewell	Magnox and PWR	1 March 1990
20C	Wylfa	Magnox	1 March 1990
25B	Hartlepool	AGR	1 March 1990
26D	Heysham	AGR	1 March 1990
Scottish Nuclear			
SC1D	Hunterston	Magnox and AGR	1 March 1990
SC4B	Torness	AGR	1 March 1990
BNFL			
31F	Sellafield (Calder Hall)	Magnox	30 March 1994
SC3C	Chapelcross	Magnox	28 September 1990

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the safety record of nuclear power generation among OECD countries with *(a)* publicly owned and *(b)* privately owned nuclear industries. [13362]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 2 February 1996]:* My Department does not have access to figures on other OECD countries which would enable the nuclear safety record of publicly or privately owned nuclear power generating industries to be compared. However, the World Association of Nuclear Operators has stated that it is aware of no evidence to suggest that the type of ownership has any bearing on the level of safety achieved.

Exporting Firms

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the number of firms which have begun exporting since May 1995; and how many firms were exporting at that date. [13592]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 5 February 1996]:* The latest available information was given to the hon. Member in my answer on 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1086*. There are no official estimates of the number of firms which have begun exporting since May 1995.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Nigeria (Police Training)

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 19 December, *Official Report*, columns *1073–74*, how many Nigerian police officers received training in the United Kingdom in the maintenance of public order in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 1991; which United Kingdom police force provided the training; and which Government Department was responsible for funding the training. [13349]

Mr. Hanley: Two Nigerian police officers received training in the maintenance of public order in 1990 and one 1991. All three were trained by the Greater Manchester police force. Funding was by the ODA.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 19 December, *Official Report*, columns *1073–74*, what was the nature of the training provided in the United Kingdom in 1990 and 1991 for members of the Nigerian police in the maintenance of public order. [13380]

Mr. Hanley: The training covered the theoretical and practical aspects of command and control in serious public disorder situations, including instruction in teaching shield tactics, with emphasis on the minimum use of force.

Zanzibar and Tanzania

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *522*, to the hon. Member for Stretford, what appropriate actions he sought and what response he has received from the Zanzibari and Tanzanian authorities. [13796]

Mr. Hanley: We remain concerned about the discrepancies in the results of the Zanzibar elections. My right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Chalker raised this during her recent visit to Tanzania and emphasised to the Tanzanian authorities the need to establish a constructive dialogue between Government and Opposition in Zanzibar.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the public and private organisations, including non-governmental organisations and academic institutions, which have received funds by way of *(a)* the European Union's PHARE programme and *(b)* the know-how fund; what were the sums of money awarded; and if he will make a statement. [13394]

Mr. Hanley: Information in the form requested is not readily available on either the PHARE programme or the know-how fund. For the know-how fund it could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Detailed information on both programmes is set out in the following publications, copies of which have been, or are being, placed in the Library of the House:

The KHF's 1994–95 annual report and latest list of approved projects;

The most recent PHARE annual report; and,

A profile of PHARE funding in the period 1990–1994.

Pakistan

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to ensure that part of the overseas aid budget for Pakistan is directed towards the education and the rehabilitation of bonded children; and if he will make a statement. [13392]

Mr. Hanley: The problem is a cause for continuing concern. We therefore welcome recent measures by the Government of Pakistan to tackle it, such as the national project for rehabilitation of child labour. We are considering, through the European Union, how best to

assist and are focusing our bilateral aid on improvements in basic services, such as education, which help tackle some underlying causes of child labour.

TRANSPORT

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest estimate of the cost of rail privatisation; if he will breakdown its main components; and if he will make a statement. [8868]

Mr. Watts: Costs incurred to date by the Department, the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising and the Office of the Rail Regulator are as follows. They include running costs and consultancy costs.

£ million—cash

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*[1]
DOT	1.0	6.7	[2]13.5	14.2	14.3
OPRAF	—	—	2.4	16.6	21.3
ORR	—	—	1.4	9.0	5.8
Total	1.0	6.7	17.3	39.8	41.4

[1] Estimated costs to 31 December 1995.
[2] Includes £1.5 million contribution by DOT to the costs of setting up OPRAF and ORR prior to formal appointments of the Franchising Director and Rail Regulator.

In addition, British Rail and Railtrack have incurred costs linked to privatisation, including expenditure on assets such as computer equipment and associated systems. These are as follows:

	BR/Railtrack (£ million—cash)
1991–92	—
1992–93	—
1993–94	92.2
1994–95	131.0
1995–96[1]	72.0

The privatisation process now has considerable momentum and the sales achieved so far will yield proceeds in excess of £2 billion.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if franchise agreements for the first three franchised lines specifically preclude the replacement of rail services with bus services. [13971]

Mr. Watts: The franchise agreement requires the franchise operator to run railway services; it may not replace these with bus services. Where, in exceptional circumstances, it is unable to operate the specified railway services, the operator is required to take reasonable steps to provide alternatives, which may include bus services.

Exhaust Emissions

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review exhaust emission requirements under the MOT requirements. [12903]

Mr. Norris: I am satisfied that the MOT test is effective in controlling unnecessary emissions from vehicles. However, we keep the operation of the system under review.

Coastguard

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the amount of overtime worked in each month since the creation of the Coastguard agency; [13375]

(2) what action has been taken to secure the retention of the Coastguard rescue helicopter base at Lee on the Solent; [13379]

(3) how he proposes to recruit to the post of Chief Coastguard; [13377]

(4) what steps are being taken to fill the current vacancies among operational Coastguard officers; [13374]

(5) what changes he has introduced to provide Coastguard cover from Chichester to Beachy head, including changes in the staffing arrangements to cover *(a)* incidents and *(b)* public education in maritime and coastal safety matters. [13376]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Ms Joan Walley, dated 6 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about Coastguard operations.

The monthly amounts spent on overtime for the Coastguard Agency since its creation are as follows:

1994–95	*£*
April	74,413
May	82,613
June	80,636
July	84,962
August	81,076
September	76,764
October	77,995
November	71,255
December	74,016
January	63,700
February	104,483
March	76,880
1995–96	
April	78,544
May	113,785
June	105,191
July	99,987
August	108,836
September	93,639
October	100,166
November	82,369
December	72,959

The Coastguard Agency is actively negotiating with the Ministry of Defence to retain facilities for future Coastguard Helicopter operations at HMS DAEDALUS.

The post, which falls vacant on the present Chief Coastguard's retirement in June, is being filled by open competition under normal Civil Service rules. The advertisement which appeared in the national press on 25 January has been drawn to the attention of serving Coastguard Officers who are eligible to apply.

The Coastguard Agency maintains a continuing recruitment programme. During the past 12 months it has appointed 29 new Coastguard Officers.

(a) The response to coastal incidents between Chichester and Beachy Head is the responsibility of Auxiliary Coastal Rescue Teams under the coordination of the Solent Coastguard Rescue Centre. There have been no changes to these arrangements in this area.

(b) Since the retirement of the Newhaven and Shoreham Sector Officer this responsibility has been effectively covered by Sector Officers based at Littlehampton and Hastings.

Helicopters (Portland)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to maintain permanent helicopter coverage for Portland and the mid-channel area; and if he will make a statement. [13378]

Mr. Norris: The interdepartmental helicopter review group, established to examine the national requirement for helicopter for search and rescue and how this might most effectively and efficiently be met, is due to submit its report to Ministers shortly. On the basis of its conclusions, further consideration will be given to future deployment. This will include the future of the Coastguard helicopter provided at Portland.

British Rail (Safety)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects each of the British Rail infrastructure service units to complete the preparation of its contractor's safety case. [13231]

Mr. Watts: Each of the six track renewal companies and seven infrastructure maintenance companies, successors to the infrastructure service units, has completed the preparation of its contractors' safety cases. Railtrack plc, as the employer for the contracts, has accepted them.

Driving Licences

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the effect of European Union proposals on *(a)* the form and *(b)* the valid period of future United Kingdom driving licences. [13482]

Mr. Norris: The second directive on the driving licence requires the inclusion of additional information on the current United Kingdom licence and the repositioning of some of the existing material. A current EU proposal, if adopted, would allow the introduction of a plastic credit card style-licence containing a photograph. There are no proposals to change the validity periods of driving entitlement, but a card licence would be renewable every 10 years.

London Lorry Ban

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further measures he plans to exclude heavy lorries from central London between the hours of 7 am and 11 pm. [13759]

Mr. Norris: None. The number of heavy goods vehicles crossing the central cordon dropped from 32,000 in 1983 to 10,000 in 1993, the latest year for which figures are available.

Bus Services (Disabled Access)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he will take to ensure access for the disabled to public bus services in the Greater Manchester area. [13480]

Mr. Norris: The Government will be bringing forward regulations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to require that all new buses coming into service from the date determined in the regulations must be fully accessible to disabled people, including those who travel in wheelchairs.

These regulations will apply to buses in the Greater Manchester area, as they will throughout the country.

Vehicle Regulations

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to bring forward amendments to the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations. [13676]

Mr. Norris: Amendments are made regularly to the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations, some to reflect changes in European type approval standards, others for the benefit of road safety or environmental protection.

London to Luton Railway Service

Sir Graham Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guaranteed level of service will be required on the London to Luton inter-city route after privatisation; what is the current level of service; and what assessment he has made of the level of service which will be provided after privatisation. [13627]

Mr. Watts: Services between London and Luton are predominantly provided by Thameslink, rather than the inter-city service, which is provided by Midland main line. Accordingly, it will be the passenger service requirement for Thameslink which will safeguard the level of service. That PSR has yet to be set. The PSR for Midland main line leaves the level of services to the commercial judgment of the franchisee.

At present on weekdays, Thameslink operates 136 trains per day between London and Luton and 133 trains per day between Luton and London, Midland main line operates 16 trains per day between London and Luton and 15 between Luton and London.

The level of service above the PSR to be provided after privatisation will be a matter for the franchise operator. In evaluating bids for franchises the franchising director is required to take account of bidders' commitments to providing service levels beyond those specified in the PSR. Franchisees for the first three franchises have committed themselves to provide service levels over and above the PSR and the Government expect bidders for other franchises to offer similar commitments.

Roads (Greater Manchester)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the road building programme in the Greater Manchester area. [13481]

Mr. Watts: Following the recent review of the trunk road programme the list of road schemes in the Greater Manchester area is as follows:

Schemes under Construction

M66 Denton to Middleton Contract 2 (Advance Side Roads)

M66 Denton to Middleton Contract 4 (M66/M62 River Irk)

Schemes expected to start 1995–96 to 1996–97

M66 Denton to Middleton Contract 1 (Denton to River Medlock)

Main Prgoramme Schemes

M63 junctions 6–9 widening

M66 Denton to Middleton Contract 3 (River Irk to River Medlock)

A6 (M) Stockport North/South Bypass

A6 (M)–M56 Manchester Airport Link–West

A57/A628 Mottram–Tintwistle Bypass

A62 junctions 12/18 improvement (replaces M62 Relief Road scheme withdrawn from the programme)

Longer Term Programme

A6 Disley and High Lane Bypass

A5225 Wigan–Westhoughton Bypass

The longer-term programme comprises those schemes, which, although required, are not of the highest priority nationally. They will be taken forward only as the main programme is completed.

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funding his Department has provided for maintenance of the trunk roads network in the Greater Manchester area between 1992 and 1995. [13479]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. James Callaghan, dated 6 February 1996:

As you know, the Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what funding his Department has provided for maintenance of the trunk road network in the Greater Manchester area between 1992 and 1995.

Expenditure on maintenance was as follows:

1992–93: £38.194 million

1993–94: £27,513 million

1994–95: £31,395 million

1995–96: £17,771 million (to date).

Maintenance programmes are determined to meet needs on the basis of continuous review of the condition of the network.

I hope this is helpful.

Traffic Congestion (London)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for avoiding traffic congestion in central London. [13736]

Mr. Norris: Improvements to the M25 and to the north circular road will encourage traffic to avoid passing through inner and central London. Within the central area itself a range of measures is being pursued, including tight controls over the provision of parking within new developments, improved signalling and traffic control, better co-ordination of streetworks, stricter enforcement of on-street parking, and improved signing on the inner ring road.

Oil Pollution

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many prosecutions have been pursued during the last five years in response to criminal or irresponsible action leading to oil pollution of seas and coastal waters; and what assessment he has made of the adequacy of current regulations and sanctions. [13117]

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 24 January, *Official Report*, column *270*, and on 31 January, *Official Report*, columns *807–8*.

Heathrow Airport

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions his Department has had with British Airways in connection with its planned relocation of its cargo centre on the north-west fringes of Heathrow airport. [13302]

Mr. Norris: British Airways' cargo centre is currently located on the southern side of Heathrow airport and is being redeveloped on that site. The Department's transport security division has been in contact with British Airways to discuss the incorporation of aviation security requirements in this project.

M25

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which bridges crossing the M25 will have to be widened to accommodate the additional lanes planned between junctions 12 and 16; and if he will make a statement. [13301]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, dated 6 February 1996:

As you know, the Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr John Watts, has asked me to reply to your parliamentary question about the proposed widening of the M25 between Junctions 12 and 16 and the likely effect on bridges.

We have two separate proposals to widen this section of the M25. Between Junctions 12 and 15 there are no bridges which would have to be widened in order to accommodate the additional lanes planned. The widening would be within the current highway boundary.

For the section between Junctions 15 and 16, we are investigating several options for widening. These may involve the widening of some of the 8 overbridges and 7 underbridges but it is not possible to say at this early stage how many would be affected.

Blue Bell Hill Tunnel

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated cost of the tunnel under Blue Bell hill that forms part of the channel tunnel rail link project. [13904]

Mr. Watts: Union Railways' estimate is just over £70 million at 1994 Q3 prices. The actual cost will depend on detailed design by the successful bidder.

Railways (Working Hours)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes the Health and Safety Executive has recently authorised in working hour arrangements for safety critical staff in the railways industry. [13805]

Mr. Watts: None. The Health and Safety Executive is not required to authorise working hour arrangements on the railways. However, under the Railways (Safety Critical Work) Regulations 1994, employers have a duty to ensure that any staff who undertake safety critical work do not work such hours that would be liable to cause fatigue which could endanger safety.

The Health and Safety Commission has recently consulted on a draft approved code of practice which would give practical guidance to employers on their duty, including guidance on carrying out a risk assessment before making any changes to existing working time patterns.

A303, Stonehenge

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he received the report of the chairman of the round table conference on the A303 at Stonehenge; when he will publish it; and if he will make a statement. [13498]

Mr. Watts: The chairman has not yet submitted his report. The report will be published as soon as it is received.

Congestion

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated about the costs of traffic congestion. [13158]

Mr. Watts: The Department has not commissioned research to estimate the national cost of traffic congestion. The cost of congestion at a national level is a very difficult concept to pin down. Estimates have been made of the UK cost of congestion on the basis of work carried out by the OECD some six years ago. However, the method used contains a number of gross simplifications and the figures are consequently unreliable.

Our own traffic and economics assessments focus on appraisal of individual transport projects. They start from the baseline of current congestion levels and estimate the reduction in congestion costs in the area concerned that can be achieved by implementing the project. These estimates are backed up by an on-going extensive programme of research on methodology.

Traffic Accidents (Poor Eyesight)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the existence of a relationship between traffic accidents and poor eyesight; and what statistics it maintains. [13752]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 6 February 1996]:* There are no specific statistics on the relationship between poor eyesight and road traffic accidents because drivers do not have their eyes tested after accidents unless required to do so by the police on suspicion that they cannot meet the legal eyesight standard. The Department however accepts the view of medical experts that poor eyesight is a danger to road safety, and follows their advice in setting minimum eyesight standards for driving.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of staff employed by his Department or related agencies in each of the travel-to-work areas of Carmarthen, South Pembrokeshire, Haverfordwest, Fishguard and Cardigan on *(a)* 31 March 1979, *(b)* 31 March 1990, *(c)* 31 March 1992, *(d)* 31 March 1995, *(e)* the latest available figure and *(f)* the estimate for 31 March 1997. [13299]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 5 February 1996]:* Details of the numbers of staff recorded in departmental computer records as employed in the Department and its agencies in the travel-to-work areas of Carmarthen, South Pembrokeshire, Haverfordwest, Fishguard and Cardigan for the years 1990, 1992, 1995 and February 1996 are set out in the following table. Figures for 1979 are not available except at disproportionate cost. Estimates for 31 March 1997 are yet to be formulated.

	31 March 1990	*31 March 1992*	*31 March 1995*	*2 February 1996*
Carmarthen	2	2	1	1
South Pembrokeshire	0	0	0	0
Haverfordwest	26	30	25	25
Fishguard	1	1	1	1
Cardigan	0	0	0	0

Railtrack Staff

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people are employed by Railtrack; how many have been made redundant in each year since Railtrack was set up; and if he will make a statement. [13219]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer, 5 February 1996]:* On 1 February, Railtrack employed 11,382 staff. During the financial year 1994–95, six employees were made redundant; to date, no employees have been made redundant in 1995–96.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list those police forces which run units dedicated to enforcing heavy goods vehicle safety; and what were the staff numbers in each of those units; [13243]

(2) if he will list by police force the current budget dedicated to enforcement legislation relating to heavy goods vehicles and public service vehicles. [13275]

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Central Community Relations Unit

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all organisations in receipt of funding from the central community relations unit in 1995 giving, in each case, the amount of funding. [12334]

Mr. Ancram: The central community relations unit provided funding in 1994–95, the last complete financial year for which figures are available, totalling £4,642,941.54. Details of the organisations funded, together with the amount of funding they received in 1993–94, are set out in the following table. It does not include payments from the European regional development fund and the European social fund in respect of European Union measures administered by the central community relations unit.

Organisations funded by the central community relations unit

	Grant £
District councils	
Antrim Borough Council	55,281.44
Ards Borough Council	39,987.37
Armagh District Council	74,526.57
Ballymena Borough Council	44,268.76
Ballymoney Borough Council	54,562.39
Banbridge District Council	56,876.90
Belfast City Council	141,706.65
Carrickfergus Borough Council	44,385.00
Castlereach Borough Council	39,522.00
Coleraine Borough Council	48,524.76
Cookstown District Council	38,429.68
Craigavon Borough Council	36,404.13
Derry City Council	86,437.00
Down District Council	63,679.29
Dungannon District Council	77,635.32
Fermanagh District Council	85,193.39
Larne Borough Council	40,235.84
Limavady Borough Council	45,031.94
Lisburn Borough Council	38,191.45
Magherafelt District Council	61,100.00
Moyle District Council	24,041.68
Newry and Mourne District Council	76,548.17
Newtownabbey Borough Council	35,689.91
North Down District Council	36,189.80
Omagh District Council	60,952.50
Strabane District Council	74,658.62
Totals	1,480,060.56
Cultural traditions bodies	
Comhaltas Uladh	24,125.00
Cultural coalition	10,000.00
Northern Ireland sub-committee of the European Bureau for lesser used languages	6,000.00
Gael-linn Teoranta	41,000.00
Glencairn People's Project	5,740.29
Linenhall Library	10,335.82
Naiscoil Na Rinne	5,000.00
Oideas Gael Uladh	5,000.00
Origins of place names	185,682.05
Preas and Phobail Limited	24,000.00
Royal Irish Regiment museum	22,149.72
Ultach Trust	80,000.00
Totals	419,032.88
Community Relations Bodies	
Chinese Welfare Association	15,033.03
Co-operation North	100,000.00
Encounter	5,000.00
Families against Intimidation and Terror	15,090.00
Growing through Conflict	3,000.00
Initiative on Conflict	—
Resolution and Ethnicity	10,112.35
Northern Ireland Community Relations Council	2,061,098.65
Parent and Child Training	750.00
St. Columb's Trust	24,110.15
Ulster People's College	30,952.52
Totals	2,265,146.70
Capital programme	
Armagh District Council	30,000.00
Craigavon Asian Women's Association	6,600.00
Department of the Environment (NI) Advisory Service	8,603.24
Fermanagh District Council	30,000.00
Glenavy Community Support Group	18,513.75
Lisburn YMCA Ltd.	16,000.00
NI Children's Committee 10	12,765.96
SOMME Association Ltd.	100,000.00
St. Columb's Trust	11,853.65
Ulster People's College	10,000.00
Wandsworth Community Association	2,871.80
Totals	247,208.40
Research	
Capita Consultants	4,111.00
Central Survey Unit, Department of Finance and Personnel	30,000.00
Charities Evaluation Services	10,000.00
Community Relations Council	10,000.00
Corrymeela Community	5,253.00
Forum for Community Work Education	5,000.00
Initiative on Conflict Resolution and Ethnicity	37,355.00
Northern Ireland Office	21,000.00
Queen's University, Belfast	25,857.00
Research and Evaluation Services	5,350.00
Social Information Systems	30,000.00
Templegrove Action Research Ltd.	5,000.00
University of Ulster, Coleraine	18,483.00
University of Ulster, Jordanstown	24,084.00
Totals	231,493.00
Overall total	
District Councils	1,480,060.56
Cultural Traditions Bodies	419,032.88
Community Relations Bodies	2,265,146.70
Capital Programme	247,208.40
Research	231,493.00
Total	4,642,941.54

Action for Community Employment

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which bodies *(a)* have received and *(b)* will receive funding from the action for community employment programme in the financial years (i) 1994–95, (ii) 1995–96 and (iii) 1996–97; and if he will list (1) the numbers employed by each body and (2) the amount each body received in (i) to (iii); and in which parliamentary constituency each body is located. [12694]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Mr. Jim Dowd, dated 30 January 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency to reply to your questions about the Action for Community Employment programme (ACE).

Across Northern Ireland there are currently 237 organisations running ACE schemes. The detailed information you seek is not immediately available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. However, on the assumption that you might find it helpful I have appended a list of ACE schemes operating during 1995/96.

I am sorry I cannot be more helpful on this occasion.

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the funding of ACE schemes in the Province. [12558]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Rev. William McCrea, dated 30 January 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency to reply to your request for a statement about the funding of the Action for Community Employment (ACE) programme.

As you know, on Monday 11 December 1995 the Secretary of State announced details of the Public Expenditure Plans for Northern Ireland for 1996/7 and the following two years. The announcement referred to the very encouraging performance of the Northern Ireland economy wish unemployment at its lowest for 14 years and employment at record levels. He mentioned also the promise of substantial jobs from recently announced investments by major companies.

Against this background the reduction of £12.5 million in funding for the ACE programme in 1996/7 will help to meet pressures in top priority programmes aimed at promoting self-sustaining economic growth. The targeting of available resources in this way will best meet the needs of the unemployed in the longer term.

I can assure you that the Training and Employment Agency is sensitive to the concerns of the voluntary/community sector and is aware of the possible implications for local communities arising from the reduction in ACE workers.

The Agency has recently written to the Chairpersons of ACE schemes to indicate the level of reduction required in each scheme in order that the programme can live within the resources available to it in 1996/7. Following consultations with a variety of sponsors and others with an interest in ACE, the Agency is happy to allow sponsors to determine how best they might achieve the reduction either individually or collectively. The aim is to keep the consequences of the reductions to a minimum.

I hope that you find this reply useful. I will of course be pleased to provide further information if you would find it helpful.

Office of Legislative Counsel

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many staff are employed in the office of legislative counsel; at what grades and salaries; and what is its overall annual cost. [12828]

Sir John Wheeler: Twenty-three staff are currently employed in the office of legislative counsel, which includes the statutory publications office.

The breakdown by grade and salary range is as follows:

Grade	*Number of staff*	*Salary range £*
First legislative counsel	1	62,000–67,000
2nd legislative counsel	1.4	53,000–58,000
Assistant solicitor	2	37,400–55,802
Senior legal assistant	1	25,964–45,328
Legal assistant	2	25,392–39,324
Deputy principal	1	19,021–29,161
Staff officer	1	15,363–20,634
Executive officer I	2	12,923–17,895
Executive officer II	4	10,982–15,208
Personal secretary	1	9,287–12,592
Administrative officer	4.5	8,778–12,174
Administrative assistance	1	6,928–10,279
Casual administrative assistant	1	6,928–10,279

The overall annual cost of the OLC is £738,000, which includes £514,000 for salaries, £61,000 for accommodation and £163,000 for other running costs.

Firearm Certificates

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the grounds for eligibility for holding a firearm certificate. [12846]

Sir John Wheeler: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 18 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *716*. Under the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, a firearm certificate shall not be granted unless the Chief Constable is satisfied that

the firearm could be held without danger to public safety or to the peace;

the applicant is fitted to hold a firearm;

the applicant has "good reason" for the firearm;

the applicant is not prohibited from holding a firearm by virtue of article 22 of the order;

the applicant is 18 years of age or more.

Controlled Secondary and Grammar Schools

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pupils *(a)* are currently and *(b)* have been in each of the last three years educated in controlled secondary and grammar schools. [12552]

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows:

(a) 54,785 pupils are currently educated in controlled secondary and grammar schools (1994–95).

(b) The numbers of pupils educated in controlled secondary and grammar schools for the last three years are as follows:

1991–92: 53,859

1992–93: 53,976

1993–94: 54,697

Education Finance

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what capital schemes are planned in the next financial year for education establishments in the constituency of Mid-Ulster; [12553]

(2) what additional resources he plans to provide for education in Mid-Ulster in 1996–97. [12554]

Mr. Ancram: There are two major building schemes planned for 1996–97 in the constituency of Mid-Ulster: a new primary school in Dromore, County Tyrone, on which work has started, and a scheme to extend Holy Trinity primary school, Cookstown.

Additional resources allocated for education services in 1996–97 have been distributed primarily through the five education and library boards and not on a parliamentary constituency basis.

Temporary Employment

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the proportion of employees currently in temporary employment. [12555]

Mr. Ancram: Information on temporary employment is available only from the labour force survey. The latest available information relates to summer 1995 when an estimated 8 per cent. of employees were in temporary employment.

Nursery Education

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he will take to make a nursery place in a state school available to all children under school age. [12556]

Mr. Ancram: It remains the Government's stated long-term policy objective to provide access to one year of nursery education for all children in Northern Ireland whose parents wish it. However, resources are not currently available within mainstream funding to facilitate the expansion of grant-aided nursery education provision.

Youth Unemployment

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of youth unemployment in Northern Ireland. [12557]

Mr. Ancram: The Government are addressing the problem of unemployment among young people through a range of programmes which seek to provide the skills and abilities needed to obtain and retain employment.

These include Training and Employment Agency programmes such as jobskills, currently being used by almost 10,000 under–25s, which provides quality training leading to national vocational qualifications; the action for community employment scheme, 40 per cent. of the participants on which are placed in employment on leaving; and programmes providing work experience opportunities including some overseas.

The agency also works closely with the Department of Education to develop and implement vocational and educational training strategies aimed at helping young people who are entering the labour market for the first time. Over the past year, new courses have been put in place for young people wishing to take advantage of the emerging opportunities in tourism.

For those with higher qualifications, the teaching company scheme administered through the industrial research and technology unit develops young graduates for careers in industry; more than 200 graduates have made use of the scheme in Northern Ireland, a rate of uptake well above the UK average.

The Government are working with the private sector Northern Ireland growth challenge to improve the links between industry and the education system at all levels.

Older Workers

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what special provision is being made for the employment of older workers in the Province. [12579]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Rev. William McCrea, dated 6 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency to reply to your question about the employment of older workers.

The Agency's network of 31 local offices provides an all-age service for those seeking employment. We also help employers to fill vacancies. If an employer seeks to impose age limits when notifying a vacancy, the Agency encourages the employer to either abandon the age limits or broaden the age band. We also emphasise the experience and reliability of older workers.

If an employer insists on imposing an age restriction for a vacancy which appears unjustifiable, the Agency will not handle it. This has been the position for several years.

On a more general note the Agency is planning to produce a booklet giving practical advice to older people about finding work, training and changing jobs. It will also encourage them to realise the wealth of experience, maturity and skills they possess. In addition we propose to produce a separate booklet for employers highlighting both the benefits of recruiting older people and the unfairness of age discrimination.

I hope that you find this reply helpful. I will of course be pleased to provide further information if you would find it useful.

Independent Schools

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pupils are currently educated in independent schools, including independent Christian schools; and what the figures are for each of the last three years. [12580]

Mr. Ancram: Nine hundred and forty-one pupils are currently educated in independent schools—1994–95. the numbers of pupils educated in independent schools for the previous three years are as follows:

1991–92: 1,052

1992–93: 963

1993–94: 939

DEFENCE

Naval Bases (Privatisation)

14. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has held with *(a)* naval officials and *(b)* union representatives regarding privatisation measures for naval bases. [12040]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence keeps in regular touch with the whole range of efficiency improvements planned for naval bases.

Mr. David Hart

15. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review Mr. David Hart's security clearance. [12041]

Mr. Portillo: Mr. Hart has gone through the proper security clearance procedure.

Departmental Expenditure

16. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money including the pay of service personnel his Department spends annually in each standard planning region of the United Kingdom. [12042]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Data of MOD equipment expenditure in each of the standard economic planning regions of the UK is available in table 1.9 of "UK Defence Statistics 1995", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. We do not compile regional data for other aspects of defence expenditure.

24. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he is taking to eliminate unnecessary spending in his Department. [12051]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Members for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) and for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner), on 9 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *93*.

Procurement Decisions (Impact)

17. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department makes of the industrial impact of procurement decisions. [12043]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Industrial implications is one of the many factors which are taken into account when procurement decisions are being made.

Former Yugoslavia

18. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many attacks there have been on British military personnel in former Yugoslavia since 1991; if he will indicate from which sources these attacks came; and how many British casualties resulted. [12044]

Mr. Soames: Regrettably, 11 British military personnel have been killed and a further 17 have sustained serious injuries as a result of the activities of the former warring factions.

21. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made by NATO's peace implementation force in former Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement. [12047]

Mr. Soames: IFOR is making good progress and is continuing to work closely with the parties in implementing the military aspects of the peace agreement. It has recently verified compliance with the latest deadline to evacuate forces from those areas which are to be transferred to other parties. We expect the implementation process to continue with the compliance of the parties.

Defence Industry

19. **Mr. Hargreaves:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effect on jobs in the defence industry of reducing United Kingdom defence spending to the European average. [12045]

Mr. Arbuthnot: A reduction in UK defence expenditure to the current NATO European average would result in cuts of over £4.5 billion per year. This would have a drastic effect on the capability of our armed forces and the future equipment programme. The implications for jobs in the defence industry would be severe.

27. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British jobs are sustained by the defence industry; and if he will make a statement. [12054]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Estimates of UK employment dependent on my Department's expenditure and on defence exports appear in table 1.10 of "UK Defence Statistics 1995", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Royal Air Force

20. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the average cost of recruitment and training for each new recruit to the Royal Air Force in 1993–94 and 1994–95. [12046]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 9 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *102*, and to the letter sent to him by my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence on 13 December 1995, a copy of which was placed in the Library of the House.

22. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the annual cost of Royal Air Force personnel and facilities in Germany. [12048]

Mr. Soames: Our current estimate of the costs for the financial year 1995–96 of RAF units stationed in Germany is approximately £227 million. Roughly half this figure represents personnel costs.

Russian Defence Policy

23. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration is being given by the defence planning staff to the implications for UK defence policy of changes in the Russian hierarchy and defence doctrines. [12050]

Mr. Soames: As explained in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1995", the progress of reform in Russia remains an important factor in the determination of our security and defence policies.

Nuclear Weapons

25. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Government's policy in respect of the UK's nuclear deterrent. [12052]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The United Kingdom's independent minimum nuclear deterrent continues to provide the ultimate safeguard of this country's security and to make an important contribution to NATO's strategy of war prevention. The introduction into service of Trident will ensure that the United Kingdom retains a credible and effective minimum deterrent into the next century.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the value of nuclear weapons to Britain's defence. [12031]

Mr. Portillo: Nuclear weapons continue to make an essential contribution to the security of the United Kingdom.

Western European Union

26. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what aims the Government have for their presidency of the WEU. [12053]

Mr. Soames: We intend to concentrate our efforts during the UK presidency on enhancing the WEU's operational capability. In particular, we are taking forward work on establishing a situation centre and intelligence section, seeking to strengthen links with NATO, and developing a coherent and progressive WEU exercise policy.

Royal Yacht

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost to his Department of the presence of the royal yacht Britannia at this year's Cowes regatta. [5310]

Mr. Soames: The total operating costs of HMY Britannia for the financial years 1992–93 to 1995–96 were provided in my reply to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 5 April 1995, *Official Report*, column *1151*. Information on the marginal costs of individual deployments could not be provided without disproportionate cost.

Tornado F3 Aircraft

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the terms of the lease agreement with the Italian authorities concerning Tornado F3 aircraft; and what non-financial facilities have been made available to the Italian authorities as part of this agreement. [13209]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The lease provides for 24 RAF Tornado F3 aircraft to be loaned to Italy for a period of 10 years for a fee of £100 million. The Italian Government are responsible for all support costs. The lease agreement includes an offset scheme under which Italian industry will be furnished opportunities to compete for defence work to the same value as the lease fee.

Exercise Purple Star

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what alternative to HMS Fearless will take part in Exercise Purple Star. [13115]

Mr. Soames: HMS Fearless remains scheduled to return to operational duties in good time to allow her to take part in Exercise Purple Star.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the planned Exercise Purple Star, scheduled for May 1996, can proceed as envisaged; and if the condition of HMS Fearless has had any significant effect on the preparation of this exercise. [13116]

Mr. Soames: Exercise Purple Star will go ahead as planned, although our contribution has been adjusted slightly to take account of our involvement with the NATO implementation force in the former Yugoslavia. The condition of HMS Fearless, and her current maintenance programme, has had no significant effect upon the preparation of this exercise.

Parliamentary Answers (Diagrams)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) of 31 January, *Official Report*, columns *755–56*, when a diagram as described by the chief executive of the Meterological Office may be reproduced in or with the *Official Report*. [14042]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The publication of answers is a matter for the Editor of the *Official Report*.

Boots

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many pairs of boots were issued to Her Majesty's forces during the past year; at what cost; and if he will make a statement. [12276]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from M. J. Roycroft to Mr. Harry Greenway, dated 6 February 1996.

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the issues of boots to Her Majesty's forces, in my capacity as the Chief Executive, Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency (DCTA).

During the past twelve months a total of 291,493 pairs of boots have been issued to units at a cost of £11,124,643 VAT inclusive. These issues cover some 40 or more different types of boot ranging from combat boots to protective footwear. Within these totals 43,620 combat boots (£3,046,826) have been issued for specific operations, including Bosnia. A further 50,963 pairs of boots (£1,962,916) were issued as part of the recently completed deployment plan to equip HM Forces with the new Combat Assault Boot.

If I can be of any further assistance please let me know.

Joint Service Command and Staff College

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the joint service command and staff college will open. [14220]

Mr. Soames: The creation of a joint service command and staff college is a key element in our policy to encourage a more joint service approach to defence issues. It will open, as planned, in September 1997. Major General T. J. Granville-Chapman will be its first commandant, and he will assume responsibility for the project in June 1996.

We shall close the joint service defence college and royal naval staff college at Greenwich, the Army staff college at Camberley and the RAF staff college at Bracknell, in 1997. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence said in his answer to the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) on 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1107*, he has appointed an advisory group to give him advice on the future of the royal naval college at Greenwich. A final decision is not expected until the summer.

The works programme for the new college cannot be completed by September 1997. We are therefore making arrangements for the JSCSC to operate initially at a temporary location, probably at RAF Bracknell. A final decision on the interim site is subject to formal appraisal and consultation. We intend to dispose of the Bracknell site by the end of 1999.

The work so far has shown that Camberley is the most cost-effective and appropriate Ministry of Defence site for the college. We shall be seeking proposals for private sector involvement in the provision of high-quality accommodation—including infrastructure and residential accommodation—associated facilities management for a range of services, and possibly civilian academic support. In exploring the opportunities for private finance, imaginative proposals involving an alternative site that meet our requirements are not ruled out.

Formal consultations with the trade unions and other interested parties will take place before any final decision on the JSCSC is made.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Helplines

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all the helplines, or schemes which include a helpline service, for which his Department provides any funding, stating which are *(a)* independent organisations, *(b)* run by his Department or agencies of his Department or *(c)* of another classification; how many calls each received in each of the last five years; and how much money each received from his Department in each of the last five years. [9803]

Mr. Burt: Full information is not available and can be supplied only at disproportionate cost. However, information is available as follows:

(a) The Department does not provide funding for any outside organisations.

(b) Helplines run by the Department or its agencies are as follows:

Social Security headquarters

Public Enquiry Office (PEO) (national call rate)

	Number of calls received
1990	29,446
1991	39,879
1992	64,120
1993	75,907
1994	86,355
1995	67,645

Any telephone costs to the Department which may be incurred by the PEO on follow-up calls and so forth cannot be distinguished from overall telephone costs for the building from which they operate.

Until October 1993 the Department of Social Security public enquiry office also answered inquiries on behalf of the Department of Health.

Information supplied by the Department's agencies is as follows:

Benefits Agency

	Amount
Freeline (free phone)	
Number of calls handled in the last 12 months up to 24 November 1995	2.7 million
Annual cost of call charges	£1.1 million
Annual running costs (staff)	£4.9 million
Benefit Enquiry Line (free phone)	
Number of calls handled in the last 12 months up to 24 November 1995	0.9 million
Annual cost of call charges	£0.75 million
Annual running costs (staff)	£2.72 million
Family Credit Advice Line (full rate)	
Number of calls handled in the last 12 months up to 24 November 1995	2.2 million
Annual cost of call charges	NIL
Annual running costs (staff)	£1.6 million
Disability Living Allowance Line (subsidised)	
Number of calls handled in the last 12 months up to 24 November 1995	2 million
Annual cost of call charges	£0.072 million
Annual running costs (staff)	£1.62 million
Disability Working Allowance Line	
Number of calls received January 1995–December 1995	50,374
Costs	£54,568
Pensions Telephone Liaison Service (TLS)	
Number of calls received:	
1994	70,864
1995	65,162
Annual running cost (staff)	£90,458.00
Annual running cost (accommodation)	£6,042.00
Total	£96,500.00

Contributions Agency

Social Security Advice Line for Employers (SSALE)	*Amount*
Number of calls received:	
April 1991–March 1992	162,153
April 1992–March 1993	189,221
April 1993–March 1994	242,223
April 1994–March 1995	225,124
April 1995–December 1995	237,976
Cost of running SSALE:	
1994–95	
Staff costs	£639,852
Non staff costs	£393,585
Total	£1,033,437
1995–96	
Staff costs	£550,154
Non staff costs	£199,000
Total	£749,154

War Pensions Agency

	Amount
War Pensions Helpline	
Number of calls:	
1992	56,065
1993	105,787
1994	315,021
1995	821,696
Running costs (staff):	
1992	£84,144
1993	£119,625
1994	£267,098
1995	£285,205

Costs of establishing the technical system in 1992 were £114,941 and the annual maintenance cost is £9,700.

Child Support Agency

	Amount
National Enquiry Line (NEL) (Includes Child Support Agency Employer Line Child Support Agency Enquiry Line)	
Number of calls: June 94–January 96	993,438
Cost of operating (NEL)	£1,123,895
Child Support Agency Literature Line	
Number of calls/coupons/cards:	
1992–94	19,964
1994–95	18,237

Child Support Agency

	Amount
Running costs (Totals):	
April 94–March 95	£134,881.77
April 95–May 95	£19,070.29
June 95–November 95	£52,290.77
c) Other classification:	
Headquarters Teleresponse Lines These lines cannot strictly speaking be classified as "helplines"; they are routine telephone information lines set up to enable the public to respond to any publicity related to the following issues; they are not permanent.	
Pension Teleresponse Line	
Number of calls/coupons:	
February 1994–March 95	41,483
Cost of running the line	£36,751
Family Credit	
Number of calls/coupons:	
April 94–April 95	18,255
Cost of running the line	£142,641
Disability on the Agenda	
Number of calls/coupons:	
April 1993–March 1995 (2 years)	34,570
Cost of running the line	£82,092
Incapacity Benefit	
Number of calls/coupons:	
Year up to April 95	138,470
Cost of running the line	£234,639
Disability Working Allowance	
Number of calls/coupons	
April 1994–January 1996	42,260
Cost of running the line	£94,000

Housing Benefit

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will detail for each of the years between 1982–83 and 1995–96 *(a)* the total cost of housing benefit in Scotland paid to (i) tenants of new towns, Scottish Homes and local authorities, (ii) tenants of housing associations and (iii) tenants of private landlords and *(b)* the number of households in Scotland receiving housing benefit in each of the above categories. [11140]

Mr. Roger Evans: The available information is set out in the table.

The cost of Housing Benefit and the number of recipients, for Scotland 1983–84 to 1994–95

	Average number of housing benefit recipients (000s)				*Housing benefit expenditure (£ million)*			
Financial years	*Local authority tenants (including new towns and Scottish Homes)*	*All private tenants (including HA tenants)*	*HA tenants*	*Other private tenants (ex HA tenants)*	*Local authority tenants (including new towns and Scottish Homes)*	*All private tenants (including HA tenants)*	*HA tenants*	*Other private tenants (ex HA tenants)*
1983–84	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	211	30	n/a	n/a
1984–85	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	235	41	n/a	n/a
1985–86	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	262	55	n/a	n/a
1986–87	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	300	71	n/a	n/a
1987–88	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	338	89	n/a	n/a
1988–89	494	72	n/a	n/a	363	86	n/a	n/a

The cost of Housing Benefit and the number of recipients, for Scotland 1983–84 to 1994–95

	Average number of housing benefit recipients (000s)				*Housing benefit expenditure (£ million)*			
Financial years	*Local authority tenants (including new towns and Scottish Homes)*	*All private tenants (including HA tenants)*	*HA tenants*	*Other private tenants (ex HA tenants)*	*Local authority tenants (including new towns and Scottish Homes)*	*All private tenants (including HA tenants)*	*HA tenants*	*Other private tenants (ex HA tenants)*
1989–90	478	79	n/a	n/a	415	113	n/a	n/a
1990–91	467	76	n/a	n/a	455	119	n/a	n/a
1991–92	466	76	n/a	n/a	505	136	n/a	n/a
1992–93	460	83	22	61	558	169	35	134
1993–94	457	93	30	63	600	202	48	154
1994–95	445	104	35	69	619	239	62	177

Notes:

1. Figures for recipients have been rounded to the nearest thousand and are averages of four quarters data. Expenditure figures have been rounded to the nearest £ million.
2. Figures for recipients refer to benefit units which may be a single person or a couple.
3. Expenditure figures are not available for 1982-83.
4. Information on Housing Benefit recipients on Scotland is not available prior to 1988-89.
5. Information on the number of housing association tenants was not collected prior to May 1992.
6. Housing association expenditure figures have been estimated from a one per cent. sample of recipients.

Source:

Recipients: housing benefit management information system, quarterly 100 per cent. caseload enquiries taken on the last working day in May, August, November and February.

Expenditure: Department of Social Security planning and finance division.

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many young single people aged 16 to 24 years *(a)* living in the private rented sector and *(b)* living in self-contained private rented sector accommodation in Scotland currently receive housing benefit; and in each case at what cost. [11161]

Mr. Evans: The latest available figures show that, as at May 1994, there were 15,000 recipients of housing benefit in Scotland who were aged 16 to 24 and living in privately rented accommodation; the estimated total cost of housing benefit paid to this group during the 1994–95 financial year was £41 million. Information is not routinely collected to differentiate between self-contained and non self-contained accommodation.

State Earnings-related Pension Scheme

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the number of *(a)* males and *(b)* females covered by SERPs; and what percentage of the work force it constituted in (i) 1993, (ii) 1994 and (iii) 1995. [12833]

Mr. Heald: Figures are not available for 1994 or 1995. The latest figures available[1] show that in 1992–93, 3.3 million men and 3.2 million women in the United Kingdom would accrue SERPS entitlement[2], representing 22.8 per cent. of the work force[3].

Notes:

[1] Source: 1 per cent. sample of national insurance records.

[2] This is the number of people who paid class 1 national insurance contributions at the not contracted out rate over the year 1992–93 whose earnings factor was equal to or above the annual lower earnings limit.

[3] Source: *Employment Gazette* December 1995. Workforce includes self-employed persons, HM Forces, people on Government training programmes and the claimant unemployed.

[4] Information on the workforce is provided quarterly and is a point in time figures. In order to assess the number throughout the year the four quarters have been averaged. The percentage covered by SERPS has then been calculated using the average figure. The breakdown by sex is unavailable.

Social Fund

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much money was lent on social fund loans at the last date for which figures are available; how many people have such loans; what is the average loan at the time of issue; and what is the average repayment period. [12834]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information for the period April to December 1995 is set out in the table.

	Budgeting loan	*Crisis loan*
Number of awards	702,751	621,048
Total amount awarded	£190,294,974	£41,161,827
Average payment	£270.78	£66.27
Average length of repayment for loan repaid during this period	34.7 weeks	14.6 weeks

1. The number of discretionary awards made after review is not included.
2. The repayment terms for social fund loans are designed to be affordable to the applicant. The rate of repayment depends upon the applicant's individual circumstances. Although most loans are repaid within 78 weeks, the period of repayment may be extended up to 104 weeks.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the average time taken to process a claim on the social fund for each year since its inception; and if he will indicate the total number of claims *(a)* met, *(b)* refused and *(c)* appealed against. [12265]

Mr. Evans *[holding answer 31 January 1996]:* The information is set out in the tables.

Clearance times

Year	*Maternity payments*	*Funeral payments*	*Community Care grants*	*Budgeting loans*	*Crisis loans*
1988–89	n/a	n/a	7 working days	13 working days	1 working day
1989–90	n/a	n/a	8 working days	10 working days	1 working day
1990–91	n/a	n/a	7 working days	4.9 working days	1 working day
1991–92	n/a	n/a	5.9 working days	3.2 working days	1 working day
1992–93	n/a	n/a	4.3 working days	5.9 working days	1 working day
1993–94	80.88 per cent. in 5 working days 98.02 per cent. in 20 working days	71.69 per cent. in 12 working days 96.09 per cent. in 35 working days	81 per cent. in 7 working days 98 per cent. in 20 working days	78 per cent. in 6 working days 97 per cent. in 20 working days	Cleared in day need arises
1994–95	73.3 per cent. in 5 working days 93.83 per cent. in 20 working days	75.72 per cent. in 12 working days 96.95 per cent. in 35 working days	87 per cent. in 7 working days 98 per cent. in 20 working days	84 per cent. in 6 working days 98 per cent. in 20 working days	Cleared in day need arises

Performance monitoring by the Benefits Agency of clearance times for funeral payments and maternity payments did not commence until September 1992.

Social fund claims, awards, refusals, appeals and reviews

	Maternity payments	*Funeral payments*	*Community care grants*	*Budgeting loans*	*Crisis loans*
1988–89					
Claims (000s)	212	53	315	933	501
Awards (000s)	170	40	153	505	379
Refusals (000s)	49	13	146	330	45
Appeals	748	668	—	—	—
Applications for first review	—	—	25,382	71,131	9,824
1989–90					
Claims (000s)	224	63	523	1,131	645
Awards (000s)	174	44	230	580	449
Refusals (000s)	46	15	278	455	46
Appeals	638	859	—	—	—
Applications for first review	—	—	71,104	100,200	9,898
1990–91					
Claims (000s)	234	68	692	1,092	596
Awards (000s)	189	49	246	596	504
Refusals (000s)	41	15	370	472	53
Appeals	522	579	—	—	—
Applications for first review	—	—	55,932	64,577	5,243
1991–92					
Claims (000s)	262	77	1,027	1,360	711
Awards (000s)	217	57	255	711	592
Refusals (000s)	41	17	736	545	70
Appeals	564	1,076	—	—	—
Applications for first review	—	—	88,913	90,429	7,148
1992–93					
Claims (000s)	271	83	1,184	1,498	837
Awards (000s)	228	63	287	801	671
Refusals (000s)	38	16	865	592	118
Appeals	491	1,032	—	—	—
Applications for first review	—	—	119,351	118,539	13,588
1993–94					
Claims (000s)	272	94	1,244	1,529	901
Awards (000s)	230	72	294	854	699
Refusals (000s)	20	10	923	600	153
Appeals	357	969	—	—	—
Applications for first review	—	—	148,633	153,776	18,790
1994–95					
Claims (000s)	262	95	1,266	1,467	1,011
Awards (000s)	220	68	285	864	755
Refusals (000s)	42	27	964	588	213
Appeals	312	1,287	—	—	—
Applications for first review	—	—	191,539	205,368	27,760

1. As claims for maternity and funeral payments are from the regulated part of the social fund there are rights of appeal to a social security appeal tribunal. The grievance procedure for dissatisfied applicants to the discretionary social fund is by review process.

2. The difference between applications received, awards and refusals is due to: applications being withdrawn by applicants; applications where there is no response from applicants; and applications not decided at the time the count was made.

Benefit Overpayment

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the total identified number of cases of overpayment of all forms of benefits in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1993–94; how many of these cases of overpayment are due to (i) departmental or agency errors and (ii) inaccurate information supplied by applicants; and what is his policy on repayment of benefits overpaid in respect of (i) and (ii). [12843]

Mr. Roger Evans: Such information as is available regarding the number and cause of overpayments is set out in the table.

Year	*Total number*	*Customer error*	*Other*
1993–94	818,073	405,984	412,089
1994–95	996,477	590,218	406,259

The category "other" includes small overpayments where recovery is not pursued, and abandoned cases. Such cases may not be caused through official error. It is not possible to disaggregate the information, except at disproportionate cost. However, the majority of these will be official error overpayments.

In cases where the overpayment is caused by misrepresentation or failure to disclose a material fact, recovery is sought whenever it is appropriate to do so. Where no acceptable offer to repay is forthcoming, recovery is effected either, where the person remains in receipt of benefit, by deductions from benefit or, if benefit is no longer in payment, through voluntary repayment or civil proceedings. Where an overpayment has been caused by official error whether recovery is sought depends on how the error arose. In appropriate cases voluntary recover is sought. Recovery is pursued further only where it is cost effective to do so and there is a right in law of recovery.

Cold Weather Payments

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated total amount of money not paid in cold weather payments in 1994 to pensioners who do not claim income support although eligible, using the most recent take-up figures produced by the Department of Social Security's analytical services division. [13104]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to change the rules under which cold weather payments are made. [13074]

Mr. Evans: There are no plans for major changes to the scheme.

After the end of March each year, we routinely review the operation of the scheme over the previous winter, taking account of advice from the Meterological Office. In particular, we look at the links between weather stations and postcode areas, and as a result minor adjustments are made if necessary.

Back-to-work Bonus Scheme

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimates he has made of *(a)* the likely revenue effects and *(b)* the numbers participating in respect of the back-to-work bonus scheme in (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1997–98 and (iii) 1998–99. [13409]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table:

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Estimated gross cost of the back-to-work bonus	£15 million	£45 million	£65 million
Estimated numbers receiving a bonus	60,000	130,000	150,000

(i) Estimates based on 2.1 million unemployed.

(ii) The table shows the gross cost of the back to work bonus scheme. However, once behavioural effects are taken into account we expect that the scheme will be broadly cost neutral. The behavioural effects are very difficult to assess accurately. In particular, the likely take up of the bonus in the first 18 months is very uncertain.

Poverty and Social Exclusion

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the United Kingdom projects to receive funds as part of the EU initiative to combat poverty and social exclusion. [13160]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The United Kingdom permanent representative to the European Union wrote to the European Commission in December seeking further information about its proposals to spend money on projects seeking to combat social exclusion. We have asked the Commission on what legal basis it is funding such projects. No response has yet been received, and Governments have not officially been notified of the Commission's intentions. The UK has already made clear to the Commission its additional scepticism about the value for public money of projects of this kind.

As an issue of principle, it is unacceptable for substantial spending projets to be undertaken without a clear legal basis. Such practices offend against budgetary discipline and undermine member states' own efforts to constrain public spending. Resources within the Community as a whole are finite. It follows that any resources used without the authority of member states will mean fewer resources are available for national Governments to support anti-exclusion projects in member states.

The Government's commitment to providing assistance for disadvantaged people is clear. In addition to spending an estimated £85 billion in this financial year on social security benefits, the Government are already funding many projects to combat social exclusion in the UK through inner city challenge, adult training, health care, housing and literacy programmes.

Pensions Awareness Campaigns

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library copies of *(a)* advertisements, *(b)* leaflets and *(c)* transcripts of television and radio broadcasts used in the pensions awareness campaign in the midlands announced in his press release of 30 January. [13995]

Mr. Heald: Such material as is available will be placed in the Library shortly.

Note:

The Department is, for copyright reasons, unable to provide transcripts of television or radio broadcasts other than radio commercials.

Deaths (Cold Weather)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of people who died as a consequence of the recent cold weather; and if he will break down the figure by assigned cause of death. [13215]

Mr. Horam: I have been asked to reply.

Information about the number of people who died as a consequence of the recent cold weather is not yet available. The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys will be publishing data on excess winter deaths later in the year.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 7 February 1996

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Chernobyl

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of the post-Chernobyl restricted areas have now been designated free from contamination to the extent that animals originating there are deemed fit for human consumption. [13680]

Mrs. Browning: Approximately 94 per cent. of the original area in England which was restricted in 1986 as a result of the Chernobyl accident is now free from contamination such that the animals originating there are totally free from all controls and are fit for human consumption.

In addition, approximately half of the remaining restricted area has been found to be free from contamination but is currently being held under controls due to the open nature of the land and the presence of common grazing.

Sheep Dip

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the development of the research programme on the control of sheep scab and the use of organophosphorus dips. [14420]

Mrs. Browning: My Department has just approved two research projects to investigate alternatives to chemicals such as organophosphorus dips for the control of sheep scab. These will run for three years and cost about £1.2 million. They will form a significant addition to the existing research programme and will be directed to developing and testing new approaches to the identification of possible sheep scab vaccines and identifying the most effective methods of application. Additionally the research will develop models to maximise the impact of future control strategies.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Sentencing Policy

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish his White Paper on changes to sentencing; and what assessment he has made of the effect of the proposals on the prison population in England and Wales. [13280]

Mr. Maclean: We intend to publish a White Paper in the spring setting out full details of the Government's proposals on sentencing, including our assessment of their implications for the prison population.

Law on Manslaughter (Defective Vehicles)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to clarify the law relating to manslaughter to enable operators of seriously defective vehicles which subsequently kill to be liable to charges for serious offences. [13274]

Mr. Maclean: The Law Commission is examining the issue of corporate liability for manslaughter as part of its review of the law on involuntary manslaughter. The Government will consider whether to clarify the law in this area in the light of the commission's final report.

Stop and Search Statistics

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many persons were stopped and searched by police forces in England and Wales during *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1994 and were subsequently (i) arrested, (ii) cautioned and (iii) charged, broken down by ethnic background; [13464]

(2) how many persons who were stopped and searched since 1989 by police forces in England and Wales and subsequently charged, were convicted, breaking down the figures by ethnicity and gender; [13454]

(3) how many of those persons who were stopped and searched since 1989 by the Metropolitan police in England and Wales and subsequently charged, were convicted, breaking down the figures by ethnicity and gender; [13455]

(4) how many persons were stopped and searched by the Metropolitan police in England and Wales during *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1994, and were subsequently (i) arrested, (ii) cautioned and (iii) charged, broken down by ethnic background. [13463]

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to her question on 5 December 1995 *Official Report*, column *212*.

Details of the ethnic group of those stopped and searched during 1994–95 will be available shortly.

Police Cautions (Burglary)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *708*, how many offenders cautioned each year since 1991 had already been cautioned on two or more occasions. [13431]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not routinely collected. The table below shows results from special studies of those cautioned for indictable offences in one week in each of 1991 and 1994 in England and Wales.

Persons cautioned in study week, 1991 and 1994
England and Wales

Percentages

Number of previous cations	*1991*	*1994*
None	80	85
One	12	10
Two or more	8	5

Prisons (Compensation and Damages Payments)

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in each of the past 10 years payments for *(a)* compensation and *(b)* damages with or without the admission of liability, have been offered by his Department to individuals as a result of disturbances in Her Majesty's prisons; if he will list the number of payments and amounts involved on each occasion; and how many other such claims have been made but refused. [13895]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter for prisons in England and Wales has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given. Responsibility for prisons in Northern Ireland and Scotland is a matter for the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland and for Scotland respectively.

Letter from Alan Walker to Mr. Jim Dowd, dated 7 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about payments for compensation and damages which have been made to individuals following disturbances in prisons in England and Wales in each of the last 10 years.

This information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Prisons (Drugs Tests)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many assaults on *(a)* staff and *(b)* prisoners occurred before and after mandatory drugs testing took place in (i) February to April, (ii) May to June and (iii) August to October in (1) 1993, (2) 1994 and (3) 1995 and (iv) November to January in (4) 1993–94, (5) 1994–95 and (6) 1995–96. [13898]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alan Walker to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 7 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the numbers of assaults on staff and prisoners for specific periods back to 1993.

Mandatory drug testing began in eight pilot establishments in February 1995. A phased programme to introduce it to all remaining establishments began in September 1995, with 23 establishments performing mandatory drug testing by the end of October and 94 by the end of January 1996.

The information requested is given in the attached table.

Number of proven adjudications for assaults[1] in prison service establishments, February 1993—January 1996

England and Wales

	Staff/others	*Prisoners*	*Total*
February 1993—April 1993	629	534	1,163
May 1993—June 1993	513	372	885
August 1993—October 1993	788	666	1,454
November 1993—January 1994	920	638	1,558
February 1994—April 1994	815	559	1,374
May 1994—June 1994	541	389	930
August 1994—October 1994	883	640	1,523
November 1994—January 1995[2]	801	624	1,425
February 1995—April 1995[2]	785	611	1,396
May 1995—June 1995[2]	497	444	941
August 1995—October 1995[2]	729	681	1,410
November 1995—January 1996[2]	707	614	1,321

[1] Includes attempting, inciting and assisting in an assault.

[2] Provisional information.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many refusals there were in respect of mandatory drugs testings in prisons in England and Wales; how many urine samples were provided; of those, how many proved positive for *(a)* cannabis only, *(b)* class A drugs only and *(c)* cannabis and class A drugs; how many days' loss of remission there were consequent on refusals; and how many days' loss of remission there were consequent on positive urine tests for (i) February to April, (ii) May to June, (iii) August to October and (iv) November 1995 to January 1996. [13897]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alan Walker to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 7 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about mandatory drug testing.

Between February and November 1995 some 4961 drug screening tests were carried out under the mandatory drug testing programme. Analysis of results from eight pilot prisons over an eight month period show that of those prisoners tested at random, 30.6% tested positive for cannabis while 3.6% tested positive for Class A drugs. Information on the numbers testing positive for both cannabis and Class A drugs is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The attached table shows the number of refusals to provide a sample and the number of addition days added both as a consequence of refusals and as a result of positive urine tests for the periods requested.

Number of proven adjudications and punishments of unsuspended additional days for drug offences

	Number of offences	*Number of days awarded*	*Average number of days*	*Total number of days*
Unauthorised use[1]				
February to April 1995	102	81	5	439
May to June 1995	180	105	9	963
August to October 1995	526	324	11	3,525
November 1995 to January 1996	2,007	1,298	12	15,792

Number of proven adjudications and punishments of unsuspended additional days for drug offences

	Number of offences	Number of days awarded	Average number of days	Total number of days
Refusal to provide a sample[1]				
February to April 1995	15	12	11	127
May to June 1995	29	16	12	191
August to October 1995	32	19	15	290
November 1995 to January 1996	184	98	23	2,225

[1] Includes attempting, inciting and assisting. All figures in these tables are based on provisional information.
The rising numbers of both offences are linked to an increase in establishments performing mandatory drug tests from eight between February and June, to 23 by the end of October and 94 by the end of January.

Public Safety Radio Communications Project

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his Department's involvement in the public safety radio communications project. [13778]

Mr. Maclean: My Department is responsible for managing the public safety radio communications project in close co-operation with representatives of the police and fire services. The procurement, which will be based on the private finance initiative, was formally launched with the appearance of a notice to potential suppliers in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* on 23 January 1996.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what financial and manpower resources he is making available to the public safety radio communications project. [13779]

Mr. Maclean: The public safety radio communications project will employ the equivalent of 19 officers plus consultants in 1996–97 at a cost of approximately £1 million. A substantial sum of money, which is commercially confidential, has been put aside as a contribution to the cost of project definition studies, contracts for which are currently the subject of a European-wide procurement exercise.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what timetable was originally planned for the public safety radio communications project and what is the present timetable. [13780]

Mr. Maclean: The implementation of new radio communications systems for the police service in England and Wales, through the public safety radio communications project, is expected to be completed by 2003. This was the original timetable and has not changed.

Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will announce who will be deputy-chairman of the parliamentary boundary commission for Wales. [14390]

Mr. Sackville: The Lord Chancellor has appointed Mr. Justice Maurice Kay to serve as the deputy chairman of the parliamentary boundary commission for Wales. This appointment is effective until 31 December 1999.

Office of the Data Protection Registrar

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will announce the outcome of the prior options study of the Office of the Data Protection Registrar. [14391]

Mr. Sackville: The study has concluded that there is still a need for the controls provided by the Data Protection Act 1984, and that these should continue to be performed by the Data Protection Registrar as an independent public body. I am placing a copy of the report of the study in the Library.

TREASURY

Flat Rate Income Tax

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will provide a range of estimates on how a flat rate income tax could operate in the United Kingdom; [12609]

(2) what would be the estimated yield in a full year from a flat rate income tax if *(a)* the first (i) £7,000 and (ii) £10,000 of each taxpayers income was exempted from tax, *(b)* no tax allowances or [illegible]ons were allowed against income other then in [illegible] and *(c)* the income tax rates on the income above the levels in *(a)* were (1) 10 per cent., (2) 15 per cent. and (3) 20 per cent. [12608]

Mr. Jack: Estimated full-year costs at 1996–97 income levels are given in the table. These estimates include the abolition of mortgage interest relief and tax relief on employees' contributions to occupational and personal pension schemes. Adjustments have also been made to allow for the abolition of reliefs for TESSAs, PEPs, profit-related pay, national savings certificates, employee share schemes and charitable giving.

The estimates do not take into account the substantial behavioural effects which might result from the introduction of such changes nor do they allow for any subsequent changes to the tax system, such as changes to tax relief on employers' contributions to pension schemes or relief for investment income in pension funds. It is assumed that employers' and employees' national insurance contributions would remain as at present.

Estimates full-year costs at 1996–97 income levels (£ billion)

	Flat rate of income tax		
Income exempt from tax (£)	*10 per cent.*	*15 per cent.*	*20 per cent.*
7,000	45	32	18
10,000	51	40	29

Single European Currency

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what sums have been allocated to each country in the European Union to publicise the benefits of a single European currency. [12602]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Commission is organising publicity for the single currency, taking into account the circumstances in each member state. Community spending is not allocated on a member state basis. The Commission has confirmed that no publicity campaign promoting the single currency will be launched in the UK.

Protocol No. 11, annexed to the EC treaty, means that the United Kingdom shall not be obliged or committed to move to the third stage of economic union without a separate decision to do so by the Government and Parliament. We will agree to take part in a single currency only if it is in our national interest to do so, given the circumstances at the time.

Customs and Excise (London Airports)

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what action he is taking in connection with the Customs and Excise department at London airports, following the investigation by the adjudicator's office into the case of Dr. A. Molnar of Warwick; [13576]

(2) how many Customs and Excise officials have been dismissed or moved to other posts, following the investigation carried out into the strip and search of Dr. A. Molnar of Warwick at Gatwick airport on 23 March 1995; [13577]

(3) if the recommendation from the adjudicator's office that a number of aspects of current procedures by Customs and Excise officers at London airports should be reviewed has been implemented. [13575]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The adjudicator's recommendations were received by customs on 16 January and are currently being considered by senior customs managers. The adjudicator found that the search of Dr. Molnar was not unreasonable. She recommended that some procedural aspects, including the handling of the complaint, should be reviewed. This is being done and the adjudicator will be informed of the outcome of the review. The adjudicator's findings do not justify the dismissal or transfer of any officials concerned in the case.

Banking and Financial Dealings Act

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning possible amendments to schedule 1 to the Banking and Financial Dealings Act 1971 to Scotland; and what reply he has given. [13816]

Mrs. Angela Knight: None.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated annual saving to business from the Deregulation (Industrial and Provident Societies) Order 1996. [13204]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Smaller societies should save an estimated £3 million a year from the increase in the threshold for a full, professional annual audit.

The longer period within which accounts can be prepared should also lead to savings, but these are more difficult to quantify.

EU Statistical Forms

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the Central Statistical Office forms which have been replaced by forms issued under requirements of the European Community. [13641]

Mrs. Knight: In January 1993 the quarterly and annual sales of industry inquires were replaced by the quarterly and annual PRODCOM inquiries. These inquiries are conducted under a Council regulation approved in 1991 to harmonise statistics on products throughout the EU. The product data are broadly comparable with external trade statistics at a detailed level.

Pension Contributions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list in the current year what would be the savings in revenue if pension contributions were allowed at the standard rate only. [12962]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 1 February 1996]:* The estimated full-year yield of restricting relief from pension contributions to the basic rate at 1996–97 income levels would be about £790 million. This is based on a projection of the 1993–94 survey of personal incomes and other survey data in line with assumptions in the Budget forecast. It does not take account of any behavioural effects which might result from the introduction of such changes. The yield represents about 8 per cent. of the total cost of reliefs for pension schemes.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the receipts for advance corporation tax for each of the last 36 months; and what estimate he has made of the total ACT receipts for 1994–95 and 1995–96. [13749]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 5 February 1996]:* Receipts of ACT in 1994–95 were £8.1 billion, and for 1995–96 were forecast at the time of the 1995 Budget to be £9.9 billion. Receipts for each of the last 36 months are as follows:

£ million	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
January	2,913	2,446	2,772
February	90	47	94
March	87	84	100
April	1,482	1,497	1,707
May	146	100	77
June	48	62	62
July	1,906	1,467	1,750
August	55	91	59
September	87	85	122
October	1,481	1,635	1,815
November	24	54	104
December	10	129	[1]107

Note:

The rate of advance corporation tax was reduced from 25 per cent. to 22½ per cent. for 1993–94 and to 20 per cent. from 1994–95.

[1] Provisional.

Source:

"Financial Statistics" table 2.1C.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 25 June 1993, *Official Report*, column *327*, on corporation tax. [13761]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 5 February 1996]:* Latest available figures for turnover, profit before tax, and corporation tax liability of the 25 largest profitable United Kingdom companies and company groups chosen on the basis of turnover in their 1994 accounts are as follows:

	Turnover[1] *£ billion*	*Profit before tax*[1] *£ billion*	*Corporation tax liability*[2] *£ billion*
At current prices			
1989	235	24	3.1
1990	257	26	3.1
1991	258	20	2.8
1992	259	18	2.8
1993	283	20	2.7
1994	295	24	[3]—
At constant 1987 prices			
1989	208	21	2.8
1990	208	21	2.5
1991	197	15	2.1
1992	190	14	2.1
1993	205	14	2.0
1994	208	17	[3]—

[1] World-wide activity reported in published accounts.
[2] After relief for foreign tax.
[3] Not yet available.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update his answer to the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) of 28 June 1993, *Official Report*, column *327*, on corporation tax repayments. [13762]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 5 February 1996]:* The information is as follows:

Corporation tax repayments

Year	*Amount £ million*
1992–93	3,248
1993–94	3,071
1994–95	2,696
1995–96[1]	2,860

[1] Provisional estimate.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will quantify the tax losses which will be made available to Railtrack on privatisation. [13757]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 5 February 1996]:* Details of the tax affairs of identified taxpayers are confidential.

Coal Privatisation

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will quantify the tax losses which will be made available to British Coal on privatisation. [13756]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 5 February 1996]:* Details of the tax affairs of identified taxpayers are confidential.

Tax Relief (Vocational Training)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people claimed tax relief for vocational training for *(a)* NVQ and *(b)* SVQ; and what estimate he has made of how many people will claim relief for other qualifications included under training relief measures in the Budget. [13758]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 5 February 1996]:* The number of people claiming vocation training relief in 1995–96 is estimated at 200,000. A breakdown of this figure between those taking courses that qualify towards national vocational qualifications or Scottish vocational qualifications is not available.

It is estimated that up to an additional 20,000 people will claim vocational training relief as a result of the extension to the relief announced in the Budget.

Unemployed Diabetics

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of diabetics are unemployed; and what percentage lose their jobs following diagnosis. [13594]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 6 February 1996]:* Information is available from the labour force survey about the number of people of working age who, in response to the survey, say that they have a health problem or disability expected to last for more than a year which affects the kind of paid work they can do. In the summer—June to August—1995, 234,000 people among this group said they had diabetes and, of these, 7 per cent. were unemployed on the International Labour Organisation definition.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the capital cost threshold for a private finance initiative scheme at which his Department becomes involved. [13970]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 6 February 1996]:* It is Government policy that the Treasury will not approve any capital projects unless private finance options have been explored, though not necessarily tested in the market place. The level of delegated authority below which Treasury approval is not required is a matter for each Department. There is no set threshold.

Contributions Agency

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Inland Revenue maintains separate records of class 1 and class 1A contributions collected on behalf of the Contributions Agency. [13745]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 5 February 1996]:* The Inland Revenue does not maintain its own separate records of class 1 and class 1A contributions collected on behalf of the Contributions Agency.

PRIME MINISTER

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the criminal incidents since 1985, other than the

blowing up of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie, for which Her Majesty's Government attribute responsibility to Libya. [14047]

The Prime Minister: We believe that Libya was responsible for the murder of a number of Libyan dissidents, mainly in the late 1980s, including some in Europe, but none in Britain.

We also believe that Libya may have been involved in other criminal incidents outside the UK, including the bombing of a UTA flight in September 1989. It would not be appropriate to provide further detail.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the total expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (1) advertising and (2) press and public relations. [11364]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* For these purposes, my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister what is his estimate of expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies, for (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97. [11453]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* For these purposes my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister what is his estimate of the expenditure of his Department, his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11456]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* For these purposes my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Prime Minister which Minister *(a)* took the decision which set the terms of reference for the Scott inquiry, *(b)* took the decision to appoint Sir Richard Scott to head the inquiry and *(c)* took the decision to establish the Scott inquiry. [13994]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer Tuesday 6 February 1996]:* The Government set up the inquiry, as I set out in my parliamentary answer on 16 November 1992, *Official Report*, column *74-75*.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Prime Minister if he will act upon recommendations made in Sir Richard Scott's forthcoming report. [13992]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 6 February 1996]:* The Government will consider carefully any recommendations made by Sir Richard Scott.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Refugee Camps, Africa

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list how many UN refugee camps there are currently in Africa; how many refugees are in each camp; what were the figures three years ago; and if he will make a statement. [13620]

Mr. Hanley: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports that, at 31 December 1994, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 11.8 million refugees in Africa. The corresponding figure at 31 December 1992 was 5.4 million. Precise information on the population of individual camps is not available.

North Korea

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards the appeals by the World Food Programme and the Food and Agricultural Organisation for assistance in alleviating the famine in North Korea; what aid and assistance the British Government have offered those agencies; and if he will make a statement. [13951]

Mr. Hanley: Our policy is to give humanitarian aid where there is a need. We have already donated £150,000 to the flood relief efforts of the United Nations. What is necessary now is to ascertain the scope of the problem in North Korea.

We are therefore funding a secondment to the World Food Programme operation in North Korea, at its request, of two nutritionists from the Save the Children Fund. They will work to and support the WFP country director there. The secondment begins this week.

WALES

Schools (Security)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how he proposes to improve security in primary and secondary schools. [12422]

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has established a working group to advise urgently on what should be done to improve security in and around schools. We shall consider the recommendations made by the group.

Osteoporosis

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many consultants there are specialising in the treatment of osteoporosis in each health authority in Wales. [12993]

Mr. Richards: Information relating to the number of consultants working in the NHS in Wales is collected centrally on the basis of specialties recognised by the royal colleges. Osteoporosis is not one of these recognised specialties and the information requested is not available.

Elderly People (Warmth and Safety)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make grants available for older people to undertake the repairs and improvements needed to make homes warm, safe and secure. [13182]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Grants are already available under the home renovation grant arrangements and the home energy efficiency scheme. The new home repair assistance in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill would replace minor works assistance and be of particular help to older people.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy concerning warmth and energy efficiency for elderly people. [13184]

Mr. Richards: There are a number of measures in place to help pensioners in Wales.

The Welsh Office's annual "Keep Warm Keep Well" campaign, run in conjunction with Age Concern Cymru, advises vulnerable people how to minimise the risks of cold weather and what help is available.

The home energy efficiency scheme provides grants for basic insulation measures to people aged over 60, whether they rent, own or are buying their own homes. The number of homes in Wales insulated in 1994–95 under the HEES was 20,808 at a cost of around £3.3 million. In 1995–96 an estimated 29,750 homes in Wales will benefit at a cost of some £4.8 million.

As at 1 February 1996, an estimated 5,546,795 cold weather payments, at an estimated cost of £47,147,754, have been issued.

Rented Housing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what plans he has to encourage the building of homes at affordable rents by the new unitary authorities; [13180]

(2) if he will make available moneys to the new unitary authorities for building homes for older people with special needs and for those on low income. [13181]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Housing associations are now the main providers of new affordable rented homes, including homes for those with special needs. The Welsh Office is currently discussing with the shadow authorities the opportunities presented by the Housing Bill. The Bill allows for the setting up of local housing companies as registered landlords, which could include board members from the relevant unitary authority to undertake the repair and building of homes.

Electricity Cables

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to require provision of underground main electricity supply cables in areas likely to be particularly affected by adverse weather conditions; and if he will make a statement. [13259]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This is a matter for the companies concerned.

General Practitioners (Patient Lists)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients have been formally removed from registration with their local general practitioners in each of the past five years. [13353]

Mr. Richards: The information requested is not available centrally.

Oil and Gas Licences, Cardigan Bay

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what research has been undertaken or commissioned by his Department to ascertain the extent to which licensed discharge associated oil and gas licences in Cardigan bay will add to the pollutant load in the bay; and if he will place copies of the relevant research documents in the Library. [12411]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None.

Supermarkets

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all *(a)* loans, *(b)* grants and *(c)* other payments in excess of £100,000 which have been made in each of the last five years by the Welsh Office to (i) Gateway, (ii) Safeway, (iii) Waitrose, (iv) Morrisons, (v) Kwiksave, (vi) Sainsburys, (vii) Asda and (viii) Spar (UK) Ltd.; and if he will make a statement. [13704]

Mr. Hague: There were none.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authority Building Control

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which organisations have responded to the draft circular "Local Authority Building Control and Related Services-Approved Inspectors-Uncompetitive Practices"; which organisations supported the publication of the circular; which organisations advised against its publication; and if he will arrange for the responses to be placed in the Library. [12521]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: This was a limited consultation rather than a full public consultation, and in such cases it is not the Department's normal practice to make the responses public by placing them in the Library of the House. Therefore, no statement was made in the consultation letter about publication of the responses, and consultees were not asked whether they wished their replies to be kept confidential. I am not prepared to put the responses in the Library.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the chairman of the National House Building Council about the draft circular "Local Authority Building Control and Related Services-Approved Inspectors-Uncompetitive Practices". [12523]

Mr. Jones: My right hon. Friend has not discussed this circular with the chairman of the National House Building Council.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what complaints he has received about alleged uncompetitive practices in the provision of building control services by local authorities in the last three years; and if he has verified the allegations with the authorities concerned. [12522]

Mr. Jones: I have received a number of complaints about alleged uncompetitive practices in the provision of building control services in the last three years. They were made in strict confidence, and undertakings were given that this would not be breached.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those local authorities and other bodies whose bids for single regeneration budget moneys were unsuccessful in both year one and year two. [13140]

Sir Paul Beresford: Listed below, by region, are the names of the local authorities and other bodies who were the bidders for support from the single regeneration budget challenge fund that were unsuccessful in both year one and year two. It should be noted that in many cases the content of the individual bid and the composition of the partnership submitting it were not identical. A number of the organisations listed were also members of partnerships that were successful in round two.

Region and Lead Bidder

South-east
Kent TEC
Shepway District Council

Eastern
Cambridgeshire TEC
Harlow DC
Huntingdonshire DC
Mid Norfolk Railway Group
Southend BC
Stevenage BC
Waveney DC

South West
Wiltshire CC
North Devon DC
Exeter Business Forum
Devon and Cornwall TEC
Cheltenham BC
Thamesdown BC
Wiltshire TEC
Exeter Homes Committee
WESTEC

West Midlands
Worcester CC
West Midlands European Centre Ltd.
Roapp Hall Ltd.

North-west
Midlands Refugee Council
Bury MBC
Stockport Partnership for Urban Regeneration
Cumbria TEC
Ribble Valley BC
Nissim and Associates
VISIONS Community Designs Ltd.
Gorton Community Forum
Blackstone Edge Outdoor Pursuits and Leisure Centre
Warrington BC

Merseyside
Knowsley MBC
Wirral MBC

London
Westminster CC
Cephas Consultancy Services Ltd.
London Borough of Brent
Bromley by Bow Centre
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham
London Borough of Havering
London Borough of Hounslow
The College of North West London

North-east
Chester le Street DC
Darlington BC
Northumberland CC
Valley Watch

East Midlands
East Midlands Offender Employment Consortium
Amber Valley BC
East Lindsey DC

Yorkshire and Humberside
None

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in rank order the second round single regeneration budget bids showing where each local authorities fell in the index of deprivation *(a)* at local authority level, *(b)* by census enumeration districts and *(c)* by the average score of the worst three wards. [13141]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have placed the information requested in the Library of the House.

Water Abstraction Licensing

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to simplify the system of water abstraction licensing. [13673]

Mr. Clappison: A joint DOE and Welsh Office consultation paper, "Proposed amendments to the Water Resources Act 1991 and the Reservoirs Act 1975", was issued in November 1993. It included plans to simplify the system of water abstraction licensing. A number of these proposals were included with the Environment Act 1995, while those not covered by that Act are being considered under deregulation procedures available under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994.

Education Authorities (Spending)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which local education authorities in England spent below their capping limits in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and, in each case, by how much in cash and percentage of total spending. [13443]

Sir Paul Beresford: The local education authorities which budgeted by more than £50,000 below their capping limits in 1994–95 and 1995–96 are as follows:

(a) 1994–95

	£ million	Percentage of 1994–95 Budget requirement
City of London	0.142	0.2
Kensington and Chelsea	1.553	1.1
Lambeth	9.207	2.9
Southwark	2.706	1.0
Tower Hamlets	1.324	0.5
Wandsworth	14.681	6.2
Westminster	25.496	13.1
Barking and Dagenham	0.513	0.4
Bexley	2.848	1.9
Brent	8.729	3.5
Bromley	9.095	5.2
Croydon	3.844	1.6
Ealing	13.974	5.6
Enfield	0.121	0.1
Harrow	0.299	0.2
Havering	3.821	2.5
Kingston upon Thames	2.778	3.1
Redbridge	3.040	1.8
Richmond upon Thames	0.399	0.4
Trafford	2.491	1.7
Sandwell	3.868	1.6
Solihull	2.553	2.1
Wolverhampton	6.222	3.0
Bradford	8.299	2.1
Buckinghamshire	1.001	0.2
Cheshire	0.105	0.02
Hampshire	20.860	2.3
West Sussex	4.703	1.1
Isles of Scilly	0.089	3.7

(b) 1995–96

	£ million	Percentage of 1995–96 budget requirement
City of London	0.936	0.9
Kensington and Chelsea	3.178	2.2
Lambeth	8.848	2.9
Westminster	29.011	13.6
Barking and Dagenham	0.425	0.3
Brent	18.368	7.9
Bromley	8.202	4.4
Croydon	0.099	0.04
Ealing	11.915	5.0
Kirklees	4.764	1.7
Cheshire	0.150	0.03
Essex	8.876	1.0
Isles of Scilly	0.164	6.2

Commission for the New Towns

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future of the Commission for the New Towns. [13893]

Sir Paul Beresford: We are considering what should be the arrangements from March 1998. Suitable enabling provisions are included in part V of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill.

Ebbsfleet New Town

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for a new town at Ebbsfleet; and if he will make a statement. [14041]

Sir Paul Beresford: The regional planning guidance for the Thames gateway—the Thames gateway planning framework, RPG9a—identifies Kent Thames-side, including the Ebbsfleet valley, and Stratford and the royal docks in east London, as the two main locations within the area where substantial growth can be expected. It is for the market to respond to these development opportunities. I understand that an application for outline planning permission for a mixed housing and commercial development on a 176 hectare—435 acre—site adjoining the proposed Ebbsfleet international and domestic channel tunnel rail link station has recently been submitted jointly to Dartford and Gravesham borough councils.

Polychlorinated Biphenyls, Cardigan Bay

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is taking *(a)* to identify the source of polychlorinated biphenyls recently found at high levels in cetaecan carcases washed up in Cardigan bay and *(b)* to eliminate polychlorinated biphenyls from the environment of Cardigan bay. [12410]

Mr. Clappison: Long use of PCBs before the ban of production and new use in this country in 1986 means that they still remain at detectable levels within flora and fauna through deposition and food chains in all areas. Investigations of contaminants in stranded cetaceans in Great Britain since 1990 have included 10 carcases at Cardigan bay in which levels of PCBs were comparatively high but similar to those found elsewhere.

Within further attempts to reduce and eliminate PCBs, the Government will be issuing an action plan very shortly, reflecting consultations on proposals to eliminate all identifiable holdings of PCBs by the end of 1999.

River Kennet

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will propose the River Kennet as a special area of conservation. [12404]

Mr. Clappison: The statutory nature conservation agencies are currently considering the representations which have been made during consultation for additions to the list of possible special areas of conservation. The River Kennet is included in these considerations and the agencies will advise in due course as to any additional sites which could qualify as possible SACs.

Gas Safety

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many times the Health and Safety Executive has been contacted by tenants with concerns about the safety of gas appliances since the introduction of the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1994; and how many visits it has made to premises. [13705]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is not available.

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many offences have been committed under section 33 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 in relation to the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1994 since their introduction. [13706]

Sir Paul Beresford: Between 31 October 1994, when the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations came into force, and 31 March 1995, the latest date for which information is readily available, the Health and Safety Executive secured two[1] convictions under the regulations.

Note:

[1] Provisional.

Rents

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals were made by *(a)* tenants and *(b)* landlords against rent officers' determinations of rent broken down into secure tenants of housing associations and regulated tenants of private landlords by rent office district. [13707]

Mr. Clappison: Rent assessment committees do not record for statistical purposes whether the appellant against a rent officer determination is the landlord or the tenant. Nor do they distinguish between secure tenants of housing associations and regulated private tenants. Statistics are available for the total number of registered fair rent appeal cases dealt with by rent assessment committees by rent regulation area. A table giving figures for each of the last six years is given:

Registration area	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Barking and Dagenham	16	16	13	33	25	11
Barnet	145	241	545	260	226	152
Bexley	38	49	115	32	92	28
Brent	233	170	293	359	223	297
Bromley	78	108	199	101	122	66
City	0	14	0	11	1	0
Camden	263	282	287	392	269	200
Croydon	43	38	92	95	91	106
Ealing	62	170	150	165	149	105
Enfield	59	70	97	103	81	95
Greenwich	43	45	70	68	38	64
Hackney	160	118	154	347	196	170
Hammersmith and Fulham	167	519	245	297	263	186
Haringey	159	86	141	125	109	173
Harrow	45	124	102	140	52	76
Havering	10	29	81	56	33	49
Hillingdon	11	30	39	32	98	65
Hounslow	75	34	134	78	102	117
Islington	72	124	268	98	94	59
Kensington and Chelsea	730	811	315	368	535	420
Kingston upon Thames	65	36	51	100	73	36
Lambeth	370	566	870	430	347	202
Lewisham	143	97	144	198	175	192
Merton	57	50	148	101	94	70
Newham	87	213	192	155	220	174
Redbridge	77	143	97	150	92	166
Richmond on Thames	32	83	40	116	108	65
Southwark	134	126	209	162	414	90
Sutton	169	61	173	92	67	71
Tower Hamlets	31	70	383	282	145	153
Waltham Forest	150	348	247	318	243	224
Wandsworth	304	631	559	339	241	283
Westminster	306	692	1,263	744	584	324
Avon	230	257	269	146	190	116
Bedfordshire	161	42	106	88	80	39
Berkshire	83	119	110	112	107	52
Buckinghamshire	135	94	146	42	106	47
Cambridgeshire	81	116	52	79	47	44
Cheshire	156	1,346	803	112	180	285
Cleveland	174	135	105	114	387	327
Cornwall	51	91	40	42	51	31
Cumbria	70	87	78	87	31	147
Derbyshire	234	239	151	464	202	232
Devon	280	182	143	286	215	150
Dorset	157	174	181	309	121	107
Durham	52	51	17	139	242	98
East Sussex	159	117	424	258	126	138
Essex	185	120	215	382	207	115
Gloucestershire	229	169	141	60	37	36
Greater Manchester	1,253	900	779	976	735	717
Hampshire	315	362	372	426	239	242
Hereford and Worcester	179	154	69	50	37	49
Hertfordshire	55	92	113	97	91	123

Registration area	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Humberside	351	448	356	226	87	123
Isle of Wight	74	26	30	12	30	24
Kent	244	337	456	253	295	97
Lancashire	214	121	176	733	452	530
Leicestershire	299	106	286	97	209	61
Lincolnshire	92	74	24	67	76	48
Merseyside	3,065	1,767	3,492	1,993	1,169	1,026
Norfolk	122	106	88	97	139	104
Northumberland	162	68	81	74	124	27
Northamptonshire	189	35	81	57	18	61
North Yorkshire	58	68	153	133	84	77
Nottinghamshire	747	533	319	512	259	259
Oxfordshire	47	62	38	368	104	50
Shropshire	64	24	22	47	19	62
Somerset	24	28	18	46	32	36
South Yorkshire	237	222	316	213	271	294
Staffordshire	462	250	282	297	302	230
Suffolk	94	56	54	102	68	98
Surrey	98	99	292	146	186	159
Tyne and Wear	140	180	223	384	363	181
Warwickshire	172	76	161	103	111	62
West Midlands	721	1,243	647	797	436	856
West Sussex	53	300	132	146	162	145
West Yorkshire	564	460	504	609	574	489
Wiltshire	95	105	33	73	36	25
	16,961	17,835	20,294	18,219	14,639	12,708

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was the weekly rate of *(a)* requests for information and *(b)* applications for grants under the home energy efficiency scheme in (i) December 1994, (ii) January 1995, (iii) December 1995 and (iv) January 1996; [13975]

(2) how many applications for grants under the home energy efficiency scheme have been received in the current financial year to the latest available date. [13976]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Information is collected on a monthly basis, and is as follows:

Month	Requests for information	Grant applications
December 1994	23,519	19,479
January 1995	25,303	33,774
December 1995	22,277	44,867
January 1996	36,089	84,723

Between 1 April 1995 and 2 February 1996, 536,669 applications for grant under the home energy efficiency scheme were made.

Housing Transfers

Mr. Ashby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the names of the authorities to be included in the programme for housing transfers by councils in 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [14299]

Mr. Curry: I am today announcing the names of the five authorities that will be able to proceed, on a voluntary basis and subject to the approval of their tenants, with proposals to transfer their housing stock to private sector landlords in 1996–97. The programme of large-scale voluntary transfers will comprise almost 21,000 dwellings valued at £172 million.

This reflects the Government's commitment to a continuing programme of transfers as a means of generating private finance to repair and improve the condition of social housing and to increase diversity and choice for tenants.

The five authorities which have successfully gained a place on the programme, together with the intended recipient housing associations are as follows:

(a) Berwick-upon-Tweed borough council (2,750 dwellings) to Berwick Housing Associations;

(b) Lichfield district council (4,955 dwellings) to Lichfield District Housing Association;

(c) South Staffordshire district council (5,354 dwellings) to South Staffordshire Housing Association;

(d) Stratford-on-Avon district council (5,800 dwellings) to South Warwickshire Housing Association.

(e) West Wiltshire district council (1,958 dwellings) to West Wiltshire Housing Society.

To date, 45 authorities have disposed of all or part of their stock to new landlords and seven more are due to do so by the end of this financial year. In addition to the five authorities listed above, other authorities are working up proposals to transfer. There will be opportunities to add them to the 1996 programme if they make good progress with their proposals over the coming months.

The Government are committed to a continuing programme of transfers and to extending the benefits of transfer to urban and non-traditional housing. We also

intend to widen the range of recipient landlords from traditional housing associations to local housing companies, subject to Parliament approving the Housing Bill, and to private sector companies, subject to future legislation. Transfers will remain voluntary and require tenant support, as they do now.

Environmental Action Fund

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he intends to distribute the environmental action fund for 1996–97. [14419]

Mr. Clappison: I have today placed in the Library of the House details of the distribution of environmental action fund for 1996–97: 126 grants in 1996–97 totalling more than £4 million will be made available. Matching funding requirements will ensure that as much again from private sources is channelled into environmental action. I am also increasing the amount ring-fenced for small community projects to £300,000.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future of local government in Hereford and Worcester; and when he expects to lay the order for the unitary authority of Herefordshire before Parliament. [13593]

Mr. Curry *[holding answer 6 February 1996]:* We have accepted the Local Government Commission's recommendation that there should be a unitary authority for Herefordshire on its historic boundaries. We hope to make an announcement soon on the timing of the reorganisation.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the total expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity for 1995–96 *(a)* to date and *(b)* as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (1) advertising and (2) press and public relations. [11372]

Mr. Willetts: Expenditure on publicity by the Cabinet Office, including the Prime Minister's office and the Office of Public Service, and its executive agencies, excluding Her Majesty's Stationary Office and the Buying Agency, is as follows:

	1993–94 £	*1994–95* £
Cabinet Office		
Advertising	5,000	60,300
Press and public relations	1,085,400	1,156,300
Other publicity	260,700	406,300
Total Cabinet Office (including NDPBs)	1,351,100	1,622,900
Executive agencies (excluding HMSO and TBA)		
Advertising	119,900	167,200
Press and public relations	13,100	37,800
Other publicity	0	0
Total executive agencies	133,000	205,000

Expenditure by HMSO and the Buying Agency, which have a different accounting year, is as follows:

	1993 £	*1994* £	*1995* £
HMSO and TBA			
Advertising	1,494,000	1,776,000	2,297,700
Press and public relations	16,000	8,000	18,200
Other publicity	872,000	876,000	1,062,000
Total HMSO and TBA	2,382,000	2,660,000	3,377,900

Details of expenditure in earlier years is available only at disproportionate cost. Figures for 1995–96 and 1996–97 are not yet available.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is his estimate of expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies, for *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97. [11500]

Mr. Willetts: Expenditure by the Cabinet Office including the Prime Minister's office and the Office of Public Service, and its executive agencies, excluding HMSO and the Buying Agency, on hospitality and entertainment was £62,100 in 1993–94, and £70,300 in 1994–95.

Expenditure on hospitality and entertainment by HMSO and the Buying Agency, both of which have a calendar-based accounting year, was £72,000 in 1993, £105,000 in 1994 and £97,000 in 1995. This includes expenditure on book launches and associated costs.

Details of expenditure in earlier years is available only at disproportionate cost. Figures for 1995–96 and 1996–97 are not yet available.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is his estimate of the expenditure of his Department and his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses for *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97. [11507]

Mr. Willetts: Expenditure by the Cabinet Office, including the Prime Minister's office and the Office of Public Service, and its executive agencies, excluding HMSO and the Buying Agency, on overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses was £1,178,000 in 1993–94, and £1,636,500 in 1994–95.

Expenditure on overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses by HMSO and the Buying Agency, both of which have a calendar-based accounting year, was £1,539,000 in 1993, £2,110,000 in 1994 and £2,136,000 in 1995.

Details of expenditure in earlier years is available only at disproportionate cost. Figures for 1995–96 and 1996–97 are not yet available.

Deregulation

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many of the proposed deregulation measures set out in "Deregulation—The Way Forward" have completed their periods of consultation with relevant interested parties and have been referred to the Deregulation Committee. [13671]

Mr. Freeman: Twenty-four of the 121 proposed deregulation measures set out in "Deregulation—The Way Forward" were identified as possible deregulation orders which might be referred to the Deregulation Committee. Of these, 13 have now been laid before the Committee and one, containing a number of measures to assist building societies, has been enacted.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the 10 most recent measures which he proposes to repeal by way of deregulation orders. [13672]

Mr. Freeman: The 10 most recent proposals for deregulation orders put to the deregulation committee are:

The Deregulation (Resolutions of Private Companies) Order;

The Deregulation (Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Act 1868) Order;

The Deregulation (Parking Equipment) Order;

The Deregulation (Special Hours Certificates) Order;

The Deregulation (Long Pull) Order;

The Deregulation (Motor Vehicles Tests) Order;

The Deregulation (Gaming Machines and Betting Office Facilities) Order;

The Deregulation (Still Birth and Death Registration) Order;

The Deregulation (Industrial and Provident Societies) Order;

The Deregulation (Gun Barrel Proving) Order.

Copies of all these proposals are available in the Vote Office of the House.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

General Certificate of Secondary Education Results

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will *(a)* provide for 1992 the simple aggregate averages of (i) the GCSE average point scores, (ii) the percentages achieving at least 5 grades A* to C, (iii) the percentages achieving the least 5 grades A* to G and (iv) the percentages achieving at least one grade A* to G of the schools of each 10th group of all maintained schools with 15-year-old pupils when ranked by their average point scores (A* = 7), *(b)* the same averages for each of those 10 groups of the same schools in 1993, 1994 and 1995, so far as possible in the case of any closures, *(c)* the number of schools and the total number of 15-year-old pupils in each 10th group in each year and *(d)* the percentages of each 10th group of these schools that were inspected by Ofsted in the their annual inspections in 1993–94, in 1994–95 and in 1993–95. [12897]

Mrs. Gillan: The following lists for maintained secondary schools in England for 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1995 shows (i) the average GCSE point scores, (ii) the average percentages achieving five or more GCSE grades A* to C, (iii) the average percentages achieving five or more GCSE grades A* to G, (v) the number of schools and (vi) the number of 15-year-old pupils in 10th group ranked by average GCSE point scores in 1992. These figures are based on the school performance tables published in the relevant years. The groups are based on schools that appeared in 1992 and these same schools have been followed through for 1993, 1994 and 1995. The group averages are simple averages which are not weighted by number of pupils in individual schools within a group.

The number of schools inspected by Ofsted is a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

15–year-old pupils in maintained schools in England. Schools in 1992, matched to those in 1993, 1994 and 1995

School performance tables 1992

	GCSE average point score	*Percentage achieving:* 5 A*–C	5 A*–G	1 A*–G	*Number of schools*	*Number of 15-year-olds*
Group 1	45.6	70.7	96.3	98.2	429	60,081
Group 2	37.2	48.1	92.5	97.4	428	71,539
Group 3	34.0	41.3	90.0	96.7	429	70,639
Group 4	31.2	35.2	87.0	95.5	428	67,672
Group 5	28.1	28.3	83.4	94.0	429	69,179
Group 6	24.8	22.4	77.9	91.2	429	62,885
Group 7	20.6	15.1	68.5	87.0	428	58,183
Group 8	10.1	4.5	31.2	69.5	429	29,071
Group 9	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.6	428	6,150
Group 10	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	429	1,657
Total	23.2	26.6	62.7	73.1	4,286	497,056

School performance tables 1993

	GCSE average point score	Percentages achieving: 5 A*–C	5 A*–G	1 A*–G	Number of schools	Number of 15-year-olds
Group 1	46.2	71.1	96.7	98.5	427	60,263
Group 2	38.1	49.9	93.0	97.6	426	69,830
Group 3	35.4	43.6	91.1	97.1	427	68,233
Group 4	32.7	37.6	88.4	96.4	426	64,857
Group 5	29.9	31.6	85.0	94.7	425	66,168
Group 6	26.6	25.0	79.7	92.2	425	58,815
Group 7	22.6	17.7	72.3	89.0	413	53,215
Group 8	11.9	6.4	37.9	69.7	350	25,612
Group 9	0.3	0.1	0.4	4.4	410	5,510
Group 10	0.1	0.0	0.0	2.3	386	1,733
Total	24.9	29.1	65.8	75.2	4,115	474,236

School performance tables 1994

	GCSE average point score	Percentages achieving: 4 A*–C	5 A*–G	1 A*–G	Number of schools	Number of 15-year-olds
Group 1	47.6	73.2	97.1	98.4	426	61,614
Group 2	39.5	52.5	93.7	97.0	426	71,638
Group 3	36.5	46.1	91.7	96.3	427	70,403
Group 4	34.3	40.2	89.8	95.5	426	66,510
Group 5	31.1	33.2	86.6	93.7	424	66,821
Group 6	27.7	26.8	81.4	90.8	422	60,435
Group 7	23.7	19.8	74.2	86.9	407	53,430
Group 8	12.6	7.5	41.2	69.6	338	24,769
Group 9	0.5	0.2	0.7	7.5	405	5,602
Group 10	0.2	0.0	0.1	2.7	364	1,673
Total	26.2	31.1	67.5	75.3	4,065	482,895

School performance tables 1995

	GCSE average point score	Percentages achieving: 5 A*–C	5 A*–G	1 A*–G	Number of schools	Number of 15-year-olds
Group 1	48.7	74.1	97.2	98.5	426	66,857
Group 2	39.9	53.0	93.8	96.8	424	77,493
Group 3	37.2	46.6	91.9	96.1	426	76,343
Group 4	34.9	41.1	90.9	95.3	425	72,660
Group 5	31.5	33.4	86.9	93.6	423	73,193
Group 6	28.2	27.6	82.0	90.5	418	64,953
Group 7	24.3	20.0	75.7	87.2	402	57,459
Group 8	13.5	7.7	43.0	69.0	321	25,780
Group 9	0.6	0.3	1.0	8.2	395	5,894
Group 10	0.2	0.0	0.4	3.5	347	1,721
Total	26.9	31.9	68.5	75.7	4,007	522,353

Job Advertisements

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many jobs have been advertised in each grade in her Department during the last three months for which records are available; and how many people have applied for each such job. [13833]

Mr. Robin Squire: No permanent jobs have been advertised for external recruitment to this Department during the three months from November 1995 to January 1996.

Departmental Staff (IT Skills)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of civil servants in her Department have had *(a)* no training in information technology skills, *(b)* initial awareness training only, *(c)* initial awareness training and one additional in-service course, *(d)* initial awareness training and more than one additional in-service course and *(e)* award-bearing in-service course. [13555]

Mr. Robin Squire: Around 10 per cent. of Department for Education and Employment staff have not yet received training in information technology skills.

Approximately 90 per cent. of Department staff have received at least initial awareness training only.

Information on the proportion of staff who have had initial awareness training only; initial awareness training and one additional in-service course; initial awareness training and more than one additional in-service course; and an award-bearing in-service course is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Local Education Authorities (Expenditure)

Sir Anthony Durant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average cost per pupil aged *(a)* under five years, *(b)* five to seven years, *(c)* seven to 11 years, *(d)* 11 to 16 years and *(e)* 16 to 18 years in each English local education authority in 1974, 1979, 1990 and the latest year for which figures are available. [13840]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following tables show the net institutional expenditure per pupil in cash and in 1995 prices for English local education authority maintained *(a)* pre-primary and primary and *(b)* secondary schools, for 1974–75, 1979–80, 1990–91 and 1993–94, and unit costs for each LEA for 1990–91 and 1993–94, the latest year for which outturn figures are available. The other information requested is not available centrally.

Average unit costs net institutional expenditure

	Pre-primary and primary		*Secondary*	
	cash £	*1995 prices* £	*cash* £	*1995 prices* £
1974–75	201	1,054	319	1,673
1979–80	429	1,072	607	1,517
1990–91	1,339	1,552	2,019	2,341
1993–94	1,630	1,661	2,245	2,287

LEA unit costs
net institutional expenditure

	1990–91				*1993–94*			
LEAs	*Pre-primary and primary cash* £	*1995 prices* £	*Secondary cash* £	*1995 prices* £	*Pre-primary and primary cash* £	*1995 prices* £	*Secondary cash* £	*1995 prices* £
Corporation of London	1,952	2,263	0	0	3,587	3,655	0	0
Camden	1,708	1,980	2,290	2,654	2,047	2,086	2,716	2,767
Greenwich	1,769	2,050	2,383	2,763	2,009	2,047	2,583	2,631
Hackney	1,901	2,203	2,707	3,138	1,958	1,995	2,617	2,667
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,970	2,284	2,667	3,092	2,534	2,581	3,329	3,392
Islington	1,766	2,047	2,438	2,826	2,719	2,771	3,005	3,061
Kensington and Chelsea	2,058	2,386	2,904	3,366	2,394	2,438	3,266	3,327
Lambeth	1,840	2,133	2,583	2,994	2,666	2,716	3,296	3,358
Lewisham	1,713	1,986	2,432	2,819	2,058	2,097	2,614	2,663
Southwark	1,852	2,147	2,351	2,725	1,806	1,840	2,421	2,467
Tower Hamlets	1,939	2,248	2,491	2,888	2,656	2,706	3,157	3,216
Wandsworth	1,820	2,110	2,518	2,919	2,139	2,179	2,795	2,848
City of Westminster	2,107	2,443	3,008	3,487	2,592	2,641	2,739	2,791
Barking	1,457	1,689	2,304	2,671	1,790	1,823	2,355	2,399
Barnet	1,549	1,795	2,112	2,449	2,006	2,044	2,952	3,008
Bexley	1,260	1,460	1,966	2,279	1,573	1,602	2,341	2,385
Brent	1,670	1,936	2,359	2,735	1,633	1,663	1,835	1,869
Bromley	1,415	1,640	2,221	2,575	1,525	1,554	2,280	2,323
Croydon	1,441	1,670	2,081	2,412	1,793	1,827	2,309	2,353
Ealing	1,688	1,956	2,576	2,986	1,915	1,951	2,575	2,623
Enfield	1,428	1,655	2,014	2,334	1,768	1,801	2,531	2,579
Haringey	1,837	2,129	2,588	3,000	2,236	2,278	3,041	3,098
Harrow	1,482	1,718	2,323	2,693	1,913	1,949	2,439	2,485
Havering	1,294	1,500	2,136	2,476	1,636	1,666	2,290	2,333
Hillingdon	1,541	1,787	2,339	2,711	1,804	1,838	2,670	2,720
Hounslow	1,507	1,747	2,057	2,385	1,935	1,971	2,282	2,325
Kingston upon Thames	1,434	1,663	2,242	2,599	1,728	1,760	2,284	2,327
Merton	1,754	2,034	1,988	2,305	1,853	1,888	2,463	2,509
Newham	1,491	1,729	2,409	2,792	1,708	1,740	2,563	2,611
Redbridge	1,350	1,565	2,122	2,460	1,640	1,671	2,526	2,573
Richmond upon Thames	1,528	1,771	1,987	2,303	1,794	1,827	2,280	2,323
Sutton	1,362	1,579	2,076	2,406	1,639	1,670	1,978	2,015
Waltham Forest	1,569	1,819	2,648	3,069	1,821	1,855	2,526	2,574
Birmingham	1,262	1,463	2,052	2,379	1,572	1,601	2,330	2,374
Coventry	1,301	1,509	2,342	2,716	1,684	1,715	2,469	2,516
Dudley	1,233	1,430	2,097	2,430	1,490	1,518	2,098	2,138
Sandwell	1,447	1,677	2,296	2,661	1,681	1,713	2,349	2,393
Solihull	1,239	1,436	2,084	2,416	1,574	1,603	2,217	2,259
Walsall	1,515	1,756	2,184	2,531	1,672	1,704	2,281	2,324
Wolverhampton	1,388	1,609	2,121	2,459	1,357	1,382	2,300	2,343

LEA unit costs
net institutional expenditure

LEAs	1990–91 Pre-primary and primary cash £	1990–91 1995 prices £	1990–91 Secondary cash £	1990–91 1995 prices £	1993–94 Pre-primary and primary cash £	1993–94 1995 prices £	1993–94 Secondary cash £	1993–94 1995 prices £
Knowsley	1,386	1,606	2,227	2,582	1,485	1,513	2,243	2,285
Liverpool	1,285	1,490	2,252	2,610	1,586	1,616	2,613	2,662
St. Helens	1,211	1,404	1,962	2,274	1,605	1,635	2,315	2,358
Sefton	1,258	1,458	2,029	2,353	1,448	1,475	2,204	2,245
Wirral	1,279	1,482	2,112	2,448	1,552	1,581	2,299	2,343
Bolton	1,221	1,415	1,950	2,261	1,581	1,610	2,119	2,159
Bury	1,193	1,383	1,808	2,096	1,432	1,459	1,979	2,016
Manchester	1,321	1,532	2,146	2,488	1,547	1,576	2,328	2,371
Oldham	1,370	1,588	1,922	2,228	1,645	1,676	2,278	2,321
Rochdale	1,199	1,390	2,135	2,475	1,307	1,331	1,974	2,011
Salford	1,267	1,469	2,146	2,487	1,505	1,533	2,215	2,257
Stockport	1,261	1,462	2,029	2,352	1,466	1,493	2,310	2,353
Tameside	1,316	1,526	1,939	2,248	1,442	1,470	2,095	2,135
Trafford	1,173	1,360	2,076	2,407	1,428	1,455	2,156	2,197
Wigan	1,144	1,327	2,096	2,430	1,437	1,464	2,141	2,181
Barnsley	1,262	1,463	1,821	2,112	1,539	1,568	2,101	2,141
Doncaster	1,255	1,455	1,861	2,157	1,425	1,452	2,022	2,060
Rotherham	1,336	1,549	1,959	2,271	1,723	1,755	2,271	2,313
Sheffield	1,386	1,607	2,086	2,418	1,573	1,602	2,119	2,159
Bradford	1,497	1,735	1,777	2,060	1,654	1,685	1,969	2,006
Calderdale	1,441	1,670	2,094	2,427	1,607	1,637	2,162	2,203
Kirklees	1,295	1,502	1,920	2,226	1,579	1,608	2,207	2,248
Leeds	1,428	1,656	1,920	2,226	1,647	1,677	2,164	2,204
Wakefield	1,339	1,553	1,989	2,305	1,577	1,607	2,150	2,191
Gateshead	1,391	1,613	2,078	2,409	1,664	1,696	2,252	2,294
Newcastle upon Tyne	1,519	1,761	1,992	2,309	1,697	1,729	2,187	2,228
North Tyneside	1,308	1,516	1,929	2,236	1,469	1,496	1,995	2,032
South Tyneside	1,287	1,402	2,087	2,420	1,463	1,491	1,948	1,985
Sunderland	1,277	1,481	1,933	2,241	1,509	1,538	2,114	2,154
Isles of Scilly	1,770	2,052	4,387	5,086	2,401	2,446	4,415	4,498
Avon	1,316	1,526	1,944	2,254	1,571	1,601	2,288	2,331
Bedfordshire	1,384	1,605	1,877	2,175	1,639	1,670	2,103	2,143
Berkshire	1,339	1,553	1,949	2,259	1,592	1,622	2,214	2,255
Buckinghamshire	1,322	1,533	2,052	2,379	1,735	1,768	2,286	2,329
Cambridgeshire	1,259	1,460	1,881	2,181	1,534	1,563	1,956	1,992
Cheshire	1,255	1,455	1,955	2,266	1,483	1,511	2,106	2,145
Cleveland	1,229	1,425	2,034	2,358	1,461	1,488	2,129	2,169
Cornwall	1,189	1,378	1,887	2,187	1,535	1,564	2,160	2,201
Cumbria	1,342	1,556	1,990	2,307	1,667	1,698	2,216	2,258
Derbyshire	1,367	1,585	2,108	2,443	1,600	1,630	2,214	2,256
Devon	1,310	1,518	1,950	2,261	1,503	1,531	2,157	2,198
Dorset	1,292	1,498	1,807	2,095	1,485	1,513	2,065	2,104
Durham	1,366	1,584	1,902	2,205	1,664	1,695	2,114	2,154
East Sussex	1,239	1,437	1,983	2,299	1,643	1,674	2,270	2,313
Essex	1,241	1,439	1,953	2,263	1,724	1,757	2,286	2,329
Gloucestershire	1,203	1,395	1,912	2,216	1,523	1,552	2,084	2,123
Hampshire	1,261	1,462	1,967	2,281	1,583	1,613	2,180	2,221
Hereford and Worcester	1,359	1,575	1,841	2,135	1,617	1,647	2,038	2,076
Hertfordshire	1,338	1,551	2,067	2,396	1,664	1,695	2,245	2,287
Humberside	1,282	1,487	1,833	2,125	1,621	1,651	2,257	2,299
Isle of Wight	1,249	1,448	1,757	2,036	1,598	1,628	2,027	2,065
Kent	1,120	1,299	1,803	2,090	1,397	1,423	2,079	2,118
Lancashire	1,311	1,520	1,948	2,258	1,669	1,701	2,347	2,391
Leicestershire	1,291	1,496	2,095	2,428	1,629	1,660	2,263	2,306
Lincolnshire	1,214	1,408	1,905	2,209	1,496	1,524	2,322	2,366
Norfolk	1,285	1,489	1,991	2,309	1,585	1,615	2,309	2,352
North Yorkshire	1,234	1,431	2,024	2,346	1,555	1,584	2,187	2,228
Northamptonshire	1,226	1,421	1,797	2,083	1,522	1,550	2,125	2,165
Northumberland	1,321	1,531	1,806	2,094	1,686	1,718	2,083	2,122
Nottinghamshire	1,390	1,612	2,220	2,573	1,653	1,684	2,381	2,426
Oxfordshire	1,565	1,815	2,157	2,500	1,765	1,799	2,191	2,232
Shropshire	1,353	1,569	2,104	2,440	1,577	1,607	2,354	2,398
Somerset	1,226	1,421	1,854	2,150	1,583	1,613	2,138	2,178
Staffordshire	1,266	1,468	1,925	2,232	1,534	1,563	2,078	2,117
Suffolk	1,310	1,519	2,023	2,346	1,673	1,704	2,190	2,231
Surrey	1,341	1,554	2,105	2,440	1,701	1,733	2,215	2,257
Warwickshire	1,219	1,413	1,895	2,196	1,555	1,584	2,420	2,466
West Sussex	1,240	1,437	1,908	2,212	1,579	1,608	2,467	2,514
Wiltshire	1,264	1,465	1,890	2,191	1,521	1,550	2,379	2,424

Employment Service (Pay Dispute)

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to resolve the pay dispute in the Employment Service; and if she will make a statement. [14044]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Nicholas Harvey, dated 7 February 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the current trade dispute within the Employment Service; responsibility for pay bargaining was delegated to the Agency in January 1994.

The Agency is in dispute with the Civil & Public Services Association (CPSA) over the 1995 pay award to those of our employees in grades represented by that union. These ES people have been paid increases, with effect from April 1995, of between 2.8% and 5.5%, depending upon their individual performance in the year ending March 1995. The majority of them received pay rises of more than 3.7%. We have made clear from the outset our view that these pay awards are fair, and are set at a level that is all the Agency can afford.

The pay awards were in addition to a 2.3% increase, also paid in April, for this group of employees as a consequence of CPSA agreement to a new pay structure for the grades in question.

The Employment Service remains committed to finding an early resolution to the dispute to enable us to resume our normal level of service to the jobseekers who use the 50 offices currently affected by strike action. Whilst we cannot and will not improve the 1995 pay award, we have offered to make specific provision during the 1996 pay negotiations to address particular issues which have been raised by the CPSA. It is for the union to decide whether to take the opportunity presented by the offer to end the dispute.

I hope that this is helpful.

European Union Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on which occasions in the last three years officials have vetoed draft EC legislation on the grounds that a fiche d'impact had not been correctly prepared. [13639]

Mr. Forth: The correct preparation of fiches d'impact is a very important part of our consideration of proposals for European Community legislation. It is one of the factors taken into account when Ministers consider the United Kingdom's negotiating position on a particular proposal.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how he ensures that the negotiating brief for his officials discussing EU legislation takes fully into account the need to minimise the burdens on United Kingdom business. [13708]

Mr. Forth: Guidance on how officials are to apply deregulatory principles when negotiating EC regulations is contained in the booklet, "Getting a Good Deal in Europe". This guidance has been supplemented by the recent publication of official guidance on the preparation of compliance cost assessments, which stresses that likely burdens on business highlighted by UK compliance cost assessments of EC proposals should be integral to the UK's negotiating strategy. Copies of both pieces of guidance are in the Library.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was *(a)* the number of schools which submitted bids for named projects, *(b)* the number of schools which had bids carried forward from 1995–96, *(c)* the number of individual projects for which bids were considered, *(d)* the total value of projects for which bids are considered, *(e)* the number of schools which have had an allocation for a project to be started in 1996–97, *(f)* the number of individual projects which have been approved for start in 1996–97 and *(g)* the total value of projects to be started in 1996–97 in respect of capital grant for grant-maintained schools in 1996–97. [13967]

Mrs. Gillan: This is a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member with this information.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance was given to grant-maintained schools on submitting bids for capital grant in 1996–97. [13943]

Mrs. Gillan: This is a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member with this information.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list those grant-maintained schools where capital grant is being allocated in 1996–97 to meet basic need giving, in each case, the number of additional places being made available. [13962]

Mrs. Gillan: This is a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member with this information.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the grant-maintained schools which *(a)* submitted bids or *(b)* had bids carried forward from 1995–96 for named projects to be funded from capital grant in 1996–97; and, in each case, what was the nature and value of the bid and of any allocation made. [13964]

Mrs. Gillan: This is a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member with this information.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list those grant-maintained schools which have applied for a significant change of character under section 96 of the Education Act 1993, stating in each case *(a)* the nature of the change, *(b)* whether it has been approved and *(c)* the capital cost associated with the change. [13984]

Mrs. Gillan: The following table lists the grant-maintained schools which have applied for a significant change of character under section 96 of the Education Act 1993, the nature of the change and the

Secretary of State's decision. Section 96 of the Education Act 1993 came into force on 1 April 1994 on which date capital costs at grant-maintained schools became the responsibility of the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman to arrange for a reply to be sent to the hon. Member giving the capital costs associated with the changes at the schools.

Area	Name of GM School	Decision
To add or extend sixth form		
Berkshire	The Westgate School	Approved
Birmingham	Ninestiles GM School	Rejected
Birmingham	Bishop Challoner RC (GM) School	Undecided
Cambridgeshire	The Queen's School	Rejected
Cambridgeshire	Comberton Village School	Undecided
Derbyshire	Heanor Gate School	Approved
Derbyshire	Woodlands GM Community School	Approved
Derbyshire	West Park GM Community School	Undecided
Dudley	Ellowes Hall School	Approved
Essex	The Greensward School	Approved
Essex	The King Edmund School	Rejected
Essex	The Philip Morant School	Approved
Essex	St. Thomas More High School For Boys	Approved
Essex	Furtherwick Park School	Undecided
Gloucestershire	St. Benedict's RC High School	Undecided
Gloucestershire	Balcarras GM School	Undecided
Gloucestershire	Pittville GM School	Undecided
Gloucestershire	Cheltenham Kingsmead School	Undecided
Hampshire	Hardley GM School	Approved
Hampshire	Bay House GM School	Approved
Hampshire	Applemore Technology College	Undecided
Hampshire	Testwood GM School	Undecided
Hereford and Worcestershire	Blessed Edward Oldcorne School	Rejected
Hertfordshire	Hockerill School	Rejected
Kent	Hayesbrook School	Undecided
Kent	Northfleet School For Boys	Undecided
Lambeth	La Retraite RC Girls' GM School	Approved
Lincolnshire	Sir William Robertson High School	Rejected
Lincolnshire	The Giles School	Rejected
Lincolnshire	Monks Dyke High School	Undecided
Lincolnshire	Gleed Girls School	Undecided
Norfolk	Cromer High School	Rejected
Norfolk	Great Yarmouth GM High School	Rejected
Norfolk	Lynn Grove GM High School	Rejected
Norfolk	Acle High School	Rejected
Norfolk	Flegg High School	Rejected
Rochdale	Wardle High School	Approved
Rochdale	Hollingworth GM High School	Rejected
Sandwell	Heathfield High School	Rejected
Shropshire	Abraham Darby GM School	Rejected
Surrey	Heathside Secondary School	Approved
Surrey	Winston Churchill School	Undecided
Tameside	Audenshaw High School	Undecided
Waltham Forest	Chingford GM School	Undecided
To add or extend nursery provision		
Berkshire	Holy Family RC School	Undecided
Bexley	Barnehurst Infant School	Undecided
Buckinghamshire	Overstone GM Combined School	Rejected
Cambridgeshire	The Park Lane GM Primary School	Rejected
Cambridgeshire	Orton Wistow Primary School	Undecided
Cheshire	St. Wilfrid's RC GM School	Undecided
Cumbria	St. Paul's CE GM School	Rejected
Cumbria	Bowness On Solway GM Primary School	Rejected
Cumbria	Flookburgh CE GM Primary School	Approved
Cumbria	Eaglesfield Paddle CE GM School	Undecided
Cumbria	Dalton St. Mary's CE Primary School	Approved
Cumbria	Broughton GM Primary School	Approved
Cumbria	Beaconside Infant School	Undecided
Cumbria	Warwick Bridge Primary School	Undecided
Derbyshire	William Gilbert Endowed Primary School	Undecided
Essex	Northwick Park Infant School	Approved
Essex	Eastwood Infant School	Approved
Essex	Chase Lane GM Primary School	Approved
Essex	St. Mary's CE Primary School	Undecided
Essex	Upshire Primary School	Undecided
Essex	Leverton Infant School	Undecided
Essex	Waltham Holy Cross Infant School	Undecided
Essex	Chetwood Primary School	Undecided
Hertfordshire	Cuffley Primary School	Approved
Humberside	Barmby Moor School	Undecided
Kent	Holy Trinity CE Primary School	Approved
Lambeth	St. Bede's RC Infant School	Undecided
Lincolnshire	Washingborough GM School	Rejected
Lincolnshire	St. Andrew's CE GM Primary School	Rejected
Lincolnshire	Old Leake School	Approved
Norfolk	Dersingham First School	Approved
Norfolk	Loddon First School	Undecided
Norfolk	Gresham GM School	Undecided
Northamptonshire	Millbrook GM Infant School	Undecided
Northamptonshire	Woodnewton Way Infant School	Approved
Surrey	The Manor School	Rejected
Sutton	All Saints' CE Primary School	Approved
Wiltshire	Studley Green GM Primary School	Undecided
Wiltshire	St. Edmund's RC Primary School	Undecided
Other change of age range		
Berkshire	Herschel GM Grammar School	Approved
Berkshire	Langley GM Grammar School	Approved
Berkshire	Slough GM Grammar School	Approved
Berkshire	Chippenham GM Middle School	Undecided
Buckinghamshire	Beaconsfield High School	Approved
Lincolnshire	King Edward VI School	Undecided
Merton	Ursuline Convent School	Undecided
Warwickshire	Rugby High School	Approved
Warwickshire	Hartshill School	Approved
Warwickshire	Myton School	Approved
Warwickshire	Ash Green GM School	Approved
To add whole or partial selection (including introduction of banding arrangements)		
Barnet	Mill Hill County High School	Undecided
Birmingham	King Edward's Five Ways School	Undecided
Hammersmith and Fulham	London Oratory School	Approved
Hertfordshire	The Bishop's Stortford High School	Undecided
Hertfordshire	Chancellor's School	Undecided
Kent	The Westlands School	Rejected
Kingston	Holy Cross School	Approved
Lambeth	Archbishop Tenison's GM School	Approved
Lambeth	St. Martin In The Fields High School	Approved
Surrey	Glyn ADT GM Technology School	Rejected
Surrey	Rosebery GM Girls' School	Undecided

Area	*Name of GM School*	*Decision*
Single sex to co-educational		
Gloucestershire	Central GM Technology College	Rejected

[1] These proposals also involved a change in the age range of the school.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures are taken to monitor the time taken by agencies with special reference to the School Curriculum Assessment Authority, the Funding Agency for Schools and the Office for Standards in Education, to answer parliamentary questions; and if she will make a statement. [13963]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department keeps a record of all instances when chairmen of non-executive agencies of non-departmental public bodies such as SCAA, the FAS and Ofsted are asked to reply on a Minister's behalf. These records are updated and monitored to ensure that a reply is sent in answer to such a question, usually within one week of the matter being referred to the relevant agency.

Executive agencies reply to questions referred to them within the usual parliamentary timetable for answering written questions.

SCOTLAND

Agriculture Department

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what reductions he estimates will take place in respect of current staffing levels within the agriculture group of the Scottish Office in 1996–97. [12303]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A reduction in the staffing levels across the Scottish Office is anticipated as a consequence of cuts of around 5 per cent. running costs for 1996–97. There will be reductions within the agriculture group, but the details have not yet been determined.

School Transport

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which local authorities in Scotland provide free transport to schools and colleges for pupils beyond the compulsory school leaving age. [12896]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information requested is not collected centrally.

School Boards

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many teachers of school boards have been appointed; how many have been subject to election by parents; and what the average turn-out was in these elections for each academic year since the boards' establishment in each authority in Scotland. [12503]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information held centrally for education authority primary, secondary and special schools is as follows:

	School year 1989–90			*School year 1991—92*		*School year 1993–94*	
Education authority	*Estimated parent complement on boards at March 1990*	*Vacant parent places filled after a contested election*[1]	*Average turnout in contested parental elections*	*Estimated parent complement on boards at May 1992*	*Vacant parent places filled after a contested election*[1]	*Estimated parent complement on boards at May 1994*	*Vacant parent places filled after a contested election*[1]
Scotland	9,824	5,411	51.4	9,317	1,356	8,924	1,367
Borders	250	148	54.3	255	20	224	22
Central	460	242	41.0	451	95	447	65
Dumfries and Galloway	389	189	56.9	401	71	411	54
Fife	591	322	41.9	487	72	501	110
Grampian	960	562	42.6	915	123	896	194
Highland	669	318	36.8	672	125	651	97
Lothian	1,025	696	41.2	929	155	868	177
Strathclyde	4,421	2,312	60.5	4,205	539	3,974	476
Tayside	658	403	42.9	646	110	616	109
Orkney	89	82	62.5	85	16	77	11
Shetland	117	77	65.5	121	14	117	30
Western Isles	195	60	76.6	150	16	142	22

[1] Only half of parent places on existing school boards fell due for re-election in each of the 1991–92 and 1993–94 rounds of biennial elections. By definition, all parent places were vacant in the initial round of school board elections in 1989–90. Information on the average turnout in contested parental elections is not available for 1991–92 and 1993–94.

1. Information on the 1995–96 round of elections is not yet available.

Scottish Homes (Transfers)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many properties have been transferred to other landlords as part of Scottish Homes' stock transfer programme where there was a ballot of tenants; how many and what percentage of tenants voted in favour of the transfers; and how many voted against the transfers. [13251]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: At 31 January 1996 Scottish Homes had transferred 15,324 properties to other landlords as part of its stock transfer programme. I understand that the chairman of Scottish Homes has written to the hon. Member providing details of the ballots relating to these transfers.

Hypothermia

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many deaths where hypothermia was mentioned on the death certificate took place among *(a)* men aged 65 years and over and *(b)* women aged 60 years and over (i) for each month of 1994 by region and (ii) for each month of 1995 by region. [13265]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is given in the table:

Deaths where hypothermia[1] *was mentioned on the death certificate, by month and region in 1994 and 1995*[2]

Region	*January*	*February*	*March*	*April*	*May*	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*December*	*Total*
Females aged 60 years and over—1994:													
Borders	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Central	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	3
Dumfries and Galloway	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Deaths where hypothermia[1] was mentioned on the death certificate, by month and region in 1994 and 1995[2]

Region	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	Total
Fife	0	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	6
Grampian	2	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	7
Highland	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Lothian	4	2	1	2	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	15
Strathclyde	6	4	1	3	0	1	0	2	1	2	1	4	25
Tayside	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
Orkney	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shetland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Western Isles	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	14	9	5	7	5	3	0	2	1	5	2	9	62
Males aged 65 years and over—1994:													
Borders	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Central	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Dumfries and Galloway	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fife	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
Grampian	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Highland	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Lothian	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	5
Strathclyde	3	2	2	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	16
Tayside	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Orkney	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shetland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Western Isles	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	9	6	4	2	2	0	1	1	1	1	2	5	34
Females aged 60 years and over—1995[2]													
Borders	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Central	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	5
Dumfries and Galloway	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Fife	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grampian	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Highland	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	4
Lothian	0	2	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	4	11
Strathclyde	2	6	4	3	2	3	0	0	1	0	1	5	27
Tayside	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	5
Orkney	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shetland	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Western Isles	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	6	10	7	8	4	3	1	0	4	0	4	11	58
Males aged 65 years and over—1995[2]													
Borders	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Central	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Dumfries and Galloway	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fife	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Grampian	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Highland	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	4
Lothian	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	5
Strathclyde	4	4	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	16
Tayside	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Orkney	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shetland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Western Isles	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	9	6	5	4	1	2	0	0	0	1	2	5	35

[1] World Health Organisation International Classification of Diseases (Ninth Revision) codes E901 (primary cause), 780.8,780.9, E901 (secondary cause).
[2] 1995 figures are still provisional.

District and Sheriff Courts

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) on what grounds he proposes to transfer the jurisdiction of Bearsden district court to Glasgow; [13474]

(2) what procedure will govern the closure of Bearsden and Milngavie district court. [13469]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There is no proposal to transfer the Bearsden and Milngavie commission area to Glasgow. From 1 April 1996 it will form part of the new East Dunbartonshire commission area. East Dunbartonshire council will then assume responsibility for the district court for that commission area. It is for local authorities to determine where district courts sit within commission areas.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will extend the consultation period on his proposal to change the jurisdiction of Dumbarton sheriff court in order to allow local hon. Members and others to see the consultation paper on this subject; [13466]

(2) what statistical analysis he has carried out to assess how much civil work is carried out from Bearsden and Milngavie in Dumbarton sheriff court; and what would be

the impact on Glasgow sheriff court if the proposals in his consultation paper were enacted; [13470]

(3) what are the financial consequences of the proposals contained in the consultation paper on the jurisdiction of Dumbarton sheriff court; [13472]

(4) with which bodies he has consulted on his proposals to change the jurisdiction of Dumbarton sheriff court; for what reasons local hon. Members were not consulted; and what is his policy in this respect on the removal of Bearsden and Milngavie from the jurisdiction; [13473]

(5) how many courts he proposes to construct in the new Dumbarton sheriff court; what area they will serve; and what changes he has made to his plans in this respect in the last six months; [13475]

(6) what will be the change in the number of sheriffs at Dumbarton sheriff court arising from moving Bearsden and Milngavie out of the sheriffdom. [13471]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A consultation paper on proposals to adjust sheriffdom and sheriff court district boundaries following the introduction of the new local authorities was issued by the Scottish courts administration on 29 December 1995 in order to provide information to allow officials to put forward advice to Scottish Office Ministers.

The paper went to sheriffs principal, the Sheriffs' Association, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the new local authorities, police forces, the Crown Office, the Scottish Court Service and interested bodies and organisations such as the Law Society of Scotland and the Scottish Consumer Council. Responses were invited by 2 February 1996. Copies of the paper and the full list of consultees have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

The proposals in the consultation paper cover the whole of Scotland. In respect of the current jurisdictions of Glasgow and other sheriff courts in the area, views were sought on the prospect of transferring Bearsden and Milngavie to Glasgow's jurisdiction and transferring the area around Rutherglen from Glasgow's jurisdiction to that of Hamilton sheriff court. The net effect would be a small reduction in the workload of Glasgow sheriff court and a small reduction in the workload of Dumbarton sheriff court. No immediate change to the permanent shrieval complement at either court would be required. Any change to requirements for the proposed new sheriff court at Dumbarton will be considered during the detailed planning process.

No ministerial decisions have yet been made in terms of the Sheriff Courts (Scotland) Act 1971, and change to sheriff court districts or to the boundaries of sheriffdoms required to be made by statutory instrument. Changes to the boundaries of sheriffdoms require an affirmative resolution in both Houses.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what inspection service exists to assess the quality of service at Glasgow and Dumbarton sheriff courts; [13468]

(2) if he will make a statement on the *(a)* relative workloads, *(b)* waiting times and *(c)* quality of service of Glasgow and Dumbarton sheriff courts. [13467]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Waiting periods for summary criminal and civil business for Glasgow and Dumbarton sheriff courts and performance of these courts against the quality of service target set for the Scottish Court Service as at 31 December 1995 are shown in the following table:

	Summary criminal waiting period	*Ordinary civil waiting period (proofs/debates)*	*Percentage of quality targets achieved*[1]
Glasgow Sheriff Court	21 weeks	12 weeks/8 weeks	97.2
Dumbarton Sheriff Court	10 weeks	12 weeks/6 weeks	100

[1] 24 individual quality of service targets are set for staff in the sheriff court. They are detailed in the framework document of the Scottish Court Service which is available in the Library.

Children's Hospices

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what studies he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* analysed and evaluated on health services for children with terminal illnesses; and if he will make a statement. [12581]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government acknowledge that there is sufficient demand to justify the establishment of a children's hospice in Scotland. Information is not collected centrally which would make it possible to establish the exact number of children with a life-limiting or life-threatening condition who would benefit from access to a children's hospice. The opening of Rachel house, Kinross, should enable a more accurate estimate to be made of the need for such a facility.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if it is his policy that children's hospices be eligible for matching funding from the national health service. [12582]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Access to public funding for the health care work of the children's hospice in Scotland should be through the mechanism of contracts with health boards, based on each board's assessment of need.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children were cared for in each of the past five years in children's hospices; and if he will make a statement. [12584]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There has not been a children's hospice in Scotland during the last five years. Information about the number of children from Scotland cared for in children's hospices in England during that period is not collected centrally.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many hospices for children are registered; and what financial assistance they have received in each of the past three years. [12583]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None, although it is expected that Rachel house, Kinross, will be registered shortly.

The Scottish Office has contributed £250,000 in this and the two previous financial years to the Children's Hospice Association Scotland in respect of Rachel house,

Kinross. In addition, my right hon. Friend recently announced a further contribution of £500,000 over the next two financial years.

Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the forthcoming policy and financial management reviews of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. [14553]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: As part of the Government's rolling programme of five-yearly policy and financial management reviews of non-departmental public bodies, my Department will conduct a thorough review of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise during 1996. The first stage of the review will take the form of a prior options study. In accordance with normal practice on such reviews, this will include an examination of the scope for discontinuing, privatising, contracting out or transferring to another body some or all of the functions carried out by Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. This study is now under way and I would welcome comments from interested parties. Comments should be sent by 31 March 1996 to:

Mr. J. Irvine

The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department

Room 3F-53

Victoria Quay

Edinburgh

EH6 6QQ

Cold Weather (Public Information)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all public information films relating to the effects of cold weather on plumbing; and if he will list the names of the films, who produced them and when they were shown. [12706]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* Two short public information films entitled "Pipe Bursts" and "Frost Warning" were made by the Central Office of Information in 1969. Both were withdrawn from circulation in the early 1980s. A television commercial was produced by the Scottish Office in 1984 and broadcast that year. No other details are now available.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the levels of public expenditure for public information materials on the effects of cold weather on plumbing *(a)* in each five-year period since 1966 and *(b)* for each year in the last five years; and if he will make a statement on the nature of the materials on which the moneys were spent. [12708]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* There has been no Scottish Office expenditure on public information material in the past five years. The last expenditure on this subject was in 1984 when a television commercial was produced by the Scottish Office. No records exist for previous years. Details of local authority expenditure in this area are not held centrally.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when a public information film on the effects of cold weather was last shown in Scotland; what was the name of this film; and who produced it. [12707]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* A television commercial was produced by the Scottish Office in 1984 but no records of it now exist. The Scottish Office is currently in discussion with the Central Office of Information regarding production of a new public information film on the effects of cold weather on domestic plumbing.

Ferry Subsidies

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total amount paid in public subsidy to P and O in respect of its services on the northern isles routes; and if he will make a statement. [12721]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* Total subsidy provision for the support of roll-on/roll-off passenger ferry services to Orkney and Shetland provided by P and O Scottish Ferries in 1995–96 amounts to £7.9 million.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the Government's policy on the payment of subsidies to ferry companies providing services on the northern isles routes; and if he will make a statement. [12720]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* The Government remain committed to providing the support which is necessary to ensure the continuity of essential passenger ferry services to Orkney and Shetland. After a competitive tendering process, the Government will award later this year a contract to operate passenger ferry services to Orkney and Shetland under new block grant arrangements. These new block grant arrangements reflect the Government's concern to ensure the viability of the essential passenger services to the northern isles and to obtain value for money from the substantial financial assistance which is provided to support essential shipping services to the islands.

Racially Motivated Crime

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give a breakdown of the number of crimes which were recorded as being racially motivated reported since 1989 within each police authority in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [13793]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1996]:* Details of the number of crimes with racial motivation are not available, although statistics are now being collected to provide that information. The table gives the number of incidents with racial motivation recorded by the police.

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Central	18	45	69	51	52	75
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	—	—	4	6
Fife	—	3	35	30	20	40
Grampian	4	9	4	20	28	44

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Lothian and Borders	91	178	213	184	223	266
Northern	—	—	—	—	1	—
Strathclyde	236	300	254	250	205	225
Tayside	27	101	103	128	193	135
Total	376	636	678	663	726	791

Judicial Factories and Curatories

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to review remuneration in judicial factories and curatories; and if he will make a statement. [13791]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1996]:* Under statute, the responsibility for fixing commission for judicial factories and curatories rests with the accountant of court in the Court of Session.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

House of Commons Staff (Pay)

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, how many staff of the House have salaries higher than those of *(a)* junior Ministers, *(b)* Ministers of State and *(c)* Cabinet Ministers together with their titles. [13586]

Mr. Beith: The information requested is listed in the following tables:

(a) Staff whose basic salaries are greater than that of a Junior Minister

Grade title	Number of job holders	Grade
Office of the Speaker		
Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards (Part-time)	1	—
Department of the Clerk of the House		
Clerk of the House	1	1
Clerk Assistant	1	2
Clerk of Committees	1	2
Speaker's Counsel	2	3
Principal Clerk Class I	6	3
Principal Clerk Class II	4	4
Deputy Principal Clerk	10	5
Assistant to Speaker's Counsel	1	5
Department of the Serjeant at Arms		
Serjeant at Arms	1	3
Director of Works	1	4
Information Systems Officer	1	5
Department of the Library		
Librarian	1	3
Deputy Librarian	1	4
Department of the Official Report		
Editor	1	4
Department of Finance and Administration		
Director of Finance and Administration	1	3
Advisor	1	2
Head of the Establishments Office	1	4
Accountant	1	4

(b) Staff whose basic salaries are greater than that of a Minister of State

Grade title	Number of job holders	Grade
Office of the Speaker		
Parliamentary Commissioner For Standards (Part-time)	1	—
Department of the Clerk of the House		
Clerk of the House	1	1
Clerk Assistant	1	2
Clerk of Committees	1	2
Speaker's Counsel	2	3
Principal Clerk Class I	6	3
Department of the Serjeant at Arms		
Serjeant at Arms	1	3
Director of Works	1	4
Department of the Library		
Librarian	1	3
Department of Finance and Administration		
Director of Finance and Administration	1	3
Advisor	1	2

(c) Staff whose basic salaries are greater than that of a Cabinet Minister

Grade title	Number of job holders	Grade
Office of the Speaker		
Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards (Part-time)	1	—
Department of the Clerk of the House		
Clerk of the House	1	1
Department of Finance and Administration		
Advisor	1	2

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Industrial Tribunals

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what remedy an employer has when he believes that an industrial tribunal has failed to take all relevant information into account in arriving at a decision which is unfavourable to him. [13574]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Where a party is dissatisfied with the industrial tribunal's decision, he may either ask the tribunal to review its decision or appeal, on a point of law only, to the employment appeal tribunal. Further appeals lie with the Court of Appeal and ultimately the House of Lords. The industrial tribunals and the EAT are independent judicial bodies and the Government cannot comment on, or intervene in, the conduct of proceedings in individual cases.

Helicopter Sales (Turkey)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he is taking to ensure that helicopters sold by the United Kingdom to the Turkish Government are not used against civilians; and if he will make a statement. [12879]

Mr. Oppenheim: It has been the policy of successive Administrations not to disclose particulars of defence trade with other countries, or details of export licences or applications for export licences.

Applications for licences to export defence equipment are considered on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with the appropriate Government Departments and in the light of established criteria. These include taking into account the human rights record of recipient states. We would not issue an export licence for the export of equipment which was likely to be used for internal repression.

Consumer Protection Act 1987

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he proposes to take to encourage greater public awareness of the provisions of part I of the Consumer Protection Act 1987 following the Consumer Associations's study entitled "Unsafe Products: How the Consumer Protection Act Works for Consumers." [13981]

Mr. John M. Taylor: We are giving careful consideration to this report, which was, in fact, produced by the National Consumer Council. My Department publishes a number of explanatory guides on consumer protection legislation—one of them a guide to the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act 1987—aimed at promoting a better understanding by businesses of their responsibilities and liabilities under the legislation, and making consumers more aware of their rights.

Electricity Industry Regulator

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the formula used by the electricity industry regulator to determine how much profit is given as return to shareholders. [13908]

Mr. Eggar: The form of the price controls in the regulated electricity market is a matter for the Director General of Electricity Supply, who has hitherto imposed controls of the form "RPI-X". Distributions to shareholders are a commercial matter for the electricity companies.

Gas Industry Regulator

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the formula used by the gas industry regulator to determine how much profit is given as return to shareholders. [13910]

Mr. Eggar: The form of price control for British Gas's regulated businesses is a matter for the regulator, the Director General of Gas Supply.

Job Advertisements

Mr. Janner: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many jobs have been advertised in each grade in his Department during the last three months for which records are available; and how many people have applied for each such job. [13827]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Department has operated an internal advertising scheme for vacancies in all grades from administrative assistant to grade 7, and equivalents, since April 1994. In the three months November 1995 to January 1996 inclusive, 239 posts were advertised. This figure is broken down by grade in the table below.

Grade	*Post advertised (November 1995–January 1996)*
Secretarial Group	13
Administrative Group	86
Executive Officer	62
Higher Executive Officer level	39
Senior Executive Officer level	9
Grade 7	30
Total	239

Information on the number of applicants for these specific posts is not yet available, but historical data suggest that, on average, there are three applicants for each post advertised.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will estimate the amount paid under ECGD guarantees since 1980 in relation to trade with the United Arab Emirates; what was *(a)* the amount paid to banks under buyer credit and line of credit facilities, *(b)* the amount paid directly to exporters under short-term or supplier credit facilities and *(c)* the amount subsequently recovered; and if he will estimate the proportion of each figure paid in respect of (i) the export of military and related equipment and (ii) the export of military and related equipment where the end user has been assessed to have been Iraq. [13946]

Mr. Oppenheim: Since 1980, the ECGD has paid claims of £27.9 million in relation to trade with the United Arab Emirates and made recoveries of £15.1 million. Of the claims, £21.3 million related to short-term or supplier credit facilities. The ECGD maintains no records of the goods supplied under its now privatised short-term business, but there is otherwise no record of any of the claims relating to arms business.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will estimate the amount paid under ECGD guarantees since 1980 in relation to trade with Singapore; what was *(a)* the amount paid to banks under buyer credit and line of credit facilities, *(b)* the amount paid directly to exporters under short-term or supplier credit facilities and *(c)* the amount subsequently recovered; and if he will estimate the proportion of each figure paid in respect of (i) the export of military and related equipment and (ii) the export of military and related equipment where the end user has been assessed to have been Iraq. [13945]

Mr. Oppenheim: Since 1980, the ECGD has paid claims of £13.1 million in relation to trade with Singapore and made recoveries of £1.43 million. All the claims related to short-term or supplier credit facilities. The ECGD maintains no record of the goods supplied under its now privatised short-term business, but there is otherwise no record of any of the claims relating to arms business.

Cambodia

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his policy towards investment in

Cambodia by British companies; what action the British Government have taken to facilitate business links; and if he will make a statement. [13949]

Mr. Oppenheim: Investment prospects in Cambodia have improved since the internationally brokered comprehensive political settlement brought to power a democratically elected coalition Government in 1993. However, the state of the economy and security situation mean that opportunities are limited at the moment.

The British Government, through our embassy in Phnom Penh, maintain regular contacts with all British companies resident in Cambodia. The embassy regularly supports visiting British companies in their efforts to establish business links. The British chamber of commerce in Bangkok visited Cambodia last year and Cambodian officials will visit the UK in March and again later this year. An export promoter from the DTI and trade promotion staff are planning to visit Cambodia later this year to identify further opportunities for British companies wishing to establish business links.

In addition, we encourage UK companies to take advantage of the European Union programmes, such as the EC investment partners scheme, which are designed to promote links between businesses in Europe and in certain developing countries such as Cambodia.

Myanmar

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his policy towards investment in Myanmar by British companies; what action the British Government have taken to facilitate business links; and if he will make a statement. [13950]

Mr. Oppenheim: My Department continues to provide information relating to investment issues in Burma and the associated risks. However, our efforts are focused primarily on the trade opportunities that may exist for British companies, rather than on investment, where we continue to take a cautious line.

My Department held a trade awareness seminar, "An Introduction to Burma", at the London chamber of commerce on 5 December 1995. This will be followed by a trade mission to Burma from 26 February to 1 March 1996.

Electromagnetic Compatibility Directive

Mr. Gill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what penalties exist in each member state of the European Union for non-compliance with the electro magnetic compatibility directive. [13500]

Mr. Ian Taylor: My Department does not hold information concerning the penalties in all of the member states for non-compliance with the electromagnetic compatibility directive. Other member states will have taken such steps as they felt appropriate to ensure compliance with the directive. In a communication of 3 May 1995, the Commission, reflecting the common view of Community institutions, noted that national penalty arrangements should be effective, proportionate and dissuasive. The Council resolution of 21 June 1995 encouraged the Commission to ensure that penalties introduced by member states to ensure compliance meet these criteria. My Department will monitor the situation.

Protecting electrical and electronic equipment from electromagnetic interference is important and, under the electromagnetic compatibility regulations, as amended, the United Kingdom enforcement authorities may issue a suspension notice or a prohibition notice to secure compliance or prosecute for offences which could lead to fines on summary conviction of up to £5,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months or to both. Except in the case of CE-marked apparatus found not to comply with EMC protection requirements, before seeking prosecution enforcement authorities must first send a compliance notice, to which no penalties attach so long as compliance follows within a reasonable period.

Greyhound Breeding (Ireland)

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the hon. Member for Wentworth will receive an answer to his question of 30 November about the support of greyhound breeding in Ireland by the EC. [13126]

Mr. Oppenheim: There are certain European Community structural fund grants for greyhound breeding in the Republic of Ireland.

Information about details of these funds' grants in other EC member states is not directly available in the United Kingdom. I have, however, made inquiries and expect to be able to give a substantive answer within the next few days.

EU Funding

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much in *(a)* ecus and *(b)* pounds, (i) in each eligible region and (ii) in total, the United Kingdom received in European Coal and Steel Community loans over the last available five-year period. [11696]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 29 January 1996]:* Loan activity under the ECSC treaty comprises article 54 investment loans, article 56 reconversion loans, and loans disbursed under the workers' housing programme. The information requested is as follows. Figures are not available on a regional basis for loans under the workers' housing programme.

Article 54 investment loans

	1990		*1991*		*1992*		*1993*		*1994*	
	ECU	*£*	*ECU*	*£*	*ECU*	*£*	*ECU*	*£*	*ECU*	*£*
Cleveland	12,842	9,000	86,164	60,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Clwyd	31,630	22,000	17,266	12,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cumbria	25,878	18,000	57,112	40,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Derbyshire	75,818	53,000	77,398	54,000	—	—	—	—	—	—

Article 54 investment loans

	1990		1991		1992		1993		1994	
	ECU	£	ECU	£	ECU	£	ECU	£	ECU	£
Durham	51,691	36,000	28,655	20,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dyfed	—	—	21,582	15,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fife	—	—	25,799	18,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gloucestershire	—	—	18,705	13,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Greater London	—		15,827	11,000	3,332,132	2,330,000	—	—	—	—
Greater Manchester	12,842	9,000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gwent	25,684	18,000	172,118	120,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Humberside	44,472	31,000	204,990	143,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kent	120,766	84,000	12,850	9,000	113,339,449	80,000,000	25,446,361	20,000,000	126,343,985	97,000,000
Leicestershire	137,498	96,000	56,115	39,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lincolnshire	—	—	25,898	18,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mid Glamorgan	51,756	36,000	58,893	41,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Yorkshire	60,123	42,000	355,197	248,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Northumberland	—	—	41,626	29,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire	186,509	130,000	361,635	252,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Glamorgan	57,508	40,000	62,944	44,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Yorkshire	589,137	411,000	569,149	397,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Staffordshire	22,015,127	16,377,000	179,069	125,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Strathclyde	31,630	22,000	5,482,653	3,910,500	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tyne and Wear	—	—	8,633	6,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Warwickshire	12,842	9,000	59,967	42,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Glamorgan	38,525	27,000	83,254	58,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Midlands	12,842	9,000	41,505	29,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Yorkshire	213,881	149,000	54,675	38,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Yorkshire and Humberside	—	—	—	—	14,300,996	10,000,000	—	—	—	—
Rest of UK	—	—	57,327,436	40,234,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	23,809,001	17,628,000	65,507,025	46,025,500	130,972,577	92,330,000	25,446,361	20,000,000	126,343,985	97,000,000

Source:
European Commission.

Article 56 reconversion loans

	1990		1991		1992		1993		1994	
	Ecu	£	Ecu	£	Ecu	£	Ecu	£	Ecu	£
Cheshire	1,024,237	723,000	488,356	343,000	—	5,314,464	4,000,000	—	—	—
Cleveland	5,058,394	3,619,200	8,680,763	6,081,250	1,635,895	1,159,000	1,079,501	812,500	1,719,073	1,340,000
Clwyd	9,636,661	6,844,500	11,935,074	8,355,322	5,429,458	33,798,000	3,435,486	2,590,000	5,647,663	4,365,000
Cumbria	1,387,823	978,500	738,291	515,000	—	—	199,292	150,000	397,526	310,000
Derbyshire	7,291,691	5,152,000	179,639	125,800	1,720,953	1,213,700	116,977	90,000	1,733,568	1,322,500
Durham	12,042,670	8,648,500	1,669,627	1,171,000	3,132,215	2,222,500	2,342,350	1,763,000	1,769,253	1,344,300
Dyfed	3,267,360	2,288,000	223,539	157,000	715,050	500,000	106,289	80,000	—	—
East Midlands	712,469	500,000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fife	2,588,173	1,860,700	677,434	472,650	32,428	23,000	301,596	227,000	1,467,509	1,142,000
Greater Manchester	12,892,017	9,153,900	7,696,014	5,445,230	729,423	519,500	1,069,536	805,000	1,148,275	869,000
Gwent	19,867,601	14,066,000	10,568,497	7,419,500	1,072,575	750,000	7,586,240	5,715,750	5,226,426	4,040,000
Hereford and Worcester	203,359	150,000	57,343	40,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
Humberside	1,424,956	1,010,000	106,786	75,000	—	—	—	—	1,669,749	1,290,500
Kent	590,641	424,000	—	—	7,701,086	5,385,000	—	—	—	—
Lancashire	391,858	275,000	160,179	112,500	906,414	650,000	—	—	—	—
Leicestershire	1,813,610	1,298,000	106,864	75,000	—	—	—	—	210,235	158,750
Lothian	3,641,879	2,594,396	854,202	597,400	7,147,801	5,012,718	3,232,722	2,592,000	4,387,444	3,413,000
Merseyside	6,047,284	4,306,630	2,149,901	1,510,000	3,889,969	2,809,000	168,821	140,000	407,142	312,500
Mid Glamorgan	6,575,498	4,715,250	3,942,230	2,774,000	7,579,751	5,411,000	1,417,981	1,070,000	397,294	300,000
Northamptonshire	5,084,364	3,608,150	7,182,952	5,033,705	243,208	172,500	31,887	24,000	2,658,672	2,015,000
Northumberland	3,774,663	2,681,000	355,954	250,000	152,974	108,500	723,432	544,500	256,990	200,000
Nottinghamshire	8,752,384	6,219,050	2,598,407	1,832,000	6,324,233	4,435,000	132,862	100,000	5,146,217	3,989,200
Rest of Scotland	52,737	38,900	18,497,913	13,000,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Glamorgan	5,018,552	3,604,840	3,228,985	2,272,000	—	—	670,951	505,000	264,863	200,000
South Yorkshire	18,428,729	13,121,530	7,969,790	5,640,000	8,375,186	5,888,500	403,899	304,000	8,641,932	6,708,100
Staffordshire	11,700,683	8,303,046	8,662,854	6,144,500	12,341,556	8,733,347	2,763,521	2,080,000	3,926,603	2,980,000
Strathclyde	40,226,372	29,266,730	14,768,555	10,400,000	10,244,146	7,215,000	6,765,976	5,092,500	25,116,834	19,453,500
Tyne and Wear	16,826,138	11,941,980	20,699,524	14,565,165	4,448,208	3,112,000	5,024,515	3,785,000	4,920,788	3,732,500
Warwickshire	4,589,789	3,231,000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Glamorgan	3,929,099	2,813,900	711,908	500,000	—	—	60,986	50,000	2,815,852	2,150,000
West Midlands	35,373,890	25,341,150	12,882,243	9,035,992	5,471,496	3,963,000	1,980,500	1,490,650	10,717,609	8,235,500
West Yorkshire	11,561,019	8,264,360	2,465,256	1,756,000	6,965,356	4,992,000	551,375	415,000	4,446,322	3,364,750
Rest of UK	881,729	635,000	109,371,238	76,863,000	6,459,460	4,613,000	1,992,924	1,500,000	—	—
Total	262,658,329	187,678,212	259,630,318	182,562,964	102,718,841	72,686,265	47,474,083	35,925,900	95,193,163	76,509,000

Loans under the worker's housing programme

(millions)

	United Kingdom	
	Ecu	£
1990	1.40	1.15
1991	8.00	6.56
1992	0.70	0.57
1993	0.00	0.00
1994	0.10	0.08

Nuclear Power

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his Department's estimate of the total cost in terms of *(a)* compensation, *(b)* grants and *(c)* loss of productive capacity arising from the effects of the Chernobyl incident. [13286]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 2 February 1996]:* A number of countries were affected by radioactive fallout from the Chernobyl accident. My Department has no sound basis for estimating the total cost of compensation and grants paid and the loss of productive capacity in all of those countries. As far as the United Kingdom is concerned, compensation amounting to £12,085,311 had been paid to farmers up to 31 December 1995.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Union

20. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the timetable for the intergovernmental conference of the European Union. [12362]

Mr. David Davis: The intergovernmental conference will begin in Turin on 29 March. No date has been set for its conclusion.

BBC World Service

22. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future of the triennial funding arrangement for the BBC World Service. [12364]

Mr. Rifkind: Changes in the triennium system are under discussion with the World Service.

European Union (New Members)

23. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning the admission of Eastern European countries to membership of the European Union. [12365]

Mr. David Davis: We receive many representations on this subject.

We make it clear that Britain is firmly committed to enlargement to the east, which is fundamental to Europe's security and prosperity.

Palestinian National Authority

24. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet representatives of the Palestinian National Authority to discuss future security in the area. [12366]

Mr. Hanley: I met representatives of the Palestinian National Authority in Gaza and in east Jerusalem only last month. I have no immediate plans for a follow-up meeting.

European Union (Political Integration)

26. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet the President of the European Commission, to discuss progress towards further political integration. [12369]

Mr. David Davis: The President of the European Commission regularly attends Foreign Affairs Councils. The next such Council is on 26 and 27 February.

Bosnia

27. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress with the peace process in Bosnia. [12370]

35. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the implementation of the peace agreement in Bosnia-Herzegovina. [12378]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: On the military side, the parties have shown widespread compliance with the terms of the peace agreement and first deadlines have largely been met. The international community is now concentrating its efforts on civilian implementations and reconstruction so that the people of Bosnia can see the benefits of peace. We are playing a full part in the reconstruction effort. The key to lasting peace is the will of the parties themselves to achieve it.

Cyprus (EU Accession)

28. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Cyprus to discuss her accession to the EU. [12371]

Mr. David Davis: None, but I discuss the matter regularly with my European and Cypriot colleagues at the European Union/Cyprus Acquisition Councils. The next Council will be held in May.

Bulgaria

29. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Bulgaria to discuss enhancing Anglo-Bulgarian relationships. [12372]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I visited Sofia on 1 and 2 February. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary hopes to visit soon.

Antarctic Treaty

30. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress towards the establishment of a secretariat for the Antarctic treaty. [12373]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The issue was taken forward at a meeting of legal experts in Brussels in November when organisational aspects of an Antarctic treaty secretariat were discussed. Discussions continue among treaty consultative parties about the siting of the secretariat.

Pakistan

31. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to pay an official visit to Pakistan to discuss human rights; and if he will make a statement. [12374]

Mr. Hanley: I hope to visit Pakistan in the near future to discuss a wide range of issues, including human rights.

Middle East Peace Process

32. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to revisit Jerusalem to discuss progress in the middle east peace process. [12375]

Mr. Hanley: I visited Jerusalem at the beginning of January and have no plans at present for another visit. I do, however, maintain a close interest in the middle east peace process.

36. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of the middle east peace process. [12379]

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the middle east peace progress. [12367]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Members to the oral answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) and my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) earlier today.

Chechnya

33. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Chechnya. [12376]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The conflict in Chechnya has brought great suffering and has cost many innocent civilian lives. The situation remains tense; clashes continue daily. A lasting peace cannot be brought through use of force. We therefore urge all sides to abide by the ceasefire agreed in July 1995 and to return to the negotiating table.

British-Israeli Relations

34. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on British-Israeli relations. [12377]

Mr. Hanley: Relations with Israel are excellent. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary visited Israel last November, as I did in January. Shimon Peres visited London from 31 January to 2 February.

United Nations

37. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made to ensure that all member states pay their share of their dues to the UN. [12380]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The UN Secretary-General informs member states regularly of the organisation's cash flow situation and reminds them of the need to fulfill their financial obligations. Despite this, at the end of 1995, less than half the UN membership had paid in full to the UN regular budget.

The EU has recently tabled in New York a comprehensive package of proposals, including a revised system of assessments and measures to tighten the penalties for late/non-payment. The aim of this proposal, based on an Anglo-French initiative, is to put the UN back on to a sound financial footing.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration he has given to the creation of a common United Nations peacekeeping military doctrine; and if he will make a statement. [13947]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We support a common UN peacekeeping doctrine and have encouraged the UN to develop one. We expect the UN to publish its own short general guidelines for peacekeeping soon. MOD and FCO experts have briefed the UN on "Wider Peacekeeping", the British Army's revised peacekeeping doctrine, and have stayed in touch with UN experts. We are pleased that "Wider Peacekeeping" has been well received and circulated within the UN, and believe that it has already made a valuable contribution to international debate.

War Crimes (Former Yugoslavia)

38. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with other Governments about bringing war criminals in the former Yugoslavia to justice. [12381]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We are in regular contact with our NATO allies and EU partners concerning all developments in former Yugoslavia.

The peace agreement obliges the parties to co-operate fully with the International War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. This obligation is also enshrined in the new constitution. In the human rights annexe, the parties are obliged to give unrestricted access to all sites and persons. We strongly support the tribunal's work.

Iraq

39. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's present guidelines on arms exports to Iraq. [12382]

Mr. Hanley: We comply with United Nations Security Council resolution 661, which prevents the sale to Iraq of any weapons or other military equipment.

Maastricht Treaty

Mr. Hawksley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support proposals at the intergovernmental conference to include national Parliaments in negotiations on the social protocol of the Maastricht treaty. [13772]

Mr. David Davis: Under the social protocol agreed at Maastricht, Acts adopted under the annexed social agreement are not applicable to the UK. The Government will not be prepared to relinquish this opt-out at the intergovernmental conference.

Job Advertisements

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many jobs have been advertised in each grade in his Department during the last three months for which records are available; and how many people have applied for each such job. [13835]

Mr. Hanley: The number of jobs advertised in each grade in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office during the last three months and the number of applicants were as follows:

Grade	*Vacancies*	*Applicants*
DS7D/8	26	2,422
Specialist grades	4	511
Support grade band 2	4	154
HCS grade 6	1	62

East Timor

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to assist the Australian Government's inquiry into the deaths of Brian Peters, Malcolm Rennie and three Australian-based newsmen, in October 1975 at Balibo, East Timor. [12368]

Mr. Hanley: We keep in touch with the Australian authorities and will continue to do so. We are prepared to assist them in any way possible.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to Indonesia regarding East Timor; and if he will make a statement. [13952]

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and I discussed East Timor with the Indonesian Foreign Minister when he visited London last month.

Diplomatic Service

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what additional staff and at what cost his Department has recruited to meet Her Majesty's Government's diplomatic requirements against the proliferation of regimes throughout the world; and if he will make a statement. [12559]

Mr. Hanley: Since 1990, 22 new independent countries have come into being. The UK has diplomatic representation on the ground in all but three, and cross-accreditation of staff in neighbouring countries for the remainder. The total additional requirement of 77 UK-based and 156 locally engaged staff in these new countries has been resourced from within existing provision, through reprioritisation and redeployment. In the same period, eight posts with UK-based and two with locally engaged staff have been closed. Further information will be available in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's 1996 departmental report, due to be published in March, a copy of which will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria govern the assessment of the effect of diplomats' declared interests on their representation of the United Kingdom. [12640]

Mr. Hanley: Interests declared by members of the diplomatic service are assessed against the need to ensure that officials neither subordinate their official duty to their private interests nor put themselves in a position where their duty and private interests conflict.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in which countries Her Majesty's Government have no diplomatic post; and if he will make a statement. [13619]

Mr. Hanley: There is no UK resident diplomatic representation in the following 18 countries:

Andorra
Bhutan
Burundi
Equatorial Guinea
Iraq
Kiribati
North Korea
Liberia
Maldives
Marshall Islands
Micronesia
Moldova
Nauru
St. Kitts and Nevis
San Marino
Somalia
Tajikistan
Tuvalu

In the following independent countries, the UK is represented by locally engaged staff and/or honorary consuls:

Afghanistan
Benin
Burkina Fasso
Cape Verde
Central African Republic
Chad
Comoros
Congo
Djibouti
Dominica
Eritrea
Gabon

Guinea
Guinea Bissau
Haiti
Kyrgyzstan
Laos
Liechtenstein
Mali
Mauritania
Monaco
Niger
Suriname
Togo
Western Samoa
Sao Tomé and Principe

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: to ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in what ways the United Kingdom's negotiating brief for the forthcoming intergovernmental conference will reflect the Government's deregulation policies. [13597]

Mr. David Davis: We are pressing vigorously to reduce the regulatory burden of EC law. The paper "UK priorities for Regulatory Reform", which has been deposited in the Library of the House, sets out how we are doing this.

A number of the UK's proposals for the IGC are designed to help reduce the burden of EC legislation including further entrenchment of the principle of subsidiarity in the treaty and a requirement on the Commission to consult interested parties before making proposals for major new legislation.

Myanmar

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the military junta in Myanmar about human rights; and if he will make a statement. [13948]

Mr. Hanley: Our ambassador in Rangoon raised the question of human rights when he called on the Foreign Minister on 27 December 1995.

At the 50th session of the UN General Assembly, we worked closely with our EU partners and others to secure a critical resolution on the human rights situation in Burma. We will continue to raise our concerns both bilaterally and in international forums.

Bangladesh

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Bangladesh about the proposed elections scheduled for 15 February; and if he will make a statement. [13841]

Mr. Hanley: We have made no formal representations to the Government of Bangladesh about the elections, but our high commissioner has been in close contact with the leaders of the main political parties throughout the current political crisis in Bangladesh. We regret the failure to reach an agreed settlement of the long-standing dispute over the conditions under which elections should be held and the consequent decision of the major Opposition parties not to put forward candidates in the forthcoming elections.

Morocco

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Moroccan Government regarding the Western Sahara; and if he will make a statement. [13953]

Mr. Hanley: The United Nations is seeking to bring about peace in the Western Sahara. The UN mission for the referendum in Western Sahara—MINURSO—is charged with the organisation of a referendum. The UK participates fully in Security Council discussions on the subject, and supports the representations made by the Secretary-General and his representatives to both Morocco and Polisario.

DEFENCE

Low Flying

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low flying sorties were booked in 1995 by *(a)* Hercules aircraft and *(b)* helicopters; and if he will provide a breakdown of these figures into those by British military aircraft and those by foreign air forces. [12891]

Mr. Soames: A total of 2,655 sorties by Hercules aircraft and 49,935 sorties by helicopters were booked in the United Kingdom low flying system in 1995. Three of the Hercules sorties and 33 of the helicopter sorties were flown by non-UK-based foreign aircraft.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low flying sorties were booked in 1995 by United Kingdom-based United States air force aircraft; and if he will provide a breakdown of these into sorties by *(a)* F15 aircraft, *(b)* Hercules aircraft and *(c)* helicopters. [12892]

Mr. Soames: United Kingdom-based US air force aircraft were booked to fly 4,191 sorties in the United Kingdom low flying system during 1995. Of these, 3,660 were F15 sorties, 395 were Hercules sorties and 136 were helicopters.

MOD Police

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list for each royal ordnance site the number of incidents in each of the last five years requiring the attendance of his Department's police; [13193]

(2) if he will list for the royal ordnance Radway green site the number and type of incidents requiring the attendance of his Department's police in the last 12 months. [13195]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is provided in the table. The category "other incidents" includes minor building insecurities, the presence of persons and objects deemed to be suspicious until investigated and cleared, and mislaying of permits. "Security incidents" include failure to return keys, classified documents not locked

away, and cabinets left insecure. Although the definition of crime includes theft of both Government and private property, criminal damage and instances of burglary, most incidents in ROFs over this period have been very minor offences.

Reported incidents	*Bridgwater*	*Chorley*	*Glascoed*	*Nottingham*	*Radway Green*
1991					
Crime	5	19	34	26	23
Road traffic accidents	1	4	6	2	2
Industrial accidents	0	0	2	18	0
Security incidents	23	66	120	185	85
Other incidents	8	43	140	11	37
1992					
Crime	2	23	21	26	28
Road traffic accidents	0	2	5	1	3
Industrial accidents	1	0	0	9	0
Security incidents	50	58	68	138	25
Other incidents	17	33	90	17	14
1993					
Crime	5	8	10	27	12
Road traffic accidents	1	1	10	0	3
Industrial accidents	1	0	2	4	0
Security incidents	55	46	22	40	10
Other incidents	11	19	18	20	17
1994					
Crime	8	9	22	74	10
Road traffic accidents	2	1	2	0	1
Industrial accidents	1	1	5	1	0
Security incidents	22	15	33	38	12
Other incidents	28	17	32	26	16
1995					
Crime	5	2	25	11	8
Road traffic accidents	0	3	4	0	2
Industrial accidents	1	3	0	5	0
Security incidents	26	30	83	37	12
Other incidents	43	12	20	14	12

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department's police currently protecting establishments in the defence industry carry arms. [13192]

Mr. Soames: All MOD police officers are firearms-trained and have ready access to arms should the need arise.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and which royal ordnance factories are currently protected by his Department's police; and from which he plans to withdraw them. [13190]

Mr. Soames: MOD police are currently deployed at the following royal ordnance sites: Bridgwater, Chorley, Glascoed, Nottingham and Radway green. A recent study on the employment of MOD police in the royal ordnance factories has recommended that MOD police be withdrawn from the Chorley, Radway green and Nottingham sites. Formal consultation between my Department and the MOD police staff associations, regarding thee proposals is now in progress.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what access the royal ordnance factory Radway green MOD police have to an armed response vehicle; and what arrangements for such access will be established when his Department's police have been withdrawn. [13189]

Mr. Soames: The MOD police stationed at royal ordnance Radway green have immediate access to a dedicated armed response vehicle. If MDP are withdrawn from royal ordnance Radway green, following the conclusion of the formal consultation process, the provision of any armed response will be the responsibility of the chief constable of Cheshire.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what training he plans to provide to private security firms before they take over security duties from his Department's police; and if they will be permitted to carry arms; [13194]

(2) how many private security staff will be employed at the Radway green royal ordnance factory site to replace his Department's existing police. [13196]

Mr. Soames: The royal ordnance factories from which it is proposed to withdraw MDP will be protected by company guard force personnel. Their number and training will be for agreement between RO plc and the relevant licensing authority. They would not be permitted to carry arms; nor are there any plans for the MOD to provide training for them. Instructions for the use of private security firms at defence installations require that they should be trained to the levels specified.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for each establishment protected at present by his Department's police *(a)* what that establishment produces and *(b)* what plans there are to withdraw the police officers; and by what date. [13191]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member.

Porton Down (Experiments)

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department last reviewed whether the Chemical Defence Establishment at Porton Down should stop its chemical warfare experiments on humans. [13665]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive of DERA to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Alan Simpson, dated 7 February 1996:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking when his department last reviewed whether the Chemical Defence Establishment should stop its chemical warfare experiments on humans has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE.

The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out research to provide safe and effective protective measures to safeguard the lives of United Kingdom Armed Forces personnel in the event that chemical and biological weapons are used against them. The role played by the Service volunteer programme is essential in ensuring the equipment provided is effective and does not degrade the performance of military tasks. Service volunteers are involved in the evaluation of new protective equipment and operational procedures and in the development of medical countermeasures against the effects of biological and chemical warfare agents.

The use of human volunteers is kept constantly under review and people are only ever used where it is both necessary and safe to do so. In recent years there has been no requirement to carry out studies involving the use of live agent to test the efficacy of these physical and medical protective measures. Work in the past conducted at CBDE has involved the exposure of Service volunteers to small quantities of chemical warfare agents in order to assess the incapacitating effects of these small amounts.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Chemical Defence Establishment at Porton Down carried out research into the long-term health effects of CS gas; and what were the results of this research. [13662]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive of DERA to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Alan Simpson dated 7 February 1996:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking when the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment carried out research into the long-term health effects of CS gas; and what were the conclusions of this research has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE.

In the early 1980s CBDE carried out limited studies to assess the long term health effects of exposure to CS gas. The results of these laboratory-based animal studies reinforced by generally available medical evidence suggests that there are no long term effects on people exposed to CS gas in the concentrations commonly employed.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Chemical Defence Estabishment at Porton Down produces an annual report or assessment of its programme of tests and studies using service volunteers *(a)* for its own internal use and *(b)* for use within the Ministry of Defence. [13664]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive of DERA to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Alan Simpson, dated 7 February 1996:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment produces an annual report or assessment of its programme of tests and studies using service volunteers for its own internal use and for use within the Ministry of Defence has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE.

The Independent Ethics Committee which reviews all of the work involving Service volunteers carried out at CBDE produces an annual report detailing the involvement of volunteers in study protocols. This report, which contains defence sensitive material, is circulated internally within CBDE and the Ministry of Defence.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if information derived from the Chemical Defence Establishment's experiments with humans is shared with Canada and the United States of America under the provisions of the 1980 memorandum of understanding on chemical and biological defence. [13663]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Information arising from work involving the use of service volunteers in research programmes carried out at CBDE have been shared with the United States and Canada as part of the collaboration promoted by the memorandum of understanding in question.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy, as part of his investigation into Gulf war syndrome, to investigate whether any of the chemical agents sold to Iraq by United Kingdom companies contributed to the damage done to British soldiers and auxiliary personnel in the Gulf war. [13434]

Mr. Soames: No. There is no scientific or medical evidence that any chemical warfare agents were used in the Gulf war.

Aircraft Proximity Incident (Perth)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Royal Air Force personnel provided a pre-flight briefing to the crew of the Portuguese air force helicopter involved in an aircraft proximity incident at Perth airfield on 6 June 1994; and what was the minimum height authorised for the aircraft's flight in low flying area 14. [13253]

Mr. Soames: Briefing was given and the minimum height authorised for the sorties was 100 ft minimum separation distance.

Procurement Ethics Code

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Crown servants who worked within his Department have moved since December 1993 within two years to companies with which they had dealings or involvement while holding post at the Department; and if all persons taking up positions directly related to their previous departmental posts applied for permission in accordance with section 9 of the code of procurement ethics. [13979]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Some 603 applications were made under the business appointment rule. There is no requirement for staff to report whether or not an appointment is taken up. We are not aware of any breaches of the rules.

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of his Department's employees are not covered by the Ministry of Defence's code of procurement ethics. [13978]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The code of procurement ethics provides a synopsis for industry of my Department's overall stance and policy. It does not supplant the detailed rules in existing departmental publications which apply to all the Department's staff.

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Crown servants in his Department have breached sections *(a)* or *(b)* of section 9 of the code of procurement ethics since December 1993. [13977]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Not as far as we are aware.

Magherafelt Royal Irish Regiment Base

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department is taking to remove all structures similar to the one in which a fire occurred at Magherafelt Royal Irish Regiment base. [12592]

Mr. Soames: The fire are Magherafelt on 30 April 1994 took place in a Widgeon type structure, being used as sleeping accommodation. Since that time, many have been replaced by more modern structures and some have been allocated to other uses. At the time of the fire, there were 44 Widgeon buildings in Northern Ireland, of which 31 were being used as sleeping accommodation. As of 5 February 1996, the total number had been reduced to 33, of which 15 were used for sleeping accommodation. After a thorough survey of these 15 buildings, a range of additional safety measures is being implemented. I am satisfied that all responsible steps are being taken to minimise the risk of fire in the remaining buildings of this type.

Stores Losses

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *81*, what factors underlay the decision not to record items valued at less than £100,000 which have been *(a)* stolen and *(b)* lost. [13163]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Losses need to be individually noted in the appropriation account only if they exceed £100,000 in value. Hence, except as regards fraud and theft, a central record of losses below that figure is not maintained, and records are kept by individual budget areas. Cases of fraud or theft are recorded centrally in summary terms.

Recruitment

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give for *(a)* 1988–89, *(b)* 1989–90 and *(c)* 1990–91 the (i) total recruitment budget, (ii) the total number of recruits and (iii) the average cost per recruit broken down between the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force. [13596]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member.

Export Licences

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the Government's policy in respect of the export of missiles which are capable of post delivery conversion from conventional to nuclear use; on what occasions United Kingdom export licences have been granted for such missiles since 1980; and if he will list for each occasion the destination country, and the country given as the end user. [13986]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Exports of missiles require export licences, as do any other defence exports. The consideration given to licence applications covers many factors and in the case of missiles includes the obligations we have accepted under the missile technology control regime. This international regime lays down the guidelines and parameters to cover the export of missiles which are capable of nuclear use. It has not been the practice to give details of licences granted for the export of defence equipment.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on which dates since 1980 form F680 export licences were granted and subsequently renewed for the export of precision guided missiles from the United Kingdom to the United Arab Emirates. [13985]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The MOD form 680 clearance procedure is not in itself an export licence procedure. It is designed to give companies guidance on the likely Government reaction to an export licence application. In the same way as for export licences, information on MOD form 680 decisions are commercial in confidence.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the Ministers responsible for the authorisation of F680 export licences during the periods *(a)* June to December 1986, *(b)* June to December 1988 and *(c)* June to December 1990. [13956]

Mr. Arbuthnot: DTI Ministers are responsible for authorising export licences. The Ministers for Defence Procurement responsible for authorising F680 guidance were, during the periods *(a)* and *(b)* Lord Trefgarne, and during period *(c)* Mr. Alan Clark.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Listed Buildings

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many grade I and grade II listed buildings were *(a)* demolished and *(b)* otherwise lost in (i) 1994 and (ii) 1995. [13384]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have been asked to reply.

This Department records, on a financial year basis, cases where we are notified, under the provisions of circular 8/87, that a local authority intends to grant consent for the total demolition of a listed building, together with the consents which the Department itself issues. The following figures show the numbers of principal and curtilage buildings affected by these consents.

	Grade I	*Grade II**	*Grade II*
1993–94	0	2	62
1994–95	1	12	79

Records are not kept centrally on the extent to which consents are implemented or losses take place without the need to apply for consent.

British Library

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to extend the capacity of the St. Pancras British library's building when capacity has been reached. [8008]

Mr. Sproat: We have no present plans to extend the British library's new St. Pancras building once it has been completed. However, that does not necessarily preclude further library development. For example, the capital costs could be incurred by the private sector under the private finance initiative. My right hon. Friend has agreed to consider proposals, and the assessment of the library's future needs which they embody, which the library has put to her for further development on the surplus land to the north of the St. Pancras construction site. The new St. Pancras building will provide considerable improvements in book storage conditions, and in the flexibility with which readers can be served and accommodated in the reading rooms. Like any national library in receipt of published material under the legal deposit system, the British library's collections are growing in size, and the library's plans include the need for material to be stored, as well as at St. Pancras, at its northern site in Boston Spa where there is scope for future expansion.

UK Sports Council

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when the new chief executive of the UK Sports Council will be appointed; and what experience in sports administration will be required. [12883]

Mr. Sproat: An announcement about the filling of this post will be made soon.

The chief executive of the UK Sports Council should have top level management experience and a thorough knowledge and fervent appreciation of sport and related issues at both national and international level. The person should also have well-developed leadership and motivational qualities, acute financial awareness together with excellent interpersonal and presentational skills.

Eurimages

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what external advice she has sought on the contractual effects of Her Majesty's Government's decision to withdraw from Eurimages. [12988]

Mr. Sproat: None.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what estimate she has made of the additional amount of investment leveraged by Eurimages in each of the last three years. [12986]

Mr. Sproat: Eurimages usually completes the funding package by contributing around 10 per cent. of the budget for films which have already attracted funding from a number of other public and private sector sources, and recoups about 3 per cent. of its contributions overall. It is not possible to identify the amount of additional private investment which might otherwise have been secured.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what has been the cost of her Department's subscription to Eurimages in each of the last three years. [12927]

Mr. Sproat: The cost of the Department's subscription to Eurimages in each of the last three years has been as follows: £1,318,856 in 1993; £1,913,206 in 1994 and £2,469,902 in 1995.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many British films have received assistance from Eurimages in each of the last three years. [12985]

Mr. Sproat: The number of films awarded Eurimages funding and involving UK co-production companies since the UK joined in April 1993 was 12 in 1993, 21 in 1994 and 22 in 1995.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what notice her Department gave of its intention to withdraw from Eurimages; and to what extent this was in line with the relevant Council of Europe resolution. [12987]

Mr. Sproat: Normal confidentiality requirements as to the contents of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget statement and my Department's spending plans did not allow for prior notice to be given of our intention to withdraw. My Department will, of course, abide by obligations arising from the relevant Council of Europe resolution.

National Lottery

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to seek powers to place a limit on the size of national lottery prizes; and if she will make a statement. [12025]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 5 February 1996]:* Directions issued by the Secretary of State under section 11 of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993, limit the number of jackpot rollovers to three.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what have been the running costs relating to the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) staff costs, (ii) information technology and (iii) other costs. [10960]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The information requested is as follows:

	1994–95 £	*1995–96* £
(a) In real terms:		
(i) staff costs	7,125	32,260
(ii) information technology	—	—
(iii) other costs	—	—
(b) In cash terms:		
(i) staff costs	6,630	32,260
(ii) information technology	—	—
(iii) other costs	—	—

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much has been spent on external consultants in the tendering process of the private finance initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) legal fees, (ii) publicity costs, (iii) accountancy fees and (iv) management consultancy fees. [10959]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The Department of National Heritage has not undertaken any PFI projects. The following costs relate to projects in its two agencies and in the non-departmental public bodies which it sponsors:

	1994–95 £	*1995–96* £
(a) Real terms:		
(i) legal fees	8,600	1,000
(ii) publicity costs	—	10,000
(iii) accountancy fees	—	100,000
(iv) management consultancy fees	30,000	49,000
(b) Cash terms		
(i) legal fees	8,000	1,000
(ii) publicity costs	—	10,000
(iii) accountancy fees	—	100,000
(iv) management consultancy fees	27,850	49,000

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is her estimate of her Department's expenditure on newspapers and magazines in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96 to date; and if she will list the publications purchased for the latest year for which information is available. [11513]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* The Department of National Heritage spent £20,033 on newspapers and magazines in 1993–94, and £34,806 in 1994–95. To date, the Department has spent £18,519 in 1995–96. The publications purchased for the Department in 1995–96 are:

NEWSPAPERS AND JOURNALS CURRENTLY PURCHASED BY THE LIBRARY ON BEHALF OF THE DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL HERITAGE

Accountancy
Accountancy Age
Ancient Monuments Society Newsletter
Ancient Monuments Society Transactions
Antique Collector
Apollo
Architects Journal and AJ Focus
Architectural Review
Art Newspaper
Arts Monthly
Arts Review
ASLIB Proceedings
Athletics Weekly
Autocar
Book Marketing and updates
Bookseller
Broadcast
Broadcasting and Cable
Building
Building and Building—Special Supplement
Building Design and Supplements
Burlington Magazine
Cable and Satellite Express
Cable and Satellite Europe
Campaign
Caterer and Hotel Keeper
Construction Repair
Context
Country Life
County News
Culturelink
Daily Express
Daily Mail
Daily Mirror
Daily Star
Daily Telegraph
Disability Now
Diver Magazine
Economist
Education
Employment Gazette
Equal Opportunities Review
Estate Times
European
European Journal of Cultural Policy
Evening Standard 1st Edition
Evening Standard Final Edition
Financial Times
Financial Times—New Media Markets
Golf World
Good Housekeeping
Guardian
Heritage
Heritage Development
Holiday Which
In Britain
Independent
Independent on Sunday
Industrial Relations Review and Report
Information UK Outlooks
Information World Review
Interchanges
International Journal of Cultural Property
Internet and Comms Today
Investors Chronicle
Journal of Architectural Conservation
Journal of Librarianship and Information Science
Journal of Planning and Environment Law and Occasional Papers
Journal of the Society of Archivists
Journal of Travel Research
Leisure Management and Leisure Opportunities
Leisure Week
Library and Information News
Library Journal
Library Manager
Local Government Chronicle
Mail on Sunday
Marketing Week
Media Monitor

Monitor
Municipal Journal
Municipal Review
Museums Journal
National Gallery Technical Bulletin
New Civil Engineer
New Library World and Librarians World
New Scientist
New Statesman and Society
News of the World
Observer
Online and CD ROM Review
Online World
Open Rugby League
Parliamentary Monitor
Personnel Journal
Perspectives on Architecture
Planning
Private Eye
Professional Manager
Public Finance
Public Policy Review
Publishing
Radio Magazine
Radio Times
Rugby World and Post
Satellite TV Europe
Satellite TV Finance
SCONUL Newsletter
Screen Digest
Screen Finance
Screen International
Spectator
Sponsorship News
Sports Industry
Stage and TV Today
Sun
Sunday Express
Sunday Mirror
Sunday People
Sunday Telegraph
Sunday Times
Taxation
Tennis World
Time Out
Times
Times Educational Supplement
Tourism Intelligence Quarterly
Tourism Management
Trace Magazine
Travel and Tourism Analyst
Travel Trade Gazette
Travel Trade Gazette Europa
Travel Weekly
UK Press Gazette
Variety
Vine—Very Informal Newsletter
Visits to Tourist Attractions
Wall Street Journal
What Satellite and TV
Which?
Wisden Cricket Monthly
Yours

Religious Buildings

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *250*, if she will consider removing the ecclesiastical exemption from statutory listed building and conservation area controls in respect of the former Roman Catholic cathedral in Middlesbrough. [13005]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 1 February 1996]:* My right hon. Friend sees no reason to do so. The building is still in ecclesiastical use as a parish church. I understand that discussions are taking place between the Church authorities and English Heritage on a programme of major repairs.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *250*, if she will consider removing the ecclesiastical exemption from statutory listed building and conservation area controls in respect of the Benedictine abbey church at Farnborough, Hampshire. [13006]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 1 February 1996]:* The abbey does not fall within the terms of the ecclesiastical exemption retained by the Roman Catholic Church. Normal statutory listed building and conservation area controls therefore apply to it. I understand that the local planning authority is currently considering an application for listed building consent for works at the abbey.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

War Pension Appeals

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when Mr. Andrew Dickson's war pension appeal, presented on 28 November 1992, reference M2910162, will be heard. [13623]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The pensions appeal tribunals received the supplementary statement of case from the War Pensions Agency on 15 November 1995. However, the pensions appeal tribunals have not yet received a response to their letter of 26 October 1994 to Mr. Dickson's representatives requesting information about the listing of the appeal. A reminder was sent on 2 February 1996, and once a response is received, the pensions appeal tribunals will arrange a hearing for the appeal.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when Mr. John Middleton's war pension appeal, presented on 8 March 1995, reference M3101179, will be heard. [13622]

Mr. Evans: Mr. Middleton's appeal was received by the pensions appeal tribunals on 31 May 1995. On 4 July, Mr. Middleton's representatives advised the pensions appeal tribunals that he would be unable to attend his hearing due to ill health and requested that a domiciliary visit be arranged. Regrettably, the pensions appeal tribunals failed to act on this letter. I should like to apologise to Mr. Middleton for this error and for the delay it has caused to his case.

The president of the pensions appeal tribunals has authorised a domiciliary visit which is expected to take place later this month. Thereafter, Mr. Middleton's appeal will be listed for hearing as a matter of urgency.

Offensive Weapons

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidelines he has issued to the Crown Prosecution Service regarding the level of charge of offenders for carrying offensive weapons. [13264]

The Attorney-General: I have been asked to reply.

The Director of Public Prosecutions, and through her the Crown Prosecution Service, is supervised by the Attorney-General. The service, when dealing with cases involving offensive weapons, applies the principles set out in the code for Crown prosecutors.

The law makes a distinction between the carrying in a public place of offensive weapons on the one hand and bladed or pointed instruments on the other. Possessing an offensive weapon is the more serious charge. Offensive weapons fall into three categories: those made for causing injury, those adapted for causing injury, or those intended by the defendant to cause injury. The offence of carrying of bladed instruments does not require proof that the defendant intended to use it to cause personal injury and carries a lesser penalty. The choice of charge will depend upon the evidence which is available to support the charge and is selected by the Crown Prosecution Service to reflect the seriousness of the offending, to give the court adequate sentencing powers, and to enable the evidence to be presented in a clear and simple way.

The Offensive Weapons Bill currently going through Parliament will increase the maximum sentences for offences under section 1 of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953 and section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 to four years' imprisonment and two years' imprisonment respectively.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Union Flag (Armagh RUC Station)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Union flag was flown at Armagh RUC station on (i) Christmas day 1995 and (ii) new year's day 1996; and what arrangements have been made to fly the Union flag at Armagh RUC station on the remainder of the specified occasions in 1996. [11716]

Sir John Wheeler: I regret that the Union flag was not flown at Armagh RUC station on 25 December 1995 and 1 January 1996, due to an unfortunate oversight which will not occur again.

Arrangements have been made to ensure that the Union flag is flown, in accordance with RUC policy.

Seed Potatoes

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what quantities of seed potatoes are being imported into Northern Ireland from the Netherlands; what evidence he has evaluated into the presence of brown rot in imported Dutch seed potatoes; what arrangements are in place to ensure that brown rot disease is not brought into Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [12940]

Mr. Ancram: There is no record of any imports into Northern Ireland of seed potatoes produced in the Netherlands in 1995. It follows that there is no evidence available regarding brown rot in imported Dutch seed potatoes.

Commission decision 95/506/EC laid down additional requirements to be met where potatoes produced in the Netherlands in 1995 are being traded. This decision enables member states to take additional measures to monitor Dutch potatoes entering their territory. The Potatoes Originating in the Netherlands (Notification) Order (Northern Ireland) 1995 requires prior written notification of the intention to land in Northern Ireland potatoes originating in the Netherlands. Any such potatoes landed will be subject to detention, inspection and testing for brown rot.

Intensive Care Beds

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many intensive care beds were available in each of the Northern Ireland health boards in each of the last seven years. [12560]

Mr. Moss: The table shows the average number of intensive care beds which were available in wards open overnight in each of the Northern Ireland health board areas for each of the last seven years.

Year/board	*Eastern*[1]	*Northern*	*Southern*	*Western*
1988–89	27	6	6	10
1989–90	31	6	6	10
1990–91	29	6	6	10
1991–92	29	6	6	10
1992–93	28	6	6	10
1993–94	27	6	6	10
1994–95	30	10	6	10

[1] The above figure for the Eastern board area includes six beds at the Royal Belfast hospital for sick children.

School Rolls

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pupils are currently educated in maintained primary schools; and what were the figures for the last three years. [12585]

Mr. Ancram: A total of 95,207 pupils were educated in maintained primary schools in 1994–95. The number of pupils educated in maintained primary schools for the previous three years are as follows:

1991–92: 95,787

1992–93: 96,047

1993–94: 95,757

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pupils are currently educated in controlled primary schools in Northern Ireland; and what were the figures for each of the last three years. [12586]

Mr. Ancram: A total of 91,435 pupils were educated in controlled primary schools in Northern Ireland in 1994–95. The number of pupils educated in controlled primary schools in Northern Ireland for the previous three years are as follows:

1991–92: 90,021

1992–93: 90,684

1993–94: 91,089

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pupils *(a)* are currently and *(b)* have been in each of the last three years educated in maintained secondary and grammar schools. [12593]

Mr. Ancram: A total of 48,692 pupils were educated in maintained secondary schools in 1994–95. The number of pupils educated in maintained secondary schools for the previous three years are as follows:

1991–92: 46,580

1992–93: 47,274

1993–94: 48,112

There are no maintained grammar schools in Northern Ireland.

Rents

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the percentage changes in each of the last seven years for rents paid to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and private landlords (housing sector); and if he will list the differential between these figures and the rate of inflation. [12587]

Mr. Moss: The annual percentage change in rents is applied to both Northern Ireland Housing Executive rents and regulated tenancies registered with the Department of Environment for Northern Ireland. The changes for each of the last seven years plus the differential between those figures and the rates of inflation are as follows:

Percentage

Year	*Rent increase*	*Difference between rent increase and rate of inflation*
1989–90	10.25	+2.55
1990–91	10.00	+0.70
1991–92	8.00	+3.50
1992–93	9.50	+6.90
1993–94	7.75	+5.85
1994–95	7.50	+4.86
1995–96	7.25	+4.05

Rents of uncontrolled tenancies are open market and information on changes in rental levels is not available.

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the present average rent paid by Northern Ireland Housing Executive tenants and what assessment he has made of equivalent rents in the private housing sector. [12588]

Mr. Moss: The present average rent paid by Northern Ireland Housing Executive tenants is £31.65 per week. Statistics on rental levels in the private housing sector are not collected.

Student Grants

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the regulations relating to the award of student grants in Northern Ireland. [12589]

Mr. Ancram: The Students Awards Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (SR 1995/1).

State Pensions

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of relating the state pensions to the inflation rate and average earnings. [12594]

Mr. Moss: None. The rates of state pensions are set for the United Kingdom and are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of his Department's expenditure on newspapers and magazines in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96, to date; and if he will list the publications purchased for the latest year for which information is available. [11427]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* Expenditure by the Northern Ireland Departments and Northern Ireland Office expenditure on newspapers and magazines is as follows:

1993–94: £699,222

1994–95: £575,711

1995–96: £375,987 (to date)

Newspapers and magazines purchased by the Departments of Economic Development, Agriculture, Education and the Northern Ireland Office are listed:

Farm Development Review

Farmers Guardian

Farmers Weekly

Farming and Conservation

Farming News

Feed Mix

Feedstuffs

The Field

Fish Farmer

Fish Farming International

Fish Trader

Fishing News International

Food and Horticulture Ireland
Food Ireland
Food Magazine
Food Manufacturer
Food Processing
Foodshop
Forestry and British Timber
The Garden
Grass Farmer
Grocer
Grower
Hoard's Dairyman
The Horse
Horticulture and Landscape Ireland
Horticulture Week
Industrial and Commercial Training
Irish Computer
Irish Dairy Industry Magazine
Irish Farmers Monthly
Irish Farmers Journal
Irish Field
Irish Skipper
The Living Earth
Lotus Magazine
Marketing
Marketing Week
The Marque
Meat and Poultry
Meat International
Meat Manufacturing and Marketing
Meat Trader
Meat Trades Journal
Milk Industry
Financial Times
Times
Daily Telegraph
Guardian
Independent
Daily Mail
Daily Express
Sun
Daily Star
Morning Star
Irish Post
Evening Standard
Irish Independent
Irish Times
Mail on Sunday
News of the World
Observer
Sunday Express
Sunday People
Sunday Mirror
Sunday Telegraph
Sunday Times
Independent on Sunday
Irish Independent on Sunday
Daily Mirror

News Letter
Belfast Telegraph
European
Armagh Observer
Antrim Times
Ballymena Guardian
Ballymena Times
Ballymoney Times
Banbridge Chronicle
Coleraine Constitution
County Down Spectator
Derry Journal
Down Democrat
Down Recorder
Dromore Leader
Fermanagh Herald
Impartial Reporter
Larne Times
Londonderry Sentinel
Lurgan Mail
Mourne Observer
Newry Reporter
Newtownabbey Times
Newtownards Chronicle
Portadown Times
Roe Valley Sentinel
Sunday Business Post
Sunday Life
Sunday Tribune
Sunday World
Strabane Weekly
Tyrone Constitution
Tyrone Courier
Ulster Gazette
Ulster Herald
Ulster Star
Ireland's Saturday Night
Irish News
Coleraine Chronicle
Dungannon Observer
The Examiner
Mid Ulster Mail
Northern Constitution
Economist
New Statesman
New Society
Police
The Phoenix
Private Eye
Listener
Spectator
TV Times
UK Press Gazette
Newsweek
Magill
Dublin Opinion
Pimms
Time Out

Scotsman
New Scientist
Hansard
Linenhall Review
Macuser
Management Today
Menswear
Mining Magazine
Motorship
New Scientist
Newsweek International
Nikei Weekly
P. C. Direct
Plastics and Rubber Weekly
Practical Motorist
Printing World
Stubbs Gazette
Tablewear International
Time
Ulster Business
Windows User
ABC Rail Guide
Accountancy
Belfast Gazette
Business and Finance
Business Traveller
Cabinet Maker and Retail Furnisher
Campaign
Carpet and Floor Covering Review
Caterer and Hotel Keeper
Certified Accountant
Construction News
Contract Journal
Cranes Today
Economic Affairs
Education
Electrical Review
Electrical Times
Electronic Times
Electronics Today International
Engineer
Enterprise Magazine
Far Eastern Economic Review
Farmweek
Fishing News
Flight International
Fortune
House Magazine
Inside Microsoft Windows
International Business Week
Investors Chronicle
Irish America
Irish Farmers Journal
Japan Times Weekly
Japanese Motor Business
Knitting International
Architects' Journal
Building
Byte
Guardian Weekly
Fortnight
Personal Computer World
Times Educational Supplement
Times Educational Supplement (Scotland)
Times Higher Education
Times Literary Supplement
AV Magazine
Agricultural Supply Industry
Amateur Gardening
Angling Ireland
Angling Times
Aquaculture Ireland
Aquaculture Magazine
Arable Farming
The Bookseller
British Farmer
Broiler Industry
Care on the Road
Checkout
Checkout Fresh
Co-Op Ireland
Creative Review
Crops
Dairy and Food Industry Magazine
Dairy Farmer
Dairy Industries International
Dairy Industries Newsletter
Deer Farmer
Deer Farming
Ecology and Farming
Enact
Egg Industry
Electronics and Wireless World
Equestrain Trade News
Eurofood
Eurofood and Drink
Eurolink
Executive Woman
Farm and Food
Farm Contractor
Misset Pigs
Misset World Poultry
Motor Boat and Yachting
Nursery and Garden Centre
Pacemaker and Thoroughbred Breeder
Paris Match
Pig Farming
Pig Industry
Pig International
Pigletter
Potato News
Potato Review
Potato Newsletter
Poultry Digest
Poultry International
Poultry World

Practical Farm Ideas
Practical PC
Safety and Health Practitioner
Salmon, Trout and Sea Trout
Scottish Beekeeper
Scottish Farmer
Scottish Fish Farmer
Scottish Fishing Weekly
Seafood International
Sheep Farmer
Supermarketing
Tillage Farmer
Timber Grower
Trout and Salmon
Turkey World
Turkeys
Value Retailing
Visa Magazine
What Personal Computer
What to Buy for Business
What's new in Computing
What's new in Farming

Information on newspapers and magazines purchased by the Departments of Finance and Personnel, Environment, and Health and Social Services could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

HEALTH

Hypothermia

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths where hypothermia was mentioned in the death certificate took place among *(a)* men aged 65 years and over and *(b)* women aged 60 years and over in (1) each month of 1994 and (2) each month of 1995 by region in England and Wales. [13263]

Mr. Horam: Information for 1994 is shown in the table. Figures for 1995 could be provided only at disproportionate cost, at this time.

Number of monthly deaths with a mention of hypothermia (ICD[1] 991.6) in women aged 60 years and over, by health region of usual residence, 1994[2]

Health region	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Not stated	Total
Northern	4	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	1	2	0	3	0	14
Yorkshire	3	2	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	4	0	14
Trent	4	2	0	3	2	1	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	16
East Anglia	1	3	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	12
North West Thames	4	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	11
North East Thames	3	4	3	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	2	0	15
South East Thames	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	5	0	13
South West Thames	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	6
Wessex	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	7
Oxford	3	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	9
South Western	2	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	1	0	13
West Midlands	5	6	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	4	0	1	0	20
Mersey	2	0	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	7
North Western	4	5	0	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	15
Wales	2	5	0	1	1	1	1	0	2	1	0	1	0	15
Total	45	34	10	13	8	6	2	7	10	15	12	24	1	187

[1] International Classification of Disease, 9th Revision.
[2] Provisional.

Number of monthly deaths with a mention of hypothermia (ICD[1] 991.6) in men aged 65 years and over, by health region of usual residence, 1994[2]

Health region	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total
Northern	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	5	10
Yorkshire	3	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	11
Trent	0	2	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	7
East Anglia	3	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	9
North-west Thames	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	8
North-east Thames	2	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8
South-east Thames	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	7
South-west Thames	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Wessex	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	4
Oxford	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
South Western	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	8
West Midlands	4	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	1	11
Mersey	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
North Western	3	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	7
Wales	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	5
Total	22	25	6	8	2	4	3	1	6	5	8	14	104

[1] International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision.
[2] Provisional.

Neurotic and Depressive Disorders

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what analysis his Department has made of the link between unemployment and *(a)* neurotic and *(b)* depressive disorders. [13270]

Mr. Bowis: The "OPCS Surveys of Psychiatric Morbidity in Great Britain" contain information on the association between employment status and levels of psychiatric morbidity. Copies of the publication are available in the Library.

Emergency Beds

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to which areas he has made extra funding available for emergency beds; how many extra beds have been established for each area; and at what cost. [13722]

Mr. Horam: It is for health authorities to decide what health care to purchase, taking into account national priorities and local needs. Individual national health service trusts need to ensure that bed numbers are carefully matched to contracted workloads and are responsive to patient flows, including the local rate of emergency admissions.

Information on medical beds is not available centrally. Details of the average daily number of available acute beds in each trust are published annually in "Bed Availability in England", a copy of which is in the Library.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* directives he has issued to health authorities, *(b)* other measures he has taken and *(c)* meetings he has had, since 1 November 1995, for the purpose of expanding the provision of NHS dentistry in all local areas of English health authorities. [13442]

Mr. Malone: I have frequent meetings, including some with hon. Members, to discuss national health service dentistry. The NHS executive board has also considered the issue. The Government are committed to an effective and accessible NHS dental service. We shall continue to take steps, working with local NHS management as necessary, to improve services.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will monitor the levels of serious illness in areas where there is opencast mining generating dust. [13486]

Mr. Horam: Research on the effects on health of air pollution, including that of dust from opencast mining, has been referred to the independent advisory Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants. COMEAP has considered the suggestion that opencast coal mining might have a harmful effect on the health of those living close to the workings. A study by Temple, 1992, was considered and COMEAP agreed that the results reported were consistent with an association between the opening of an opencast mine and an increase in asthma consultations. However, the committee considered that local awareness of the opening of the mine and concern about its possible effects on health were plausible explanations of the association and that further work would be needed to sustain a causal hypothesis.

In 1994 the Department of the Environment, the Department of Health and the Medical Research Council issued a joint call for proposals for research into air pollution and respiratory disease. The Department is currently considering the proposals that were put forward, including studies on the health effects of opencast mining.

Waiting Times (Northumberland)

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the average waiting list time for patients in the Northumberland health authority for each year since 1992. [13484]

Mr. Horam: The information is not available centrally. Information on waiting lists at hospitals in Northumberland is contained in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Drug-related Deaths (Northumberland)

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his calculation of the number of people who died in Northumberland health authority as the result of the use of medicinal drugs in each of the last five years *(a)* accidentally, *(b)* in cases involving suicide or self-inflicted injury and *(c)* in cases involving injury undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted; and which drug each death involved. [13562]

Mr. Horam: The table shows the number of people usually resident in the Northumberland health authority area who have died as a result of poisoning by drugs, medicaments and biological substances, ICD[1] codes 960-979, in the years 1988 to 1992, under the headings of accident, suicide and self-inflicted injury, and injury undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted. Whether or not these were prescribed drugs is not recorded at death. However, most of the categories of these substances are available only on prescription. Major exceptions are "analgesics, antipyretics and antirheumatics", ICD[1] code 965 and "other unspecified drugs and medicaments", ICD[1] code 977. The drugs implicated in these deaths are published each year in tables 9 and 10 of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys publication series DH4 which is available in the Library.

Deaths as a result of poisoning by drugs, medicaments and biological substances, ICD[1] 960-979, to residents of Northumberland health authority areas 1988–1992

ICD[1] code	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
960-979					
Accident	1	0	1	1	0
Suicide and self-inflicted injury	7	6	7	2	5
Injury undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted	8	6	7	6	4

Deaths as a result of poisoning by drugs, medicaments and biological substances, ICD[1] 960-979, to residents of Northumberland health authority areas 1988–1992

ICD[1] code	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
965					
Accident	0	0	1	1	0
Suicide and self-inflicted injury	3	0	5	0	2
Injury undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted	2	1	2	5	1
977					
Accident	0	0	0	0	0
Suicide and self-inflicted injury	0	3	1	0	1
Injury undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted	0	1	3	0	0

[1] International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision.

Clinical Psychology

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he proposes to *(a)* increase the efficiency of current courses in clinical psychology, *(b)* increase the number of training places in clinical psychology and *(c)* ensure that sufficient clinical psychologists are available to meet the needs of the health services within the next five years. [13682]

Mr. Malone: It is for local employers to determine the staff needed to deliver services. Since 1993, the number of training places for clinical psychologists has continued to increase to meet growing demand. From April 1996 it will be for education and training consortia to assess future demand and the effectiveness of the provision of courses. The national health service executive will maintain a national overview.

Osteoporosis

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which NHS hospitals are currently operating bone density scanners for osteoporosis; [13729]

(2) what assessment he has made of the accessibility of NHS bone density scanners to women who require screening. [13730]

Mr. Horam: Information on the location of bone densitometry scanners in individual hospitals is not available centrally. The recent survey by the National Osteoporosis Society suggested that 38 per cent. of health authorities are specifically funding bone densitometry. It is for individual health authorities to decide locally what priority to give to making bone densitometry scans available to those who need them.

NHS Trusts (Outcome Indicators)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to publish outcome indicators for NHS trusts in England similar to those published by the Secretary of State for Scotland in December 1994. [13732]

Mr. Horam: The national health service executive is working with the joint consultants committee to promote the development of new clinical indicators, which will enable aspects of NHS trusts' performance to be examined. It will be necessary to pilot and test any proposals before publication. Some of the clinical outcome indicators published in Scotland require the linkage of patient records in a way not yet routinely available in England, and accordingly there are no plans at present to publish such indicators.

Oral Cancer

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many new cases of oral cancer, including cancers of the lip, tongue and oral hypo-pharynx, have been recorded since 1989; [13769]

(2) how many oral cancer cases reported in each of the last three years were of people aged *(a)* under 15 years, *(b)* 15 to 19 years, *(c)* 20 to 35 years, *(d)* 36 to 64 years and *(e)* over 65 years; and how many were (i) male and (ii) female. [13787]

Mr. Horam: Provisional numbers of oral cancers[1] diagnosed in 1990 in England and Wales are shown in the table.

Age	*Males*	*Females*	*Total*
0–14	4	5	9
15–19	7	0	7
20–34	34	21	55
35–64	824	347	1,171
65 and over	878	612	1,490
Total	1,747	985	2,732

[1] Oral cancer is defined as: cancer of the lip (International Classification of Diseases, ninth revision, 140), tongue (ICD9 141), gum (ICD9 143), floor of mouth (ICD9 144), other and unspecified parts of the mouth (ICD9 145), oropharynx (ICD9 146), nasopharynx (ICD9 147) and hypopharynx (ICD9 148). Cancers of the salivary glands (ICD9 142) have been excluded as they are not normally grouped with oral cancers.

Figures for 1988 and 1989 are contained in the Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys annual reference volumes, "Cancer statistics, registrations", series MB1 numbers 21 and 22, respectively; copies of which are available in the Library.

Ecstasy

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to draw the attention of younger people to the dangers of drug taking, with particular reference to Ecstasy. [13817]

Mr. Bowis: We launched a campaign to promote awareness of the national drugs helpline in November 1995. This featured a radio advertisement focusing on the risks to health from Ecstasy and a new information booklet for young people on the dangers of drugs and solvents. We shall shortly be launching a phase of advertising aimed at young people, which will focus on specific drugs, including Ecstasy. This will include wider advertising on independent radio and in the youth press, together with advertising aimed at parents in journals and magazines.

These campaigns are part of the Government's overall strategy, "Tackling Drugs Together." The work in this area within the national curriculum is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment.

Cornwall Healthcare NHS Trust

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was his role in the appointment of *(a)* the non-executive directors and *(b)* Mrs. Kirby-Harris as chair of the Cornwall Healthcare NHS trust; and what consultations were held prior to Mrs. Kirby-Harris being appointed. [13809]

Mr. Bowis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State appointed two of the current non-executive directors of Cornwall Healthcare national health service trust on 1 November 1995. His predecessor appointed the current chairman on 7 March 1994. Mrs. Kirby-Harris was appointed by his predecessor on 1 April 1993 after consideration of the candidates recommended by the regional health authority chairman.

Hospitals (Patients' Money)

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was held in hospital accounts in respect of the balance of patients' money; for each of the last five years for each NHS region. [13781]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Medicines and Food (Dangers)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he proposes to give the public on the danger of combinations of medicines and food in *(a)* neutralising the effects of the medicine and *(b)* causing strokes and heart attacks. [13162]

Mr. Malone: Where there is a known interaction between a human medicinal product and food, advice is already provided in the product information, which is authorised by the Licensing Authority, and in the British National Formulary, which is sent free of charge to all doctors. Doctors are responsible for discussing with their patients treatment options and any risks of treatment, this discussion should include information on likely side-effects and interactions with foods or other medicines. To supplement advice from the doctor many medicines have patient information leaflets, which include advice on how to take the medicine, any side-effects and whether there are any interactions with foods or other medicines. By the end of 1998 all medicinal products will have patient information leaflets, unless the relevant information can be included on the label. Pharmacists are also available for advice on medicines supplied through a pharmacy. In addition, patients taking monoamine oxidase inhibitors receive a treatment card which lists foods which should not be eaten while taking these medicines and for 14 days afterwards.

Breast Screening

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *246*, how he monitors the effectiveness of breast screening programmes in meeting "The Health of the Nation" targets for breast cancer. [13709]

Mr. Horam: Information on breast cancer screening has been collected since 1988–89, and is published in "Summary Information from Form KC62 England", copies of which are available in the Library. The data were collated on the Department's behalf by the cancer screening evaluation unit.

Health Economics Consortia

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health economics consortia have been set up in the United Kingdom; what capital the Government have allocated to these units; what is their remit and to whom they are accountable; and how many district health authorities, or other public bodies, have commissioned reports on service provision from these units. [10354]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* Health economics consortia are independent, self-financing bodies which provide economic advice and analysis to the NHS on a consultancy basis. It is for health authorities to consider what information they require to support their strategic objective of maximising the health benefits of their local populations and how best to obtain it. No information on the use of health economics consortia is held centrally.

TRANSPORT

Traffic Signs

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he has made on the proposal to allow business sponsorships of, and advertising on, traffic signs. [13675]

Mr. Watts: Advertising, or displaying messages acknowledging business sponsorship, on traffic signs is not permitted under current legislation We are developing proposals for public consultation on options for amending legislation.

British Railways Board

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what instructions he has given to the chairman of the British Railways Board regarding the role of the British Railways Board and its subsidiaries after April 1997; and if he will make a statement; [13925]

(2) what instructions he has given to the chairman of the British Railways Board regarding the rate at which subsidiaries of the British Railways Board are to be transferred to the private sector; and if he will make a statement. [13926]

Mr. Watts: The objectives set by my right hon. Friend for the chairman of the British Railways Board for 1995–96 were set out in a letter to the chairman on 26 June 1995, as announced in my right hon. Friend's answer of 4 July 1995 to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), *Official Report*, column *117*. Announcements about the chairman's objectives for 1996–97 and subsequently will be made in due course.

Office of Passenger Rail Franchising

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many personnel are currently employed by the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising; and how many he expects

to be employed in the financial year 1996–97 and 1997–98. [13932]

Mr. Watts: The number of staff in post at the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising as at 1 January 1996 was 88. The estimated number of staff required in 1996–97 is 121; in 1997–98 the estimated number is 136. The number of staff will rise to manage the franchises that have been let and to deal with the emerging franchises as the momentum continues to build. The figures include staff directly employed and those on loan or secondment from other parts of the civil service, the railway industry and the private sector.

Rail Privatisation (Safety)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research he has conducted into the likely effects of rail privatisation on safety within the railway system; and if he will make a statement on the results. [13770]

Mr. Watts: The independent Health and Safety Commission was asked in 1992 to examine in detail the implications for safety of the Government's privatisation proposals. We have implemented in full the Commission's recommendations for a new regulatory and safety management system.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to ensure that safety within the railway system will not deteriorate after privatisation. [13771]

Mr. Watts: We have implemented in full the independent Health and Safety Commission's recommendations for ensuring safety. The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate will continue its monitoring and investigation to see that standards are maintained and, where necessary, improved.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much money is being spent by his Department on improving safety within the railway system. [13786]

Mr. Watts: Safety expenditure by the railways is not identified separately as it is an integral part of expenditure which has other benefits, including maintenance and renewal.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to what extent, prior to the completion of the franchising of passenger rail services on the great western, south-west and London, Tilbury and Southend lines, the Health and Safety Executive has been consulted on arrangements existing between the franchisees and Railtrack regarding the prevention of trespass on running lines; and what conclusions were reached by the Health and Safety Executive in each case. [13933]

Mr. Watts: The Railways (Safety Case) Regulations 1994, which are enforced by the Health and Safety Executive, require railway operators to demonstrate that they have effective arrangements in place to control health and safety risks and to co-operate with each other to facilitate compliance. Railway safety cases have to be accepted by the infrastructure controller, in this case Railtrack, or by the Health and Safety Executive.

Railtrack's safety case has been accepted by the HSE, and Railtrack has in turn accepted the safety cases for the great western, south-west, and London, Tilbury and Southend train operators. These safety cases set out in some detail the arrangements for co-operation and management of the interfaces between operators.

Association of Train Operating Companies

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the powers, responsibilities, legal status and sources of income of the Association of Train Operating Companies. [13930]

Mr. Watts: The Association of Train Operating Companies—ATOC— is an unincorporated association open to all train operators holding passenger licences. Its principal functions, as set out in its constitution, are to facilitate the development and operation of commercial arrangements between passenger operators and to promote the use of the railway network, including, in particular, the making of journeys which involve more than one operator. ATOC's main objects and its ancillary functions are achieved through a number of schemes, essentially multi-party contracts between operators. ATOC's central secretariat administers these schemes, but is not itself a party to them. The secretariat's activities are financed through a membership fee levied on the association's members.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff are currently employed by the Association of Train Operating Companies; and how many he expects will be employed in the financial years 1996–97 and 1997–98. [13931]

Mr. Watts: Staffing levels in the Association of Train Operating Companies—ATOC—secretariat are determined by the association's members, who fund the secretariat's activities. ATOC currently employs 33 staff and expects to employ about 50 staff in 1996–97. It is too early to estimate the number of staff ATOC will employ in 1997–98.

M3

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish statistics on the volume of traffic on the M3 between junctions 6 and 7, and the volume of traffic entering and leaving the M3 at those junctions for each year since 1980. [133777]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Andrew Hunter, dated 7 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about the volume of traffic on the M3 motorway between junctions 6 and 7 and the volume of traffic entering or leaving the M3 at those junctions, for each year since 1980.

I regret that information in the form requested is not available. However, the annual average daily traffic flow (AADT) between junctions 6 and 7 on the M3 motorway for the three years 1993–95 was:

1993: 70,100

1994: 70,700

1995: 76,100

I hope that this is helpful.

Rail Privatisation

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide full details of the timetable for the franchising of passenger rail services; and if he will make a statement. [13998]

Mr. Watts: Bidders for the Network SouthCentral, Gatwick Express, Midland Main Line and InterCity East Coast franchises were shortlisted on 16 January. Final tenders are required by 1 March. Invitations to tender for South Eastern were issued on 19 December and for Chiltern on 30 January. For both franchises, indicative bids are required by 22 March. The franchising director issued on 23 January a document inviting applications to qualify to receive invitations to tender for the Cardiff Railway Company and South Wales and West franchises; responses to this must be received by 26 February.

The timetable for the franchising of passenger rail services is kept continually under review by the franchising director and the process for letting further franchises will be commenced by him as soon as practicable.

Newbury Bypass

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he intends to visit the countryside on the route of the Newbury bypass in the current year. [12407]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans to visit the countryside on the route of the Newbury bypass.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what detailed studies on the effects of run-off from the Newbury bypass on the rivers Lambourn and Kennet have been undertaken and published; [12409]

(2) what detailed studies on the effects of noise and air pollution from the Newbury bypass on Snelsmore common have been undertaken and published; [12408]

(3) if he will list the sites of national archaeological interest along the route of the proposed Newbury bypass; what detailed studies of the impacts of the road on these sites have been published; and what opportunity there has been for public consultation on these impacts; [12406]

(4) what protection is afforded to archaeological sites of national importance under planning policy guidance; how such protection has been taken into account in the consent procedure for the A34 Newbury bypass; and what opportunity there has been for the public to comment formally; [12405]

(5) how many badger setts lie on the route of the proposed A34 Newbury bypass; and what steps have been taken to relocate them before clearance work starts. [12403]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Cynog Dafis, dated 7 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent questions about the Newbury Bypass.

The studies we have carried out show that there will be no effect on the rivers Kennet and Lambourne from run off from the Newbury Bypass. The run off from the bypass will discharge through silt traps and oil interceptors to either deep soakaways or to balancing ponds. The balancing ponds use plants and reed beds as filters to improve further the quality of the water. These proposals have been agreed with the National Rivers Authority and will lead to an overall improvement in water quality, as less traffic will cross the rivers on the existing A34 where no such measures exist.

The effects of noise from the bypass were assessed in accordance with the Manual for Environmental Appraisal and were published at the 1988 Public Inquiry. they did not specifically single out Snelsmore Common. No areas have been identified where air quality along the bypass will be a problem. The removal of congestion in Newbury together with other Government measures to reduce emissions from vehicles will lead to an overall improvement.

There is only one site of national archaeological interest along the route of the Newbury Bypass, the Mesolithic site in the Lambourne valley. Field and desk-top studies have been undertaken along the route and are available. These studies together with proposals for archaeological rescue work have been discussed and agreed with English Heritage.

Although there were no known sites of archaeological importance at the time of the 1988 Public Inquiry, it was always accepted that there may be sites and the Inspector took account of this in his report.

Protection is afforded to archaeological sites of national importance under Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) No 16, a copy of which may be found in the House of Commons Library.

Such protection has been taken fully into account in giving the go ahead for the A34 Newbury Bypass.

Representation about archaeological sites were made at the 1988 Inquiry and were covered by the Inspector in his report.

After carefully surveying the route of the bypass, 3 badger setts were found. Replacement badger setts were constructed and the badgers relocated under licence from English Nature before the existing setts were destroyed.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were *(a)* the original estimated savings from the introduction of the incapacity benefit for the years 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98 and *(b)* the updated estimates for each of these periods; and if he will make a statement. [12245]

Mr. Burt: The original estimates for savings from the introduction of incapacity benefit were published in the Financial Memorandum to the Incapacity for Work Bill. Information from the Financial Memorandum is reproduced in the table.

	Estimated savings (£ million)
1995–96	410
1996–97	1,185
1997–98	1,720

A variety of factors will influence performance against these estimates including the decision to control the rate of processing of pre-April 1995 invalidity benefit cases to match operational performance. It is not yet possible reliably to estimate the overall effect on the original savings estimates.

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many decisions to award incapacity benefit have been issued *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the Greater Manchester area since April 1995; [12234]

(2) how many decisions to refuse incapacity benefit applications have been issued since April 1995 *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in the Greater Manchester area and *(c)* in the borough of Rochdale. [12335]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. The available information is in the table.

	Allowed following reference to BAMS on the all-work test	*Disallowed following reference to BAMS on the all-work test*[1]
National	302,048	45,085
Greater Manchester	23,752	3,523
Rochdale	670	120

[1] Includes disallowances following failure to return the all work test questionnaire and failure to attend for medical examination.
BAMS—Benefits Agency Medical Services.
1. All information to end of November 1995.
2. Data for greater Manchester covers the BA districts of: South Cheshire, Stockport, Tameside, Manchester South, Manchester Central, Salford, Sale/East Cheshire, Oldham, Manchester Trinity, Blackburn/Accrington, Bolton/Farnworth, Burnley/Pendle/Rossendale, West Pennine (including Rochdale office) and Wigan and Leigh.
3. The data is provisional and reflects activity during a time when the take-on of cases has been carefully controlled to ensure that the flow of work does not exceed operational capacity. It is, therefore, too early to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the new procedures.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applicants for incapacity benefit passed the all-work test and were deemed fit for employment in the most recent period for which he has figures. [13128]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table:

	Number
Found incapable of work following reference to BAMS on the all-work test	302,048
Found capable of work following reference to BAMS on the all-work test[1]	45,085

[1] Includes disallowances following failure to return the all-work test questionnaire and failure to attend for medical examination.
1. All information to end of November 1995.
2. The data is provisional and reflects activity during a time when the take-on of cases has been carefully controlled to ensure that the flow of work does not exceed operational capacity. It is, therefore, too early to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the new procedures.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the average length of time taken to hear an appeal against the disallowance of incapacity benefit under the all-work test in the northern region in 1995. [13200]

Mr. Burt: The information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Child Benefit

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 16 January, *Official Report*, column *571*, on child benefit, if, in the course of statutory consultation on the integration of one-parent benefit and child benefit, he will issue a draft timetable for the integration of those benefits. [13098]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: It is expected that the consultation process will be completed in early April. Regulations, which will be subject to affirmative resolution, will be laid before Parliament as soon as possible after the end of the consultation process. Subject to parliamentary approval, the regulations will come into force in April 1997.

Office Equipment and Uniforms

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what sums have been spent *(a)* by DSS offices and *(b)* by executive agencies on (i) uniforms for staff and (ii) furniture for offices in each region in each of the last five years; and if he will list those items valued over £5,000. [13093]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the tables.

Staff uniforms

Year (calendar)	£
1991	n/a
1992	1,544,695
1993	1,092,464
1994	1,488,005
1995	1,120,623

1. The figures are provisional and subject to change.
2. The table shows the total amount spent on uniforms for staff by the Department and its executive agencies.

Furniture

Year (financial)	£
1990–91	15,918,340
1991–92	1,795,241
1992–93	11,762,878
1993–94	13 034,386
1994–95	13,563,886

1. The figures are provisional and subject to change.
2. The table shows the total amount spent on furniture by the Department and its executive agencies.
3. Information regarding individual items of furniture is available only at disproportionate cost.

National Insurance (Contribution Holidays)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the estimates given in the Department of Social Security press release of 29 November 1994, on *(a)* the effect on public revenues of the proposed national insurance contribution holidays for people unemployed for two years or more and *(b)* the estimated number who will benefit from the scheme, giving the figures for 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99. [13403]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99
Estimated cost (£ million)[1]	30[3]	50	50
Estimated number of new employees benefiting each year[2]	130,000	130,000	130,000

1. National insurance contribution income forgone.
2. Estimates are based on a forecast of 2.1 million unemployed, but do not include the impact on the level of unemployment, because the response of employers and the size of any behavioural effects cannot be estimated with certainty.
3. The first year cost is lower than a full year's cost because the national insurance holiday lasts for one year and applies to new cases flowing off unemployment. Thus in respect of people leaving unemployment in the latter half of the year, a full year's cost in the first year will not accrue.

Official Documents (Braille)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what provision is made by his Department to provide official documents in braille and large text. [13445]

Mr. Burt: The Department and its agencies have a policy of making public information available in braille and large text and on audio cassette. When producing material for blind and partially sighted people, the recommended guidelines of the Royal National Institute for the Blind and the Government's own document, "Accessible Information Meeting the Government Commitment", are followed.

Facilities are available to produce one-off documents in Braille on request.

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average income of the bottom 20 per cent. of pensioner households as a percentage of average household incomes; and what was the equivalent figure in 1979. [13957]

Mr. Heald: Since 1979, the median income of the bottom 20 per cent. of pensioners has risen by nearly 20 per cent. For the population as a whole, median income rose by just over 25 per cent. More information is in the tables.

Median household incomes of the bottom 20 per cent. of pensioners as a percentage of overall median income, 1979 and 1992–93 Table 1: Before housing costs— £ per week at March 1995 prices

	Median income of the bottom 20 per cent. of pensioners	Median household income—all individuals	Pensioner bottom quintile median as per cent. of: whole population median
1979	93	178	52 per cent.
1992–93	111	224	49 per cent.

Notes:
1. The information in the tables is derived from the 1979 and 1992–93 households below average income datasets. 1992–93 is the latest date for which results are available.
2. Estimates are of weekly household equivalised disposable income, for monetary amounts estimates are shown as equivalent monetary amounts for a couple with no children. Figures are given to the nearest whole £.
3. All estimates are subject to sampling error.
4. Figures for 1992–93 are for two calendar years data combined.
5. Figures are for the UK.

Table 2: After housing costs—£ per week at March 1995 prices

	Median income of the bottom 20 per cent. of pensioners	Median household income—all individuals	Pensioner bottom quintile median as per cent. of: whole population median
1979	80	154	52 per cent.
1992–93	95	195	49 per cent.

1. The information in the tables is derived from the 1979 and 1992–93 households below average income datasets. 1992–93 is the latest date for which results are available.
2. Estimates are of weekly household equivalised disposable income, for monetary amounts estimates are shown as equivalent monetary amounts for a couple with no children. Figures are given to the nearest whole £.
3. All estimates are subject to sampling error.
4. Figures for 1992–93 are for two calendar years data combined.
5. Figures are for the UK.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the tables given in the written answer on 30 November 1993, *Official Report*, columns *426–27*. [13959]

Mr. Heald: The information on the numbers of single pensioners treated as having notional income from savings is in the table.

Number of single pensioner recipients

Amount of notional Income £	Income support	Housing benefit	Council tax benefit
1	14,000	17,000	29,000
2	10,000	13,000	23,000
3	8,000	11,000	19,000
4	7,000	11,000	21,000
5	6,000	10,000	17,000
6	5,000	9,000	15,000
7	4,000	7,000	11,000
8	4,000	7,000	14,000
9	3,000	6,000	12,000
10	3,000	7,000	11,000
11	2,000	4,000	7,000
12	3,000	5,000	9,000
13	2,000	5,000	8,000
14	2,000	4,000	7,000
15	2,000	3,000	5,000
16	2,000	4,000	9,000
17	2,000	2,000	4,000
18	2,000	3,000	5,000
19	2,000	3,000	5,000
20	2,000	2,000	5,000
All cases	87,000	133,000	236,000

Notes:
1. The figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Single pensioners are defined as people in receipt of income support and/or housing benefit and/or council tax benefit aged 60 or over who do not have a partner.
3. There is a considerable overlap in the figures as most people receive both housing benefit and council tax benefit. There is also some overlap with the income support recipients.

Sources:
Income Support Quarterly Enquiry May 1994.
Housing Benefit Management Information System, annual 1 per cent. sample inquiry taken at the end of May 1994.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will estimate the total of state benefits paid to pensioners, including state earnings related pension and the basic state pension, expressed as a percentage of *(a)* gross domestic product and *(b)* the total personal incomes of the population as a whole in each year since 1979; [13960]

(2) if he will estimate the total of income support, housing benefit and council tax, or equivalent benefits applicable at the time paid to pensioners expressed as a percentage of *(a)* gross domestic product and *(b)* the total personal incomes of the population as a whole in each year since 1979. [13961]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the tables.

	1978–79	*1979–80*	*1980–81*	*1981–82*	*1982–83*	*1983–84*	*1984–85*	*1985–86*	*1986–87*
Total benefit expenditure on the elderly (£ million)	8,752	10,138	12,134	14,357	16,105	17,456	18,522	20,241	21,703
Expressed as a percentage of GDP	5.04	4.86	5.10	5.50	5.64	5.63	5.58	5.55	5.53
Expressed as a percentage of PDI	7.45	7.12	7.34	7.99	8.28	8.32	8.11	8.15	8.05
Total HB/CTB expenditure for the elderly (£ million)	510	570	747	1,172	1,478	1,719	1,927	2,144	2,324
Expressed as a percentage of GDP	0.29	0.27	0.31	0.45	0.52	0.55	0.58	0.59	0.59
Expressed as a percentage of PDI	0.43	0.40	0.45	0.65	0.76	0.82	0.84	0.86	0.86
Total IS expenditure for the elderly (£ million)	561	624	729	924	941	985	1,162	1,302	1,453
Expressed as a percentage of GDP	0.32	0.30	0.31	0.35	0.33	0.32	0.35	0.36	0.37
Expressed as a percentage of PDI	0.48	0.44	0.44	0.51	0.48	0.47	0.51	0.52	0.54

	1987–88	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Total benefit expenditure on the elderly (£ million)	22,873	23,658	25,715	28,638	31,613	34,544	36,978	37,926
Expressed as a percentage of GDP	5.26	4.89	4.89	5.14	5.44	5.71	5.79	5.59
Expressed as a percentage of PDI	7.82	7.25	7.12	7.48	7.66	7.80	8.02	7.93
Total HB/CTB expenditure for the elderly (£ million)	2,411	2,412	2,813	3,473	3,168	3,932	4,688	5,099
Expressed as a percentage of GDP	0.55	0.50	0.54	0.62	0.55	0.65	0.73	0.75
Expressed as a percentage of PDI	0.82	0.74	0.78	0.91	0.77	0.89	1.02	1.07
Total IS expenditure for the elderly (£ million)	1,570	1,847	2,050	2,301	2,725	3,728	3,939	3,866
Expressed as a percentage of GDP	0.36	0.38	0.39	0.41	0.47	0.62	0.62	0.57
Expressed as a percentage of PDI	0.54	0.57	0.57	0.60	0.66	0.84	0.85	0.81

The Elderly are men and women aged 60 and over.
GDP = Gross domestic product. PDI = Personal disposable income.
IS = Income support (and equivalent for earlier years).
HB/CTB = Housing benefit/council tax benefit and equivalent for earlier years.

Personal Pensions

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cost in the first year of introducing age-related rebates to appropriate personal pensions as proposed in his current consultation document; and what would be the cost if the proposed levels were raised by *(a)* 0.25 per cent., *(b)* 0.5 per cent., *(c)* 0.75 per cent., *(d)* 1 per cent., *(e)* 1.25 per cent., *(f)* 1.5 per cent., *(g)* 1.75 per cent. and *(h)* 2 per cent. of allowable earnings. [13958]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

Additional rebate (per cent. upper band earnings)	*Total cost 1997–98 (£ million)*	*Cost above 1997–98 baseline (£ million)*
Baseline	1,885	n/a
0.25	1,970	85
0.50	2,045	160
0.75	2,125	240
1.00	2,200	315
1.25	2,275	390
1.50	2,350	465
1.75	2,430	545
2.00	2,505	620

1. The figures are in respect of 1997–98 accruals. Costs would not arise until 1998–99 because rebates for appropriate personal pensions (APPs) are paid in arrears. The figures have been calculated in 1994–95 price terms.

2. The "baseline" figures reflect the proposed age-related rebates for APPs set out in the Government Actuary's consultative note on contracting-out terms issued in August 1995.

3. The costings assume the same age and earnings distribution and numbers of individuals in APPs under each of the proposed set of rebate levels shown.

Pensions Information Line

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what instructions and guidance has been issued to those giving advice on the "pensions info-line" about the information and advice to be given to callers. [13415]

Mr. Heald: All those giving advice on the "pensions info-line" follow a carefully prepared script on computer that has been devised to cater for different types of inquiry. Help screens with prescribed wording are also available on the computers, should the need arise—for example, to explain the content of a leaflet or to give out the telephone number of a trade association.

All operators are briefed by departmental staff on a regular basis about new or revised literature, as well as about any forthcoming press or publicity activity which might result in increased numbers of calls on particular pensions issues.

Operators are not allowed to deal with calls to the info-line until they have undergone training and can demonstrate to the supervisor's satisfaction a sound knowledge of the script and of DSS pensions literature.

In accordance with the Financial Services Act, operators do not give financial advice to callers.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 8 February 1996

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Immigration

Mr. Madden: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will arrange for *(a)* papers relating to judicial review applications in respect of immigration matters to be lodged at district registries, *(b)* reference numbers to the applications to be obtained by telephone from the Crown Office by the district registry and *(c)* the district registry to forward the papers to the Crown Office in London; and if he will make a statement. [14283]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The rules of the Supreme Court do not provide for papers relating to judicial review applications to be lodged at district registries. Applications must be filed at the Crown Office in London. Judicial review is one of the specialist areas being considered by Lord Woolf in the second stage of his review. His final report and proposed new rules are due in July. It would be inappropriate to make significant procedural or rule changes prior to Lord Woolf's recommendations being received.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Fire Safety

Mr. Pike: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what action he plans to take arising from the consultation on the interdepartmental review of fire safety legislation and enforcement; and if he will make a statement. [13629]

Mr. Willetts: The Government have been considering the findings of the review and the views expressed by interested parties, including the deregulation task force. It has also been further considering the fire safety aspects of the EC framework and workplace directives. An announcement on both will be made soon.

EU Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidance he plans to issue to Government Departments to ensure that fiches d'impact are properly prepared by the Commission in relation to proposals that result in significant burdens on business. [13642]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster published on 25 January guidance for Government Departments on the preparation of compliance cost assessments for new domestic and EC regulatory proposals. Guidance on the preparation of fiches d'impact by the Commission is contained in this document.

Private Sector Schemes

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what public bodies he has asked to produce schemes for moving into the private sector under the prior options exercise; what was the original time scale for such schemes; what is now the timetable; and if he will make a statement. [14114]

Mr. Freeman: I have not asked any of the public bodies for which my Department is the sponsor to produce schemes for moving into the private sector.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Departmental Publications

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which of his Department's administrative manuals and internal guidance are now made public; and which remain private. [14032]

Mr. Hanley: The FCO code of management, diplomatic service regulations and home service regulations are available in the House of Commons Library.

Diplomatic service procedure includes volumes which are classified. It is currently being revised, and volumes are being declassified where possible, with a view to sending unclassified sections to the House of Commons Library.

One-off best practice manuals, covering such subjects as management practices and guidance on the presentation of papers, are unclassified and available on request.

Hong Kong

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what efforts he is making to encourage the Chinese Government to ensure that the proposed electoral college for Hong Kong will be democratically accountable; and if he will make a statement; [13954]

(2) what discussions he has had with the Chinese Government about the establishment of an electoral college in Hong Kong to oversee the appointment of a chief executive; and if he will make a statement. [13955]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 7 February 1996:]:* The Sino-British joint declaration on the question of Hong Kong provides for the chief executive of the Hong Kong special administrative region to be selected by election or through consultations held locally, and then appointed by the Chinese Government. When they adopted the Basic Law, Hong Kong's future constitution, the Chinese National People's Congress also decided on special arrangements for choosing the first chief executive by a selection committee consisting of 400 permanent residents of Hong Kong. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary recently told Chinese leaders—and Chinese officials have made similar public remarks since—that it will be important for confidence in Hong Kong for the chief executive to command the support and respect of the Hong Kong civil service and of Hong Kong people.

EU Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how he ensures that the negotiating brief for his officials discussing EU legislation takes fully into account the need to minimise the burdens on United Kingdom business. [13712]

Mr. David Davis: Guidance on how officials are to apply deregulatory principles when negotiating EC regulations is contained in the DTI's booklet, "Getting a Good Deal in Europe". This guidance has been supplemented by the recent publication of guidance on the preparation of compliance cost assessments, which stresses that the likely burdens on business highlighted by United Kingdom compliance cost assessments of EC proposals should be integral to the UK's negotiating strategy. Copies of both pieces of guidance are in the Library of the House.

Newly Independent Countries

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a list of the countries granted independence by the United Kingdom since 1970 showing *(a)* when a formal decision was taken to proceed towards independence and *(b)* the actual date of independence day in each case. [14285]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The countries granted independence by the United Kingdom since 1970 are: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Fiji, Grenada, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Zimbabwe.

I refer the hon. Member to the "Commonwealth Yearbooks" 1987 and 1993–94 (HMSO, 1987 and 1995) from which the other information may be obtained. Copies of the yearbooks are in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT

Compulsory Competitive Tendering (Luton)

Sir Graham Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many times Luton borough council has been investigated by his Department for possible transgressions related to compulsory competitive tendering; and what has been the outcome in each case. [13628]

Mr. Curry: Luton borough council has been the subject of five investigations by the Department. Three of these investigations related to alleged anti-competitive behaviour in the award of refuse collection in 1991, building maintenance in 1993 and grounds maintenance work in 1995, to the council's direct service organisation. In each case, no statutory action was taken after the authority provided my right hon. Friend with an explanation of its conduct.

The other investigations relate to the authority's failure in 1992–93 to achieve the statutory financial objective for building maintenance work and other—civic—catering. In both of these cases a notice was served, in 1994, under section 13 of the Local Government Act 1988 requesting the reasons for the failure. Following receipt of this information, a direction was given requiring the authority to achieve the statutory financial objective for other catering in the financial year 1994–95 or close its DSO. The authority's accounts for the year indicate that that objective was achieved, although the external auditor's opinion on these accounts has not yet been received.

Local Authority Investments

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what fiduciary duty councillors have to their council tax payers on decisions concerning *(a)* the local authority's pension fund and *(b)* investments in equities. [13941]

Sir Paul Beresford: The fiduciary duties of a local authority to its council tax payers to exercise prudential care and propriety apply in relation to the exercise of all the authority's functions, including those in respect of superannuation funds and investment in equities. The Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 1995 require local authorities responsible for managing pension funds to have regard to the need to diversify investments, to consider the suitability of those investments and to seek qualified advice at reasonable intervals.

SCOTLAND

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *303-4*, if he will give the names of each councillor serving on the non-departmental public bodies. [12433]

Mr. Kynoch: The information is as follows:

	Councillor
Highlands and Islands Enterprise	Mrs. Val MacIver
New Town Development Corporations	
Cumbernauld Development Corporation	Tom Barrie OBE
	Rosemary McKenna CBE
East Kilbride Development Corporation	Stewart Crawford
	Colin Robb
	David Sanderson
Glenrothes Development Corporation	John McDougal
	Robert Taylor
Irvine Development Corporation	Jack Carson
	Thomas Colyer
Livingston Development Corporation	Isobel Brydie
	Brian Meek OBE
	William Percy
	Joseph Thomas
Scottish Arts Council	Keith Geddes
	Janette Richardson
Scottish Community Education Council	Mrs. Val MacIver

	Councillor
Scottish Environment Protection Agency	Alison Magee Corrie McChord Jennifer Shaw
Scottish Enterprise	Rosemary McKenna CBE
Scottish Examination Board	Dr. R. Bull T. Farrell Mrs. Maginnes Mrs. J. P. Orskov Ms A. J. Smith W. A. Smith
Scottish Homes	Daphne Sleigh
Scottish Sports Council	George Urquhart
SCOTVEC	P. Watters
Scottish Water and Sewerage Customers Council	John Connolly Lynn Groundwater Rhona Kemp Alexander Scott

The undernoted councillors are members of Health Boards and NHS Trusts:

Health Boards	
Argyll and Clyde HB	John Mullin
Fife HB	Agnes Smith
Forth Valley HB	Keith Harding
Lanarkshire HB	John Thomson
Shetland HB	Mary Colligan
NHS Trusts	
Angus NHS Trust	Pamela Bowman George Norrie
Argyll and Bute NHS Trust	John Wilson
Borders General NHS Trust	George Finlay
Caithness and Sutherland NHS Trust	Alison Magee
Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity NHS Trust	Ernest Gibson George Willacy
Dumfries and Galloway Community Services NHS Trust	Janette Richardson
East and Midlothian NHS Trust	Patricia Fawcett
Hairmyres and Stonehouse NHS Trust	Janet Mitchell
Lanarkshire Health Care NHS Trust	Mary Smith
Law Hospital NHS Trust	Murdo Morrison
Moray Health Services NHS Trust	Margaret Davidson
North Ayrshire and Arran NHS Trust	Angela Dunbar Cherry Young
Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust	Jean Goldie
Royal Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	George Murray
West Lothian NHS Trust	Peter Johnston

GP Fundholding

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost to his Department of the study carried out by the department of general practice at Edinburgh university for his Department into general practitioner fundholding. [1251]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office Department of health funded the research project, which was carried out over a period of three years, at a cost of £436,956.

Asthma

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of asthma have been diagnosed in each health board area in Scotland in each year since 1979. [12512]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Available information relates to in-patient and day case discharges from hospitals and excludes patients treated by general practitioners and in hospital out-patient and accident and emergency departments.

Details of numbers of discharges, by health board of residence, with a principal diagnosis of asthma, is shown in the table for calendar years 1979 to 1994. The figures for 1995 are not yet available.

In-patient and day case discharges with a principal diagnosis of asthma by health board of residence, calendar years 1979–1994

Health board of residence	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Argyll and Clyde	291	308	326	351	472	497	489	574
Ayrshire and Arran	241	247	336	364	373	487	503	533
Borders	85	80	90	128	119	172	160	184
Dumfries and Galloway	69	106	120	135	170	143	147	175
Fife	192	292	292	313	374	416	377	424
Forth Valley	138	171	163	171	180	192	225	290
Grampian	334	385	446	499	577	575	604	681
Greater Glasgow	845	951	1,089	1,069	1,235	1,332	1,372	1,366
Highland	113	146	178	189	215	249	222	248
Lanarkshire	253	406	498	447	591	638	686	625
Lothian	908	1,060	1,099	1,077	1,148	1,182	1,298	1,245
Orkney	4	5	5	11	10	13	25	13
Shetland	3	4	8	15	23	22	17	17
Tayside	402	390	459	451	484	533	604	537
Western Isles	15	22	22	20	26	31	21	24
Scotland total	3,893	4,573	5,131	5,240	5,997	6,482	6,750	6,936
Outside Scot/not known/other	62	59	44	72	74	64	95	91
Grand total	3,955	4,832	5,175	5,312	6,071	6,546	6,845	7,027

Health board of residence	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Argyll and Clyde	580	632	720	807	802	765	855	717
Ayrshire and Arran	683	653	657	648	789	760	832	740
Borders	197	207	227	275	185	174	201	169
Dumfries and Galloway	184	210	189	218	226	242	252	221
Fife	475	532	486	465	475	483	536	445
Forth Valley	362	356	339	411	424	361	452	460
Grampian	912	846	817	1,148	1,017	1,013	1,056	1,009
Greater Glasgow	1,574	1,621	1,582	1,839	1,833	1,988	2,058	1,870
Highland	269	259	242	289	310	270	367	311
Lanarkshire	801	895	976	1,032	1,168	1,074	1,087	979
Lothian	1,477	1,468	1,532	1,579	1,796	1,702	1,759	1,660
Orkney	30	16	17	17	20	19	16	13
Shetland	20	15	25	29	14	14	35	27
Tayside	648	708	705	734	942	834	894	828
Western Isles	14	26	19	30	31	35	38	40
Scotland total	8,226	8,444	8,533	9,521	10,032	9,734	10,438	9,489
Outside Scotland/not known/other	99	133	105	129	129	155	146	137
Grand total	8,325	8,577	8,638	9,650	10,161	9,889	10,584	9,626

Mortgage Arrears

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many households have mortgage payment arrears of more than three months. [14288]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: This information is not held centrally.

Murray Green

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to make a decision on the complaint raised on behalf of Murray Green under section 70 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 in May 1994. [13766]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Secretary of State's decision issued on 6 February 1996.

School Boards

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was, for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools for each education authority area in Scotland and for each sub-division within Strathclyde region (i) the number of schools with school boards, (ii) the total number of schools and (iii) the percentage of schools which had school boards for each year since the establishment of school boards. [13249]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information held centrally is as follows. It is taken from statistical returns by education authorities to the Scottish Office on the results of the first elections to school boards held in 1988–89 and subsequent biennial elections in 1991–92 and 1993–94:

Education authority primary schools[1]

	March 1990			May 1992			May 1994		
	Number of eligible schools	With school boards		Number of eligible schools	With school boards		Number of eligible schools	With school boards	
		Number	Per cent.		Number	Per cent.		Number	Per cent.
Scotland	2,373	1,901	80.1	2,339	1,789	76.5	2,329	1,723	74.0
Borders	77	53	68.8	76	52	68.4	72	45	62.5
Central	117	90	76.9	116	90	77.6	116	86	74.1
Dumfries and Galloway	116	80	69.0	116	83	71.6	116	86	74.1
Fife	145	116	80.0	145	95	65.5	145	99	68.3
Grampian	274	190	69.3	274	183	66.8	274	175	63.9
Highland	205	140	68.3	197	143	72.6	199	140	70.4
Lothian	243	190	78.2	240	163	67.9	240	154	64.2
Strathclyde	901	820	91.0	884	773	87.4	883	741	83.9
Tayside	190	129	67.9	188	125	66.5	187	119	63.6
Orkney	23	20	87.0	23	19	82.6	24	17	70.8
Shetland	35	28	80.0	35	29	82.9	29	28	96.6
Western Isles	47	45	95.7	45	34	75.6	44	33	75.0
Strathclyde Divisions									
Argyll and Bute	77	68	88.3	76	66	86.8	74	65	87.8
Ayr	151	144	95.4	148	133	89.9	150	132	88.0
Dunbarton	117	109	93.2	117	104	88.9	116	99	85.3
Glasgow	232	202	87.1	228	186	81.6	228	161	70.6
Lanark	214	193	90.2	208	183	88.0	208	179	86.1
Renfrew	110	104	94.5	107	101	94.4	107	105	98.1

[1] Includes primary departments of secondary schools.

Education authority secondary schools

	March 1990			May 1992			May 1994		
	Number of eligible schools	With school boards		Number of eligible schools	With school boards		Number of eligible schools	With school boards	
		Number	Per cent.		Number	Per cent.		Number	Per cent.
Scotland	428	412	96.3	410	389	94.9	406	376	92.6
Borders	9	8	88.9	9	9	100.0	9	9	100.0
Central	19	18	94.7	19	16	84.2	18	17	94.4
Dumfries and Galloway	16	16	100.0	16	16	100.0	16	16	100.0
Fife	19	18	94.7	19	17	89.5	19	16	84.2
Grampian	39	34	87.2	38	31	81.6	38	33	86.8
Highland	27	27	100.0	27	25	92.6	26	23	88.5
Lothian	51	48	94.1	48	47	97.9	46	43	93.5
Strathclyde	185	182	98.4	171	169	98.8	171	160	93.6
Tayside	32	30	93.8	32	31	96.9	32	30	93.8
Orkney	6	6	100.0	6	6	100.0	5	6	100.0
Shetland	9	9	100.0	9	9	100.0	9	9	100.0
Western Isles	16	16	100.0	16	13	81.3	16	14	87.5
Strathclyde Divisions									
Argyll and Bute	9	9	100.0	9	9	100.0	9	9	100.0
Ayr	31	31	100.0	30	30	100.0	29	26	89.7
Dunbarton	25	25	100.0	24	23	95.8	24	22	91.7
Glasgow	50	47	94.0	42	42	100.0	43	38	88.4
Lanark	38	38	100.0	37	36	97.3	37	36	97.3
Renfrew	32	32	100.0	29	29	100.0	29	29	100.0

Hip and Femoral Fractures

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* hip fractures and *(b)* femoral fractures were recorded in 1993–94. [13842]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The numbers of hip fractures and femoral fractures recorded for NHS in-patients and day cases treated in Scotland in the year ending 31 March 1994 are given in the table.

	Recorded in		
	Principal[1] position	Other position	All
Hip fracture (ICD=820)	8,354	913	9,267
Femoral fracture (ICD=821)	1,293	284	1,577

[1] The SMRI allows six diagnoses to be recorded. The diagnosis recorded in principal is the main condition. Other diagnoses affecting the treatment of the patient are recorded in the remaining five positions.

Osteoporosis

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the cost *(a)* of osteoporosis to the Scottish economy, *(b)* of running a basic diagnosis and prevention service and *(c)* of hospital treatment (i) per patient and (ii) in total in each health board. [13843]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of beds in orthopaedic wards have been occupied by osteoporosis fracture patients over the last 12 months. [13844]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The percentage of average staffed beds[1] occupied by patients with a diagnosis of fracture and osteoporosis[2] in the speciality of orthopaedics was 0.2 per cent.—4.1 average occupied beds out of 2,012 average available staffed beds—for the year ending September 1995. The data on occupied beds are provisional.

Source:

[1] IDS(S)1 31 March 1995.

[2] SMR1 for the year ending 30 September 1995—ICD codes 733.0 (osteoporosis) in principal position with fracture (800–829) in a secondary position or fracture (800–829) in principal with osteoporosis (733.0) in a secondary position.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people died in 1993–94 as a result of fractures due to osteoporosis. [13846]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of people in Scotland who died in 1993 and 1994 as a result of fractures due to osteoporosis[1] is as follows:

1993: 13

1994: 15

Note:

[1] World Health Organisation International Classification of Diseases (Ninth Revision) code 733.1.

Bone Densitometers

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many bone densitometers are in use in each health board area. [13845]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Mortgage Repossessions

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the annual number of mortgage repossessions since 1979. [14287]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Figures supplied by the Council of Mortgage Lenders suggest that in 1994, 1,791 properties were taken into possession by mortgage lenders in Scotland. This represents 0.22 per cent. of the total

number of properties with mortgages outstanding. The comparable figures for 1993, were 2,330 and 0.29 per cent. respectively. The equivalent figures are not available for the period 1979–1992, and are not yet available for 1995.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Scotland were *(a)* of an economically active age and *(b)* in employment for each year since 1979. [14289]

Mr. Kynoch: The information requested is given in the table.

Thousands

Spring	*People of working age[1] in Scotland* *Total*	*In employment*
1979	3,021	2,187
1980	—	—
1981	3,062	2,066
1982	—	—
1983	3,102	2,043
1984	3,121	1,999
1985	3,131	2,060
1986	3,128	2,027
1987	3,139	2,044
1988	3,134	2,119
1989	3,137	2,207
1990	3,143	2,226
1991	3,143	2,204
1992	3,145	2,235
1993	3,147	2,171
1994	3,149	2,203
1995	3,149	2,225

Source:
Central Statistical Office, Labour Force Survey.
Note:
[1] Aged 16-59 for females, aged 16-64 for males.

Water Authorities

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what will be the opening capital structure of the new Scottish water authorities on 1 April. [14739]

Mr. Kynoch: The new water authorities have been set up to enable water and sewerage services to be provided in accordance with commercial principles and disciplines. It is therefore right that the authorities should have a capital structure which reflects these objectives.

The opening capital of the new water authorities will mainly take the form of debt to the public Works Loan Board. There is likely in addition to be a small amount of debt to the European investment bank. This debt will represent borrowings for water and sewerage purposes by the current regional and islands councils which is transferable to the water authorities under section 91 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994.

The total of such debts at 31 March 1996 is likely to be in the region of £1.7 billion. This is more than will be compatible with the requirement on the authorities, announced on 29 November last year, to earn a real rate of return of 6½ per cent. on assets amounting in aggregate to £1,000 million. Accordingly my right hon. Friend intends to commute up to £700 million of the transferable debt.

The precise amount and details of the commutation have still to be worked out. Discussions will be held with the local authorities and the new water authorities.

Commutation is a technical exercise. It will involve no net addition to public expenditure and no increase in the cash available to the water authorities. A reduction will be made in the authorities' external financing limits, previously announced as £274 million, to reflect the reduced debt servicing costs, so that the net effect on the authorities' finances, including their investment and charges will be neutral.

PRIME MINISTER

Pay Review Bodies

Sir Michael Shersby: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the reports and recommendations of the pay review bodies. [14718]

The Prime Minister: The 1996 reports of the five pay review bodies have been published today. Copies are available in the Vote Office and the Library of the House. The Government are grateful to the chairmen and members of the review bodies for the time and care that they have put into the preparation of the reports.

The Government are concerned that pay settlements for these groups should be consistent with the approach to public sector pay. Under this approach, increases should be offset by efficiencies and other economies to help to deliver improved efficiency across the public sector. Specifically, the cost of pay settlements should be accommodated within the resources allocated to programmes. The Government have had to consider the recommendations of the pay review bodies against that background to determine the appropriate response.

The main pay recommendations are as follows.

The Armed Forces Pay Review Body has recommended a range of increases in daily rates of 3.2 to 3.8 per cent., plus an increase of 0.5 per cent. in the X factor reflecting the special demands of service life. This gives an average increase of 3.8 per cent. with effect from 1 April. Separately, following a quinquennial review of the value of armed forces pensions, it has recommended a 1 per cent. increase in pay to reflect reduced pension differentials with the private sector, with a further 1 per cent. increase next year.

The Doctors and Dentists Review Body has recommended general increases of 3.8 per cent. for doctors and 4.3 per cent. for dentists. It has specifically recommended higher increases for junior hospital doctors of 5.3 per cent. for registrars and 6.8 per cent. for house officers, although the latter figure would be partly offset by a reduction in the rate for additional duty hours.

The review body for nursing staff, midwives, health visitors and professions allied to medicine has recommended that pay for these groups should once again

be determined locally. The review body also recommended a 2 per cent. increase in the national scales which underpin local negotiations.

The School Teachers Review Body has recommended a 3.75 per cent. increase in teachers' pay, and other changes in pay structures.

The Senior Salaries Review Body has recommended:

a. values for the pay ranges for the senior civil service in the pay structure set out in January 1995 in the White Paper, "Taking Forward Continuity and Change". Under these arrangements, Departments will determine individual salaries within the ranges and will be able to reward the best performers, with a framework in which the overall pay bill is expected to fall by some 7 per cent. next year as staff numbers are reduced;

b. increases for senior military officers in the range 3.9 to 5.6 per cent. averaging 4.6 per cent. consistent with the AFPRB recommendations;

c. increases of 3.9 per cent. for the judiciary.

This is a complex set of recommendations covering a number of different issues that have been addressed in detail by the review bodies in preparing their reports. The Government have said that they will normally accept review body recommendations, and do not intend to reject them on this occasion. Nevertheless, if this year's recommendations were implemented as they stand, from the due date, they would represent a marked step up in the level of pay settlements in the public sector, compared with settlements over the past year, and a significant charge on public expenditure programmes.

Accordingly, the Government intend to stage their introduction and propose that in most cases the settlements to be paid with effect from 1 April should be 1 percentage point less than the review body recommendations, the balance to be paid later this year on 1 December. This meets the requirements on affordability and the approach to public sector pay, while retaining the pattern of increases recommended by the review bodies.

Staging arrangements will also extend to the awards that Departments will determine for the senior civil service within the framework set by the SSRB recommendations.

The Government have, however, decided that it would not be appropriate to apply this general arrangement to the recommendations for nurses and other staff covered by the NPRB.

The following table summarises the main pay recommendations of the review bodies.

	Main pay recommendations percentage	*Pay bill costs £ million*	*percentage*
AFPRB—Armed forces	3.7–4.3[1]	211	3.8
DDRB—Doctors and dentists	3.8–6.8	245	4.4
NPRB—Nursing staff, midwives, health visitors and professions Allied to medicine	[2]	—	—
STRB—School teachers	3.75	421	3.8
SSRB Senior salaries			
Senior civil service	[3]	—	—
Senior military	3.9–5.6	1	4.6
Judiciary	3.9	6	3.9

[1] Includes ½ per cent. increase in the X factor which reflects the special demands of military compared with civilian life. AFPRB has also recommended an additional 1 per cent. on pay as part of a staged pensions-related adjustment.
[2] To be determined in local pay negotiations but with a guaranteed 2 per cent. increase in national pay rates.
[3] Recommendations for the senior civil service affect the pay framework within which Departments will set individual pay rates.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Hain: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, column 1120–21, if he will list the years since 1966 when crime fell. [13966]

The Prime Minister: Between June 1993 and June 1995 there were 572,000 fewer crimes recorded than in the preceding two years—the largest fall since records began last century.

Complete year figures are available up to the end of 1994. Since 1966 recorded crime in England and Wales has fallen in the following years:

1973, 1978, 1979, 1983, 1988, 1993, 1994.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Prime Minister what action he has taken to pay compensation to *(a)* British and *(b)* Australian nuclear test veterans from the 1950s. [14145]

The Prime Minister: In studies carried out by the National Radiological Protection Board of over 20,000 British nuclear test veterans, the incidence of death and cancer has been less than among the general public in the same age groups, and no higher than among a matched control group These facts do not sustain a case for compensation. The handling of claims in Australia is a matter for the Government of Australia.

Professor al-Masari

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library the information *(a)* made available to the courts about the case of Professor al-Masari and *(b)* passed to the Government of Dominica about Professor al-Masari; and if he will make a statement, [14130]

The Prime Minister: No. It is not my normal practice to do so.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Executive Pay

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures he plans on executive pay. [12641]

Mr. Oppenheim: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) by my hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 25 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *317*.

British Geological Survey

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what instructions or guidance has been given to the British Geological Survey regarding private sector involvement; when he expects to receive its response; and if he will make a statement. [14115]

Mr. Ian Taylor: No specific instructions regarding private sector involvement have been given to the British Geological Survey which is a component of the Natural Environment Research Council. The BGS has a long and successful tradition of working in partnership with the private sector which I applaud. Standard conditions, for public sector research establishments working with the private sector, apply.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in what ways and according to what timetable he intends to bring about the changes in the organisation and procedures of industrial tribunals he announced on 20 November 1995. [13965]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The majority of the changes require primary legislation and, as mentioned in the reply from my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade to my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler) on 20 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *20*, detailed proposals will be brought forward when a suitable legislative opportunity arises.

Written Questions

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the written questions PQ No. 95/972, PQ No. 95/771, PQ No. 95/770, PQ No. 95/702, PQ No. 95/697, PQ No. 95/692 and PQ No. 95/691 will be answered by his Department. [14236]

Mr. Lang: PQ No. 95/770 was answered on 24 January 1996. PQ No. 95/692 was answered on 23 January 1996. The remaining questions will be answered as soon as possible.

Directors' Pensions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to require disclosure of directors' pensions. [12678]

Mr. Oppenheim: My Department is currently consulting on proposed changes to the requirements of the Companies Act 1985 relating to the disclosure of director's emoluments, including their pension entitlements. A copy of the consultative document is available in the Library of the House. Before finalising the proposed changes, my Department will take into account the results of the current consultation by the Institute of Actuaries and Faculty of Actuaries on the method which should be used to calculate the value of directors' pension entitlements.

Grant Aid (South-west)

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many companies have received grant aid from his Department in the south-west region since January 1990; and how many of those companies are still trading. [10112]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* The number of businesses in the south-west receiving grants under the principal current regional and technology support schemes in the period is as follows:

	Number
Regional selective assistance	386
Regional enterprise grant	575
Small firms merit award for research and technology	112
Support for products under research	37

As projets are normally monitored for only a limited number of years after final payment of grant, complete information on grant recipients' trading status is not readily available.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the companies in the south-west which have received financial assistance since 1985 from his Department showing *(a)* the year assistance was given, *(b)* how much was given and *(c)* if the company is still trading. [13109]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 1 February 1996]:* A full answer to the question could be prepared only at disproportionate cost. In summary terms, the number of businesses in the south-west receiving grants under the principal current regional and technology support schemes in the period is as follows:

	Number
Regional selective assistance	514
Regional enterprise grant	639
Small firms merit award for research and technology	112
Support for products under research	37

In addition, around 2,000 payments were made under the regional development grant scheme and over 11,600 businesses received support for business reviews under the enterprise initiative consultancy service.

As projects are normally monitored for only a limited number of years after final payment of the grant, complete information on grant recipients' trading status is not readily available.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

British Geological Survey

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the contracts or work done by the British Geological Survey paid for by the Overseas Development Administration, the nature of work, and the cost in each case; what arrangements need to be made to continue these programmes if the survey is privatised; and if he will make a statement. [14113]

Mr. Hanley: Following are the current contracts that the British Geological Survey has with ODA:

Contract	*Country*	*Value £*
Yaoba Oasis Environmental Project (hydrogeological consultants)	China	186,688
Establishment of coastal geology unit (IT training)	Albania	78,525
Water Resources Management, lake Balkhash (environmental impact study)	Kazakhstan	26,046
Primoyre Mineral Waters (water sampling)	Russia	24,973
Environmental Thematic Mapping	Slovakia	36,500
Resource centre scheme with ODA (call down contracts for ad hoc consultancy work)	Global	75,000
Bapedal Groundwater Project (monitoring consultancy)	Indonesia	39,200
World Bank Mining and Environmental Project (geological information mapping programme)	Ecuador	2,319,282
Coal Bed Methane Pre-feasibility study	Bangladesh	44,500
Land-ocean Contaminant study	Mexico/Africa/Indonesia	434,939
Mitigation of mining related mercury pollution hazards	Philippines/Ecuador	268,000
Protecting groundwater beneath wastewater recharge sites	Mexico/Thailand	207,271
Groundwater management in drought prone areas of Africa	Africa	142,527
Developing new well siting techniques	Zimbabwe/Egypt	203,822
Groundwater resources degradation; socio-economic impacts and their mitigation	China/India/Thailand /Mexico/Jersey/ Palestinian Territories	94,050 [1]34,000 to BGS)

[1] Joint research project with the Natural Resources Institute

If the BGS is privatised, the arrangements for continuing these programmes would be reviewed at the time. One option would be to transfer the contracts to the new owner.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of the parents with care referred to in his answer of 26 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *803*, lifted off income support following the payment of maintenance assessed by the CSA, were in receipt of mortgage interest payments made in respect of their income support entitlement. [13598]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information requested is not readily available, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Although it is possible to give the number of parents with care lifted off income support following the payment of maintenance assessed by the Child Support Agency, it is not possible to identify those who were in receipt of mortgage interest payments as part of their income support entitlement. There is no business need for the Child Support Agency to record this information.

Cold Weather Payments

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people claimed cold weather payments in the area covered by the benefits offices in Greenock and Port Glasgow in late December; on which dates they qualified; and what was the total amount paid to those whose claims were met. [13161]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Dr. Norman Godman, dated 7 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people claimed Cold Weather Payments (CWPs) in the area covered by the benefits offices in Greenock and Port Glasgow in late December; on which dates they qualified; and what was the total amount paid to those whose claims were met.

Customers who qualify for CWPs are automatically identified by a scan of the Income Support Computer System. Those customers who are being paid clerically also have their claims examined to identify those who qualify. There is no need, therefore, for a claim to a Cold Weather Payment (CWP) to be made.

Data is not held on the number of people who qualified for a CWP, only on the number of payments made and the amount paid out in the area covered by Greenock and Port Glasgow Benefit Offices. This is because a customer may receive more than one payment in a cold weather period depending on the length of the recorded and/or forecasted period. Two recorded periods of Cold Weather were identified from 19 December 1995 to 1 January 1996 inclusive, and two forecast periods were identified from 23 December 1995 to 5 January 1996 inclusive.

On 30 December 1995, 9,070 payments were issued by the computer system amounting to £77,095. On 6 January 1996, a further 9,085 payments were made amounting to £77,222.50. Statistics are not yet available for any clerical payments which may have been made.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average time taken to process a new claim for disability living allowance. [13173]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 7 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what is the average time it takes to process a new claim for Disability Living Allowance. (DLA).

The Secretary of State has set two targets in relation to new DLA claims. These are that 68% of new claims be cleared within 30 working days and that 85% be cleared within 53 working days. As at 31 December 1995, the DLA Unit cleared 70.73% new claims within 30 days and 92.57% within 53 days.

The average time for processing a DLA claim is not a target set by the Secretary of State. However, at 31 December 1995, the average length of time taken to process a new claim to DLA was 27 days.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

TRANSPORT

EU Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how he ensures that the negotiating brief for his officials discussing EU legislation takes fully into account the need to minimise the burdens on United Kingdom business. [13713]

Mr. Watts: Guidance on how officials are to apply deregulatory principles when negotiating EC regulations is contained in the booklet, "Getting a Good Deal in Europe". This guidance has been supplemented by the recent publication of guidance on the preparation of compliance cost assessments, which stresses that the likely burdens on business highlighted by UK compliance cost assessments of EC proposals should be integral to the UK's negotiating strategy. Copies of both are in the Library of the House.

Car Phones

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received in respect of the use by car drivers of hand-held telephones while driving; and if he will make a statement. [14111]

Mr. Norris: My Department has received 32 letters and other representations over the past 12 months about this issue, the majority requesting legislation to prohibit the use of in-car telephones while driving. However, I believe that existing legislation provides sufficient powers of prosecution.

Road Safety

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will published the United Kingdom and EU research that he has *(a)* undertaken, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* evaluated that indicates the scale and direction of the expected changes in death and serious injury from (i) the new eyesight standards for HGV drivers and (ii) the banning of coaches from the third lane of motorways. [14009]

Mr. Norris: The Department knows of no research, either published or commissioned, which could reliably estimate the effect of changes in eyesight standards for drivers in terms of a reduction in death and serious injury from road accidents. Work has begun on assessing the effect of banning coaches from the third lane of motorways, and the results will be made known when available.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what have been the costs of railway privatisation to date, broken down into *(a)* payments to legal, financial and other advisers and *(b)* administrative costs within (i) BR, (ii) Railtrack, (iii) the Office of the Rail Regulator, (iv) the Franchise Director and (v) within Government departments; and what estimate he has made of total expenditure under the same headings to the end of financial year 1995–96. [9947]

Mr. Watts: Consultancy and administrative costs incurred to date by the Department, the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising and the Office of the Rail Regulator are as follows:

Estimated rail privatisation costs at 31 December 1995

£ million

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*[1]	*Total*
Consultancy costs						
DOT	0.5	5.5	10.5	12.0	12.1	40.6
OPRAF	—	—	1.5	13.1	16.2	30.8
ORR	—	—	0.6	2.9	1.8	5.3
Total	0.5	5.5	12.6	28.0	30.1	76.7
Running costs						
DOT	0.5	1.2	1.5	2.2	2.2	7.6
OPRAF	—	—	0.9	3.5	5.1	9.5
ORR	—	—	0.6	4.7	3.8	9.1
Total	0.5	1.2	4.5[1]	10.4	11.1	[1]27.7
ORR capital costs	—	—	0.2	1.4	0.2	1.8
Grand total	1.0	6.7	17.3	39.8	41.4	106.2

[1] To 31 December.

[2] Includes £1.5 million contribution by DOT to costs of setting up OPRAF and ORR.

In addition, the Health and Safety Executive incurred administrative costs of some £2.8 million, of which £2.0 million has be paid by the Department of Transport.

The forecast outturns to the end of the financial year are as follows:

Estimated costs in the last quarter of 1995–96

	£ million
Consultancy costs	
DOT	14.8
OPRAF	9.9
ORR	2.0
Total	24.3
Running costs	
DOT	0.8
OPRAF	3.3
ORR	2.2
Total	6.3
ORR capital costs	0.4
Grand total	31.0

British Rail and Railtrack have also incurred costs linked to privatisation, covering expenditure on administration, including consultancies, and on assets such as computer equipment and associated systems. Details of these costs are a matter for the industries themselves. However, we understand from BR and Railtrack that they will incur the following costs in the current financial year:

	£ million
BR	75
Railtrack	27

1. Forecast expenditure to 31 March 1996.

This expenditure has been incurred in support of Railtrack flotation and sales of rail businesses, which have so far yielded proceeds in excess of £2 billion.

Spare Computer Capacity

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all cases where spare computer capacity has been sold to other Departments since 1987, giving the Department and value of each contract. [14075]

Mr. Norris: My Department has made no sales of spare computer capacity to other Departments. Processing capacity in excess of departmental requirements is not maintained, and redundant IT equipment is relocated within the Department, traded in part exchange or disposed of to the trade on competitive tendering terms.

Coach Safety (Children)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to introduce regulations to improve the safety of children travelling on coaches and minibuses. [14717]

Mr. Norris: I have laid regulations before the House today which will require seat belts to be fitted to minibuses and coaches used specifically to transport children. I have also laid regulations ending, where seat belts are fitted, the concession that allows three seated children to count as two passengers.

The regulations on seat belt fitting only apply to a vehicle which is undertaking a journey specifically for the purpose of carrying children. The requirements will apply to:

all minibuses used from 10 February 1997;

all coaches used from 10 February 1997, if they are registered from 1 October 1988; and

all coaches used from 10 February 1988, if they are registered before 1 October 1998.

The regulations on the "three for two" seating concession will take effect from 1 May 1996. They will recognise the incompatibility of the concession with the fitting of seat belts to minibuses and coaches.

I believe that these measures will further improve the good safety record of minibuses and coaches and will go a long way towards reassuring parents who may be concerned for the safety of their children when travelling in these vehicles.

I am pleased that we have been able to introduce these measures independently and ahead of our partners in the European Union.

Meanwhile, I will continue to encourage operators to fit all their vehicles with seat belts voluntarily. We intend to require the mandatory fitting to all new minibuses and coaches as soon as the necessary agreement has been reached in Europe.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Delegated Legislation

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the powers to make statutory instruments exercisable by the Secretary of State under primary legislation enacted since 1979 are subject to *(a)* the negative and *(b)* the affirmative resolution procedure. [9594]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 16 January 1996]:* The numbers are as follows:

(a) 71 subject to the negative, and

(b) 49 subject to the affirmative resolution procedure.

Detailed tables of the measures have been placed in the Library.

Immigration (Indian Sub-continent)

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his assessment as to the reasons for the increase in arrivals and departures to the Indian sub-continent in the last two years. [13345]

Mr. Kirkhope: The data on arrivals and departures are given in the table. The reasons for the increase in arrivals and departures between 1992 and 1994 are not known, but increases have occurred for all arrivals in and departures from the United Kingdom.

	1992	1993	1994
Arrivals in the United Kingdom from the Indian sub-continent of overseas residents	252,000	273,000	313,000
Departures from the United Kingdom to the Indian sub-continent of United Kingdom residents.	372,000	427,000	477,000

Source:
CSO, International Passenger Survey. All figures rounded to three significant figures.

Internet

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 14 December, *Official Report*, column *735*, what progress has been made by the interdepartmental group on obscenity in examining possible measures to control access to material disseminated via the Internet; and if he will make a statement. [13400]

Mr. Sackville: We are discussing with representatives of Internet service providers any concern about the availability of pornographic material on the Internet, and ways of controlling access by children and young people to such material.

Telephone Tapping

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to amend the law regarding telephone tapping; and if he will make a statement. [13198]

Mr. Howard: While the Government keep the operation of the law regarding interception under review, I have no immediate plans for changes to the law in this area.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the practice of intercepting private telephone calls; [13355]

(2) if he will make a statement on the involvement of newspapers in provoking the interception of private telephone calls. [13356]

Mr. Howard: The unauthorised intentional interception of a communication in the course of its transmission on a public telecommunications system is an offence under section 1 of the Interception of Communications Act 1985. In addition, the unauthorised intentional use of wireless telegraphy apparatus to obtain information as to the contents, sender or addressee of any message, and the disclosure of such information are offences under section 5 of The Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949. Soliciting or inciting a person to commit offences under the 1985 Act and the 1949 Act is itself a criminal offence. It is for the police to investigate allegations of unlawful interception.

Reported Crime Statistics

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will express the number of reported crimes in each police authority area in 1981, 1986, 1991 and each subsequent year as a figure per head of the 18 to 24-year-old males estimated by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys to be resident in each police authority area. [13262]

Mr. Maclean: The available information is for 1991–1994 and is contained in the table. Information for 1981 and 1986 is not available in the form requested.

All offences recorded per head of 18–24 year old males by police force area, 1991–1994

	1991	1992	1993	1994
Avon and Somerset	2.0	2.3	2.4	2.3
Bedfordshire	2.0	2.1	2.2	2.0
Cambridgeshire	1.4	1.6	1.6	1.6
Cheshire	1.4	1.7	1.7	1.7
Cleveland	2.7	3.0	2.8	3.0
Cumbria	1.9	2.0	1.9	2.0
Derbyshire	1.6	1.9	2.0	2.0
Devon and Cornwall	1.4	1.6	1.7	1.6
Dorset	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.9
Durham	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.3
Essex	1.4	1.5	1.5	1.4
Gloucestershire	2.0	2.3	2.4	2.5
Greater Manchester	2.6	2.8	2.7	2.6
Hampshire	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.6
Hertfordshire	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.2
Humberside	2.5	2.8	3.1	3.1
Kent	1.8	2.1	2.2	2.2
Lancashire	1.7	1.9	1.9	1.9
Leicestershire	1.7	1.9	2.0	2.0
Lincolnshire	1.6	1.8	1.9	1.9
Merseyside	1.9	2.0	1.9	1.9
Metropolitan Police[1]	2.3	2.5	2.6	2.5
Norfolk	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.6
Northamptonshire	2.0	2.0	2.1	2.1
Northumbria	3.0	3.0	2.9	2.8
North Yorkshire	1.4	1.5	1.7	2.0
Nottinghamshire	2.5	2.9	2.9	2.9
South Yorkshire	1.6	1.9	2.2	2.3
Staffordshire	1.5	1.7	1.8	1.8
Suffolk	1.2	1.4	1.4	1.3
Surrey	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.1
Sussex	1.7	1.9	1.8	1.9
Thames Valley	1.6	1.8	1.9	1.9
Warwickshire	1.7	1.9	1.9	1.9
West Mercia	1.4	1.5	1.6	1.7
West Midlands	2.0	2.2	2.3	2.3
West Yorkshire	2.4	2.6	2.7	2.7
Wiltshire	1.3	1.4	1.4	1.4
Dyfed-Powys	1.2	1.3	1.2	1.0
Gwent	1.7	1.9	1.9	1.9
North Wales	1.4	1.6	1.5	1.4
South Wales	2.2	2.4	2.4	2.4
England and Wales	1.9	2.0	2.1	2.1

[1] Includes the City of London.

Probation Service

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the total staff establishment for the probation service in England and Wales by each grade; and how many from each grade were from an ethnic minority in *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1995; [13460]

(2) how many probation staff in England and Wales were from an ethnic minority in *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1995. [13459]

Mr. Sackville: The information available is given in the tables: they are not directly comparable since staff establishment figures are collected in whole-time equivalent terms and those of ethnic minority origin in terms of staff in post.

Information on the ethnic origin of probation staff in 1989 is not available, but figures for 1987 are shown in table B.

Table A: Staff establishment of the probation service, by grade, 31 March 1989 and 31 March 1995

Number of staff, whole time equivalent[1]

	31 March 1989	*31 March 1995*
Probation grade staff		
Chief officers[2]	273	333
Senior officers	1,120	1,282
Main grade officers	5,372	6,289
Total probation grade staff	6,765	7,905
Non-probation grade staff		
Probation Services' Officers	1,728	2,577
Clerical/secretarial	3,392	4,090
Administrative and other non-probation grade staff[3]	659	1,030
Non-probation grade hostel staff	—[4]	928
Total non-probation grade staff	5,779	8,125
Total staff	12,544	16,030

[1] Whole-time staff plus whole-time equivalent of part time staff. Figures rounded to the nearest whole number. Components and totals are rounded independently and so components may not add precisely to totals.
[2] Includes Chief, Deputy Chief and Assistant Chief Probation Officer.
[3] Excludes sessional supervisors.
[4] Figures not available for 1989.

Table B: Probation staff from ethnic minority groups (full time and part time) in post, by grade

	31 December 1987	*31 March 1995*
Probation grade staff		
Chief officers[1]	—	8
Senior officers	3	42
Main grade officers	124	535
Total probation grade staff	127	585
Non-probation grade staff		
Probation Services' Officers	62	177
Clerical/Secretarial	144	343
Administrative and other non-probation grade staff[2]	32	86
Non-probation grade hostel staff	19	112
Total non-probation grade staff	257	718
Total staff	384	1,303
Rate of response (Per cent.)	84.1	94

[1] Includes Chief, Deputy Chief and Assistant Chief Probation Officer.
[2] Excludes sessional supervisors.

Police Cautions (Burglary)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *708*, if the 959 people who were cautioned by Metropolitan police for burglary offences during 1994 have been included in the figures for crimes cleared up. [13896]

Mr. Maclean: The numbers of persons cautioned are included within the overall statistics for crimes cleared up.

Licensing Laws

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received following recent relaxation on the licensing laws; and how many have been in favour of the recent changes. [13891]

Mr. Kirkhope: The Licensing (Sunday Hours) Act 1995, which came into effect on 6 August 1995, relaxed restrictions on the opening hours of licensed premises on Sundays and Good Friday. Since then we have received 14 letters on the subject of Sunday hours, two of which were in favour of this relaxation.

Registered Drug Users (Blackpool and Fylde)

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many registered drug users there are in Blackpool and the Fylde; and what estimate he has made of the total number of habitual users of prescribed drugs in Blackpool and the Fylde. [13838]

Mr. Sackville: Analysis of data held on the addicts index at the Home Office shows that in 1995 a total of 385 drug addicts were notified from the Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde area. Of these, 270 were persons who had been previously notified in the preceding 12 months.

Asylum

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many without foundation appeals against a refusal of asylum were determined in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995; and how many of these appeals were (i) allowed, (ii) referred back to the Secretary of State for reconsideration under paragraph 5 of schedule 2 to the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 and (iii) withdrawn. [13935]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information regarding the decisions on without foundation appeals for 1995 is given in the table. The equivalent information for 1994 is published in table 8.4 of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1994", issue 15/95. A copy of this publication is available in the Library.

Outcome of without foundation appeals to the adjudicator, excluding dependants, 1995

	1995 percentage
Total determined[1]	1,115 (100)
of which:	
Allowed	3
Dismissed	59
Withdrawn	9
Referred to the Secretary of State	29

[1] Figures are provisional and rounded to the nearest 5 or percentage.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for asylum by persons applying *(a)* at a port of entry to the United Kingdom and *(b)* after entry were decided in 1995; and how many in each category were granted asylum and exceptional leave to remain. [13989]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is given in the table.

Decisions[3] on applications [1] received for asylum in the United Kingdom[1] excluding dependants, by location of application, January to December 1995

	Principal applicants		
	Applied at port	*Applied in-country*	*Total*
Asylum applications[2]	14,410	29,555	43,965
Decisions[3]	10,255	16,755	27,005
Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum	345	950	1,295
Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave to remain[4]	1,945	2,465	4,410
Total refusals	7,960	13,340	21,300
Refused asylum and ELR after full consideration	6,665	11,040	17,705
Refused on safe third country grounds[5]	1,300	215	1,515
Refused under para 340[6]	—	2,085	2,085

[1] Provisional figures rounded to the nearest 5.

[2] Figures exclude information on applications made overseas.

[3] Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in the period.

[4] Usually granted for a year in the first instance, subject then to further review.

[5] Refused on the grounds that the applicant had arrived from a safe third country.

[6] Paragraph 180F prior to 1/10/94. For failure to provide evidence to support the asylum claim within a reasonable period, including failure to respond to invitation to interview to establish identity.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of without foundation asylum appeals were determined within the time scale prescribed by the Asylum Appeals (Procedure) Rules 1993, in 1995. [13934]

Mr. Kirkhope: In 1995, 12 per cent. of all without foundation appeals were determined within the prescribed time scale.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applications are currently awaiting an initial decision by his Department's asylum division; how many appeals against a refusal of asylum are currently being processed by the asylum division; and how many appeals against a refusal of asylum, which have been processed by the asylum division and despatched to the immigration appellate authority, are awaiting hearings by the authority. [13988]

Mr. Kirkhope: As at 31 December 1995, 69,650 asylum applications were awaiting initial decisions by the Home Office from people who had been refused asylum and 11,690 such appeals were awaiting hearings by the Immigration Appellate Authority.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons, having been refused asylum, *(a)* were removed or *(b)* made voluntary departures from the United Kingdom in (i) 1994 and (ii) 1995. [13990]

Mr. Kirkhope: In 1994, there were 2,108 removals, including 566 voluntary departures, of persons refused asylum. The provisional figures for 1995 are 2,629 and 759 respectively.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the average time currently taken by his Department to reach an initial decision on *(a)* all asylum applicants and *(b)* asylum applications submitted (i) prior to and (ii) following implementation of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993; [13937]

(2) what is the average time taken by his Department's asylum division to process and despatch to the immigration appellate authority an appeal against a refusal of asylum; and what is the average time taken by the authority to hear and determine such an appeal following its receipt from the asylum division. [13936]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information on the times taken at the various stages of the asylum process are given in the table.

Average times involved in deciding applications for asylum (June—November 1995)

	Months
Time taken for an initial decision to be made (pre-act applications)	40.0
Time taken for an initial decision to be made (post-act applications)	8.9
Time taken by the Home Office to process an appeal	3.7
Time taken by the Immigration Appellate Authority to determine an appeal	6.1

Mohammed Riaz and Quayyum Raja

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Mohammed Riaz and Quayyum Raja are to be informed of the decision concerning their tariff sentences; and if he will make a statement. [13743]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 5 February 1996]:* These prisoners will be informed of their tariff decisions as soon as current consideration of their cases is completed.

EU Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home department how he ensures that the negotiating brief for his officials discussing EU legislation takes fully into account the need to minimise the burdens on United Kingdom business. [13711]

Mr. Howard: Guidance on how officials are to apply deregulatory principles when negotiating European Community regulations is contained in the booklet "Getting a Good Deal in Europe". This guidance has been supplemented by the recent publication of guidance on the preparation of compliance cost assessments, which stresses that the likely burdens on business highlighted by United Kingdom compliance cost assessments of EC proposals should be integral to the United Kingdom's negotiating strategy. Copies of both pieces of guidance are in the Library.

Policing of Football Matches

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the latest figures for payments received by the Metropolitan police from London's premier and football league clubs in the present football season in respect of police services. [14213]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Metropolitan police that the payments are those given in the table.

Club	*Total paid this season*[1] *(£)*
Arsenal	112,233.68
Barnet	18,516.48
Brentford	19,148.18
Charlton	16,162.78
Chelsea	85,180.53
Crystal Palace	81,361.96
Fulham	19,454.48
Leyton Orient	21,483.75
Millwall	51,312.31
Queens Park Rangers	41,298.09
Tottenham Hotspur	65,323.43
West Ham United	63,008.32
Wimbledon	84,739.22
Total	679,223.21

[1] As at 31 January 1996.

In addition, sums of £25,000 and £60,000 have been received respectively from the Leyton Orient and Millwall clubs, in respect of outstanding invoices for previous seasons.

Asylum and Immigration Bill

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the Glidewell panel on matters related to the Asylum and Immigration Bill; and if he will make a statement. [14240]

Miss Widdecombe: I have received no such representations.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will arrange for *(a)* ministerial correspondence and *(b)* other communications between his Department and members of the Standing Committee on the Asylum and Immigration Bill to be placed in the Library. [14282]

Miss Widdecombe: This has been arranged.

Immigration

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have applied to regularise their immigration status; how many such applications were *(a)* approved and *(b)* refused; how many are currently awaiting decision in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [14153]

Mr. Kirkhope: The table gives the readily available information on the numbers of persons accepted for settlement on a discretionary basis in the years 1986 to 1994, after a period of at least 10 years continuous residence in the United Kingdom. The numbers of refusals and the total number of applications made on the basis of long residence are not separately available.

Grants of settlement on the basis of long residence, 1986–94

	Number
1986	1,200
1987	1,300
1988	2,300
1989	3,300
1990	2,550
1991	2,200
1992	2,100
1993	2,050
1994	1,950

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances people who have lived in the United Kingdom for *(a)* 10 years and *(b)* 14 years are able to apply to regularise their immigration status; what are the grounds on which the time limits of 10 and 14 years have been set; and if he will make a statement. [14121]

Mr. Kirkhope: Under the long residence concession, a person who has 10 years or more continuous lawful residence in the United Kingdom, or 14 years continuous residence irrespective of legality, may be granted indefinite leave to remain in the absence of any strong countervailing factors. The grant of indefinite leave to remain under the long residence concession is discretionary and outside the immigration rules.

The long residence concession has its origin in the European convention of establishment, article 3(3) of

which provides that nationals of any contracting party who have been lawfully residing for more than 10 years in the territory of another party may be expelled only for reasons relating to public order, public health or morality. In operating the concession, however, we do not distinguish between nationals of the contracting parties and other overseas nationals.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people *(a)* applied, *(b)* were granted and *(c)* were refused applications to regularise their immigration status in (i) 1974 and (ii) 1977. [14122]

Mr. Kirkhope: The concession offered in 1974 to allow Commonwealth citizens who had entered the United Kingdom illegally before 1973 to regularise their stay attracted 2,430 applications, of which 1,810 were granted. This concession was extended in 1977 following further court judgments which widened the scope of illegal entry. A further 640 applications were dealt with, of which 460 were granted.

Bedford Prison

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the practice of dye-stamping the hands of visitors visiting prisoners in Bedford prison started; what is the purpose of this practice; and if he will make a statement. [14125]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alastair Papps to Mr. Max Madden, dated 8 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about Bedford prison.

Dye-stamping the hands of visitors to prisoners was introduced at Bedford in February 1995. It is an additional security measure to reduce the likelihood of the prisoner walking out of the visits area with visitors and escaping.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the arrangements in each European Union state for asylum seekers *(a)* to apply for social security benefit and *(b)* to seek employment; what time limits apply; and if he will make a statement. [14127]

Miss Widdecombe: Information about access to social security benefits and employment in other European Union countries is at paragraphs 17 to 19 of the Home Office memorandum on key asylum measures in other European countries, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy that asylum seekers who are granted exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom are able to apply for reunion with their families in less than the four years as required at present. [14129]

Mr. Kirkhope: Those granted exceptional leave to remain will not necessarily be here on a permanent basis. They will normally be eligible for family reunion only after four years, although this may be granted earlier in cases with wholly exceptional compassionate circumstances.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy in respect of those seeking asylum in the United Kingdom participating in political activities within the United Kingdom; how that policy has changed over the past 10 years; if such involvement by an asylum seeker may be regarded as being supportive of the application; and if he will make a statement. [14123]

Mr. Kirkhope: All applications for asylum in the United Kingdom are considered in the light of all available information and in accordance with the criteria set out in the 1951 United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees.

Those seeking asylum in this country are expected to act within the law. If an asylum seeker undertakes activities in the United Kingdom which are inconsistent with his previous beliefs and behaviour and calculated to create or substantially enhance his claim to refugee status, this may damage the credibility of his claim.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the net expenditure implications of allowing asylum seekers to seek employment from the date their asylum application is lodged; and if he will make a statement. [14126]

Miss Widdecombe: The opportunity to seek employment is a major incentive for economic migrants and undeserving asylum applicants. We have no plans to relax employment restrictions for asylum seekers.

Illegal Working

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which organisations supported the proposals outlined in the consultation document on prevention of illegal working; if he will place in the Library responses in those cases where the respondent is willing for their response to be made public; if he will list those respondents who are unwilling for their response to be made public; and if he will make a statement. [14164]

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) on 6 February at column *109*. I will, however, place in the Library in due course an updated list of those who have responded and a revised summary of the main points made in the responses.

Association of Circus Proprietors

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations take place between his Department and the Association of Circus Proprietors. [14154]

Mr. Sackville: The association was one of a large number of bodies consulted by the Home Office in 1993, in the course of a deregulation review. There have been no other contacts.

Immigration Officers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many immigration officers there are in each of the immigration and nationality department's administrative areas. [14235]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information is provided in the following table. The figures exclude members of the Immigration Service serving at ports of entry, enforcement offices and detention centres.

Division/ Directorate	*Immigration Officer*	*Chief Immigration Officer*	*HM Inspector*	*Total*
Presenting Officer Units	—	10	—	10
Personnel Management Unit[1]	18	12	3	33
Immigration Service (Ports)[1]	15	15	9	39
Immigration Service (Enforcement)[1]	33	15	6	54
Total Staff				136

[1] Includes staff based at Croydon and West London on administrative duties

Human Rights Reports

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those organisations whose reports on human rights internationally are routinely considered by his Department; with special reference to those who consider asylum application procedures. [14119]

Miss Widdecombe: The asylum division considers a wide range of material relating to human rights including from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Commission of Jurists, the parliamentary human rights group, the Commonwealth human rights initiative, Human Rights Watch, the Refugee Council, the Minority Rights Group, Asylum Aid, the United States Department of State and the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board. The Department also has access to Council of the European Union Heads of Mission reports and advice from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on human rights issues. Other non-governmental and media reports are monitored on a regional or country basis.

UNHCR, Amnesty International, Asylum Aid, the Refugee Council and, in addition, the Council of Europe are known to have issued documents considering asylum application procedures.

Karamjit Singh Chahal

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will grant temporary release to Karamjit Singh Chahal from Bedford prison; and if he will make a statement. [14124]

Mr. Kirkhope: My right hon. and learned Friend is satisfied that Mr. Chahal's continued detention is necessary.

Illegal Working

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library copies of correspondence from the Data Protection Registrar seeking clarification of the data protection implications of the use of national insurance numbers as envisaged under the consultation document on prevention of illegal working; and if he will make a statement. [14131]

Miss Widdecombe: There has been no such correspondence. However, as I made clear to the hon. Member on 6 February, we are in touch with the Data Protection Registrar on this matter.

Prisoners (Restraints)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the dates and origins of all representations which his Department received before 25 December 1995 concerning the use of restraints on women prisoners attending hospital; and if he will make a statement. [12418]

Miss Widdecombe: This information is not recorded centrally and could be supplied in the required form only at disproportionate cost.

Prosecutions (Durham)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases have been referred by Durham police to the Crown Prosecution Service in each of the last three years; how many have been prosecuted; and how many have been successful. [13246]

The Attorney-General: I have been asked to reply.

The figures shown in the tables represent the number of cases received from the police and the number of defendants whose case proceeded to a hearing in magistrates courts and in the Crown court during the calendar years 1993, 1994 and 1995, and of those, the proportion who were convicted. Convictions are inclusive of guilty pleas, as well as of contested hearings.

In the magistrates court:

Table 1 shows the number of defendants whose case was received by the CPS, and the number whose case was finalised; of defendants finalised, the number whose case was referred to the CPS for pre-charge advice, and the number of other, non-criminal, proceedings—such as forfeiture proceedings under the Obscene Publications Acts.

Table 2 shows the number of defendants whose case was not proceeded with, divided into cases where the prosecution was dropped and cases which could not proceed—for example because the defendant had died, or could not be traced.

Table 3 shows the number of those cases proceeded with, showing: the number of defendants bound over to keep the peace; the number of defendants' cases heard in the magistrates court; the number of defendants' committed to the Crown court; and the number of defendants' whose case was discharged at committal.

Table 4 shows the outcome of the cases heard in the magistrates court, showing the number of defendants convicted and the number acquitted.

In the Crown court:

Table 5 shows the number of defendants whose case was received and the number finalised. Of the number of defendants cases finalised, the table shows the number of cases which were appeals from the magistrates court or committed to the Crown court from the magistrates court for sentence.

Table 6 shows the number of defendants' cases not proceeded with, divided into those in which no evidence was offered before the jury was sworn, prosecution dropped, and those which could not proceed and were written off—for example, because the defendant had died, could not be traced by the police, or had been found unfit to plead.

Table 7 shows the number of defendants' cases proceeded with divided into the number bound over to keep the peace and the number heard in the Crown court.

Table 8 shows the number of defendants' cases heard in the Crown court which resulted in convictions and the number which resulted in acquittals.

The Crown court figures for the year 1993 include Northumbria cases as it is not possible to distinguish the Durham cases from the Northumbria cases from the statistics available.

Magistrates Court

Table 1

	Case numbers					
			of which...			
	Received	Finalised	Pre-charge advice	Per cent.	Other proceedings	Per cent.
1993	16,296	16,381	1,035	6.3	2	0.1
1994	14,963	14,654	1,173	8.0	12	0.1
1995	14,354	15,110	1,074	7.1	18	0.1

Table 2

	Not proceeded with of which...			
	Prosecution dropped	Per cent.	Written Off	Per cent.
1993	2,144	13.9	1,677	10.9
1994	1,852	13.7	392	2.9
1995	1,811	12.9	866	6.1

Table 3

	Proceeded with of which...							
	Bind over	Per cent.	Hearings in the Magistrates' Court	Per cent.	Committed to Crown Court	Per cent.	Committal discharged	Per cent.
1993	233	1.5	10,027	65.3	1,229	8.00	34	0.2
1994	291	2.1	9,664	71.7	1,245	9.2	25	0.2
1995	344	2.4	9,916	70.7	1,073	7.6	8	0.1

Table 4

	Outcome of which...			
	Convicted	Per cent.	Acquitted	Per cent.
1993	9,801	97.7	226	2.3
1994	9,369	96.4	295	3.6
1995	9,709	97.9	207	2.1

Crown Court

Table 5

		of which...		
	Receipts	Finalised	Appeals and committals for sentence	Per cent.
1993	6,591	5,138	986	19.1
1994	1,538	1,448	271	18.7
1995	1,402	1,644	309	18.8

Table 6

	Not proceeded with of which...			
	Prosecution dropped	Per cent.	Written Off	Per cent.
1993	222	5.3	37	0.9
1994	56	4.7	6	0.5
1995	94	7.0	8	0.6

Table 7

	Proceeded with of which...			
	Bind over	Percentage	Hearings	Percentage
1993	75	1.8	3,818	91.9
1994	11	0.9	1,104	93.8
1995	21	1.5	1,212	90.7

Table 8

	Outcome of which...			
	Convicted	Per cent.	Acquitted	Per cent.
1993	3,494	91.5	324	8.5
1994	1,032	93.4	72	6.6
1995	1,126	92.9	86	7.1

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many vessels are under investigation for failing to comply with their licence conditions in 1995. [13667]

Mr. Baldry: At 31 December 1995, 84 fishing vessels were under investigation by the Ministry for suspected fisheries offences, including breaches of licence conditions.

Genetic Modification

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he has taken to monitor the long-term effects of the sale of genetically modified foods. [14151]

Mrs. Browning: The safety of foods produced using genetic modification is thoroughly assessed by the independent Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes before approval for their use is given. As a condition of this approval applicants are required to monitor routinely the genetic stability of the products that they market and provide this information to the committee.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to set up an ethics committee to examine proposals to develop and market genetically modified plants and animals. [14152]

Mrs. Browning: This matter has already been examined by two Government committees, the Committee on the Ethics of Genetic Modification and Food Use which reported in September 1993, and the Committee to Consider the Ethical Implications of Emerging Technologies in the Breeding of Farm Animals, which reported in February 1995. Both reports are available in the House of Commons Library.

Local Veterinary Inspectors

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library a copy of the report of the inquiry chaired by Divisional Veterinary Officer Hugh Morris in regard to certification procedures carried out by local veterinary inspectors. [11691]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* The report of the working party chaired by Mr. Morris, DVO was an internal discussion document not intended for publication. A copy will not, therefore, be placed in the Library.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Student Loans Company

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many people were employed by the Student Loans Company on 1 January in each of the last five years; what were the grades of those employed; and how many loans were being administered on 1 January in each of the last five years; [13847]

(2) if she will set out *(a)* the number of cases in which the Student Loans Company has issued county court summons against students, *(b)* the number of cases which have proceeded to a court hearing, *(c)* the number of cases in which the defendant has been either (i) ordered or (ii) agreed to repay the loan and *(d)* the number of cases in which the Student Loans Company has agreed to withdraw a summons, and the reason for that decision. [13848]

Mr. Forth: These are matters for the Student Loans Company. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member with the information.

Nursery School Inspections

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will place in the Library the names of the nursery schools visited by registered inspectors of education in school year 1994–95 under section 9 of the Education (Schools) Act 1992; and what is the public document which sets down the criteria used for these inspections. [14286]

Mr. Robin Squire: This is a matter for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Nursery Vouchers Scheme

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *983*, concerning agreements entered into with non-statutory bodies or persons concerning her proposed extension to early years education, on what statutory authority she entered on 22 January into contract No. 0414/118/02 with Capita Managed Services Ltd. relating to the administration of phase 1 of a voucher scheme; how many responses were received to the published advertisements; and what is the value of the contract. [14284]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Secretary of State entered into the contract on behalf of the Crown in pursuance of the Crown's ordinary common law right to enter into contracts. This right does not depend on statute. One hundred and seventy companies expressed an interest in the contract. The contract was awarded by competitive tender. Its value is commercially confidential.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what budget has been allocated for phase 1 of the nursery voucher scheme in each of the four pilot authorities; and if she will give a breakdown of this budget with respect to *(a)* funding for new places, *(b)* publicity, *(c)* administration and *(d)* inspection. [14116]

Mr. Squire: The estimated cost of new places in the phase one authorities is shown in the table. The budget for publicity in phase one is £750,000. The estimated cost of inspection and administration in phase 1 is £5 million, much of this is expected to be accounted for by the preparations for inspection in phase 2.

Local authority	*Estimated cost of new places* £
Wandsworth	770,000
Westminster	880,000
Kensington and Chelsea	935,000
Norfolk	3,300,000

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the proportion of providers participating in *(a)* phase 1 and *(b)* phase 2 of the voucher scheme, capable of meeting the premises' requirements set out in the Children Act 1989 and the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981. [14117]

Mr. Squire: It is the responsibility of local education authorities and the governors of grant-maintained schools to ensure that all school premises comply with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981. They will also be responsible for ensuring compliance with the revised regulations that we expect to lay before the House later this month.

The Children Act 1989 does not prescribe premises standards for registration. Local authority social services departments have regard to the space standards guidance set out in local authority circular LAC(93)1 when registering institutions.

Reception Classes

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the *(a)* average class size, *(b)* average pupil-teacher ratio and *(c)* average pupil-adult ratio of reception classes in England. [14110]

Mr. Robin Squire: Information about pupils and staff in reception classes is not collected centrally.

Under-fives Education

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are the number and percentage of three-year-olds in *(a)* maintained nursery schools and nursery classes, *(b)* reception classes in primary schools, *(c)* private or voluntary sector provision an *(d)* pre-school provision overall. [14118]

Mr. Robin Squire: The available information for schools in England is shown in the following table. We have no reliable estimates on three-year olds in voluntary or private provision.

Pupils aged three years of age (1) in schools in England: January 1995

School type	*Pupils*	*Percentage of population*[2]
Maintained nursery schools and nursery classes	277,353	42
Infant classes in primary schools	1,309	—
Independent schools[3]	22,075	3
All schools[4]	303,467	46

—negligible (i.e. less than 0.5)

[1] Full-time and part-time pupils aged three years of age at 31 August 1994.

[2] Full-time and part-time pupils aged three years of age at 31 August 1994, expressed as a percentage of the population aged three at 31 August 1994

[3] Includes pupils in direct grant nursery schools.

[4] Includes pupils in maintained nursery, primary and special schools, non-maintained special schools and independent schools.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress St. Helen's chamber of commerce, training and enterprise and Greater Peterborough and Kent TECs are making in meeting the criteria for the award of a three-year licence. [14640]

Mr. Paice: I am pleased to announce the award of three-year licences to St. Helens chamber of commerce, training and enterprise, Greater Peterborough and Kent TECs, which have now completed the process of meeting the rigorous standards that we set.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Housing Bill

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons the provisions of the Housing Bill do not extend to Northern Ireland [12827]

Mr. Moss: Provisions on housing benefit in the forthcoming Housing Bill will extend to Northern Ireland. Separate Northern Ireland legislation on homelessness and other related issues is likely to be brought forward in due course in a way which accommodates the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland.

Movilla Cemetery

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Old Movilla road, Newtownards, is designated as an access to Movilla cemetery, Newtownards; what assessment he has made of the gradient; what research he has evaluated into the impact of snow and frost on the road; if he will make it his policy to implement gritting the Old Movilla road during periods of frost and snow; and if he will make a statement. [12941]

Mr. Moss: The main entrance to Movilla cemetery is on the Old Movilla road, Newtownards. The 120m section of Old Movilla road between Movilla road and the cemetery's entrance has a very slight gradient; the remaining 390m section has a gradient of approximately 1:8. The impact of snow and ice on this road is not considered to be significantly different from many other comparable minor roads and traffic volumes are not high enough to justify its inclusion in the winter maintenance programme. However, the Department proposes to provide a grit bin along the steepest section of the road.

Strangford Ferry

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many days each of the two car ferries operated on the Portaferry-Strangford route during the month of January 1996: on how many days the passenger ferry operated in that month; what factors led to the absence of a ferry service on Monday 29 January 1996; if he will arrange an internal inquiry about the management of this ferry service; what proposals there are to provide a new ferry boat; and if he will make a statement. [12901]

Mr. Moss: During January 1996 the MV Strangford was in service for 22 days, while the MV Portaferry was not in service at all as it was, and still is, receiving its annual refit, which is required for marine safety purposes; the passenger vessel, MV Isle O'Valla was in service for six days.

No ferry service was in operation on 29 January 1996, when the MV Strangford and the MV Isle O'Valla suffered major mechanical breakdowns.

While there are no proposals to carry out an internal inquiry into the management of the ferry service, a report on the recent breakdown is presently being prepared.

Last year marine consultants carried out a review of the ferry service and, in the light of that, the Department is exploring the possibility of replacing the MV Portaferry. However, as this proposal will have to compete with other priorities it is not possible to state at this stage when a new vessel could be provided.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the net cost to public funds of the operation of the Strangford ferry, including maintenance and repairs, in the last financial year. [13170]

Mr. Moss: Approximately £333,000.

Film Posters

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his policy in respect of the display of posters of an explicit sexual nature at *(a)* the property of the Department of Environment and *(b)* the property of Ulsterbus; what posters for the film "Showgirls" are on display at the bus stop at Carryduff; and if he will make a statement on the display of posters in public areas. [12914]

Mr. Moss: Neither the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland nor Ulsterbus permits the display of posters of an explicit sexual nature at their property; a poster advertising the film "Showgirls" on display at the privately owned bus shelter at Carryduff was removed by the owners in mid-January. The content of advertisements is controlled by a voluntary code of conduct supervised by the Advertising Standards Authority. It is an offence under the Indecent Advertisements Act 1889 to display publicly material which is of an indecent or obscene nature.

Conservation Schemes

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the annual expenditure figures and forecasts for the *(a)* countryside access scheme, *(b)* environmentally sensitive areas, *(c)* farm conservation grant scheme, *(d)* farm woodland premium scheme, *(e)* habitat scheme, *(f)* nitrate sensitive areas, *(g)* moorland scheme, *(h)* organic aid scheme and (i) countryside stewardship for each year between 1990–91 and 1997–98. [13637]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 5 February 1996]:* The information is as follows:

£000

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
a. Not applicable in Northern Ireland								
b.	217	474	628	587	528	1,712	4,335	4,381
c.	6,376	6,276	4,749	6,255	6,249	3,960	2,390	1,549
d.	—	—	0	69	113	163	272	324
e.	—	—	—	—	—	0	350	350
f. Not applicable in Northern Ireland								
g.	—	—	—	—	—	0	350	350
h.	—	—	—	—	—	0	58	60
i. Not applicable in Northern Ireland								

Midwives

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many midwives are employed at each hospital in Northern Ireland in *(a)* permanent and *(b)* temporary posts; and how many of those employed in these posts are (i) Roman Catholic, (ii) Protestant and (iii) in non-determined categories; [13938]

(2) how many midwives were appointed to *(a)* permanent posts and *(b)* temporary posts at each hospital in Northern Ireland to date during 1996; and how many of those appointed were (i) Roman Catholic, (ii) Protestant and (iii) non-determined at each hospital; [13940]

(3) how many midwives were appointed to *(a)* permanent and *(b)* temporary posts at each hospital in Northern Ireland during the last 12 months; and how many Roman Catholic, Protestant and non-determined midwives were appointed at each hospital. [12939]

Mr. Moss: The information requested is not held centrally.

Cookstown Bypass

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to implement the provision of a Cookstown bypass. [12590]

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 7 February 1996]:* A scheme to complete a bypass of Cookstown—the Cookstown eastern distributor road—is included in the Department's six to 15-year major road works programme, but its precise timing will depend on future funding levels.

Omagh Bypass

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken to

provide the finances necessary to conclude the Omagh bypass. [12591]

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 7 February 1996]:* The final stage of the Omagh throughpass is included in the Department's six to 15-year major works programme, but its precise timing will depend on future funding levels.

Volunteer Drivers

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consultations his Department carried out with the voluntary sector before announcing the discontinuance of exemptions for public service vehicles and road service licensing of volunteer drivers and their vehicles; and what account was taken of the decision to be in line with the 1993 strategy document of the volunteer activity unit in coming to this decision. [13799]

Mr. Moss: The health and personal social services executive has had no consultations with the voluntary sector. However, it wrote to voluntary organisations on the 20 December 1995 informing them of the Department of the Environment's intention to withdraw, probably from May 1996, exemptions from public service vehicle and road service licensing requirements for volunteer car services under the Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 1967. The HPSS executive at the same time indicated its intention to discuss ways of facilitating this change with the minimum impact on volunteers. The Department of the Environment is aware of the 1993 strategy document, but it has an overriding duty under section 6(1)(i) of the Transport Act (NI) 1967 to ensure fair competition among persons providing facilities for the carriage of passengers for reward. Volunteer car services which operate for reward are not at present exempt from road service licensing.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will specify those current European laws designed to promote fair competition which his Department assesses to be preventing volunteer car services from retaining public service vehicle exemptions; and if he will publish the legal opinion he has obtained on the subject. [13800]

Mr. Moss: Whether the exemptions from public service vehicle regulations currently granted to volunteer car services conflict with European competition law has not been tested in the courts. However, the Department of the Environment has a duty under section 6(1)(i) of the Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 1967 to ensure fair competition among persons providing facilities for the carriage of passengers for reward.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will amend the Transport Act 1967 formally to exempt volunteer car services from the road service licensing requirements of that Act. [13801]

Mr. Moss: The Department of the Environment is examining the possibility of amending the Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 1967 with a view to creating special licensing arrangements for volunteer car services while continuing to provide for the proper regulation of public transport services to ensure fair competition among persons providing facilities for the carriage of passengers for reward. The Department does not intend to proceed with plans to phase out the existing concessions until it is known whether suitable arrangements can be made.

Junior Sports Club Scheme

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost to the Sports Council of the review by Price Waterhouse of the junior sports club scheme. [13801]

Mr. Ancram: The cost to the Sports Council was £5,500.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the annual telephone costs to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* his Department's non-departmental public bodies staff for each of the years (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97; and if internal telephone directories are available to staff in all areas of *(a)* to *(c)*. [11402]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* The information for the Northern Ireland Office, Northern Ireland Departments and agencies is as follows.

£000

	1979–80	1989–90	1991–92	1993–94	1994–95	[1]1995–96	[1]1996–97
Northern Ireland Departments and Northern Ireland Office	[2]372	6,874	6,157	7,184	7,072	7,030	[3]3,842
Agencies	—	—	1,237	1,959	1,826	1,655	[4]105

[1] Estimated.
[2] Figures available for DHSS and DENI only.
[3] Excludes DED, DOE and DHSS as budgets have not been agreed to this level of detail.
[4] Figures available for the Valuation Lands Agency only.

These figures include capital expenditure. Figures for the Compensation Agency are included in the departmental returns.

Within the Northern Ireland Office, agencies have their own internal directories. The NIO internal directory is available to NIO core staff but not to staff in the agencies.

Within Northern Ireland Departments, departmental internal telephone directories are available to all staff within those Departments and their agencies. In addition, the Department of Finance and Personnel's Telecoms branch produce a paper network telephone directory for all Northern Ireland civil service buildings connection to the DIAL telecommunications network within Northern

Ireland. These directories are distributed at a ratio of one directory per three people. Government telecommunications network directories are also distributed for all buildings in the network.

Information on non-departmental public bodies could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

WALES

Local Government Finance

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated level of Government financial support for each of the new unitary local authorities and for Wales as a whole in constant prices for *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97, indicating the percentage yearly change in each case and the overall cumulative change (i) net of community care and the estimated cost of local government reorganisation and (ii) including community care and the estimated cost of local government reorganisation. [8885]

Mr. Gwilym Jones *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* The figures for 1995–96, redistributed on a unitary authority basis, and final figures for 1996–97 estimated at 1995–96 prices are set out in the following table. No estimates are available for 1994–95.

Government financial support for unitary authorities

	Central government support at constant 1995–96 prices (£ thousands)[1]					
	Net of community care			*Inclusive of community care*		
Unitary authority	*1995–96*[2]	*1996–97*[3]	*Percentage change*	*1995–96*[2]	*1996–97*[3]	*Percentage change*
Anglesey	48,805	47,280	–3.1	51,847	50,792	–2.0
Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire	84,787	84,493	–0.3	90,412	91,115	0.8
Aberconwy and Colwyn	68,819	67,493	–1.9	74,766	73,804	–1.3
Denbighshire	61,226	63,680	4.0	66,039	68,712	4.0
Flintshire	89,704	87,472	–2.5	95,474	93,694	–1.9
Wrexham	78,626	76,836	–2.3	84,010	82,639	–1.6
Powys	92,555	90,351	–2.4	98,001	96,859	–1.2
Cardiganshire	46,862	49,953	6.6	49,926	53,605	7.4
Pembrokeshire	79,745	78,432	–1.6	84,412	83,879	–0.6
Carmarthenshire	120,020	115,764	–3.5	128,068	125,339	–2.1
Swansea	156,525	151,340	–3.3	166,929	163,108	–2.3
Neath and Port Talbot	98,393	99,205	0.8	105,028	106,790	1.7
Bridgend	88,495	85,476	–3.4	93,399	91,705	–1.8
The Vale of Glamorgan	74,708	71,330	–4.5	79,263	76,550	–3.4
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	172,578	176,136	2.1	182,725	189,516	3.7
Merthyr Tydfil	46,985	46,759	–0.5	49,505	50,081	1.2
Caerphilly	120,393	119,816	–0.5	126,734	127,684	0.7
Blaenau Gwent	54,145	57,144	5.5	57,285	60,801	6.1
Torfaen	64,245	63,311	–1.5	67,720	67,289	–0.6
Monmouthshire	48,917	47,089	–3.7	52,245	50,924	–2.5
Newport	96,171	93,107	–3.2	101,632	99,485	–2.1
Cardiff	197,087	198,101	0.5	208,794	211,832	1.5
Wales	1,989,794	1,970,570	–1.0	2,114,214	2,116,203	0.1

(1) Comprises revenue support grant and the distributable amount from non-domestic rates, and, for 1996-97, grant under the council tax reduction scheme.
(2) Derived from indicative unitary authority standard spending assessments issued on 27 October 1995.
(3) Estimates derived from the final 1996-97 local government revenue settlement.

Provision for reorganisation costs is separate from, and additional to, the revenue settlement. For 1995–96 the Welsh Office has issued supplementary credit approvals—SCAs—of £23.1 million to county and district authorities and unitary authorities and is paying special grant of £17.6 million to the new unitary authorities to cover their running costs. For 1996–97 a further £40.0 million in SCAs is being provided to the new authorities and £2 million in special grant to meet the balance of 1995–96 running costs.

The distribution of special grant resources is given in the following table. The distribution of SCAs for 1996–97 will not be known until later in the year.

Special grant paid to unitary authorities

£000

	Grant paid in 1995–96	*Balance to be paid in 1996–97*[1]
Anglesey	717	80
Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire	848	94
Aberconwy and Colwyn	843	94
Denbighshire	782	87
Flintshire	813	90
Wrexham	801	89
Powys	825	92
Cardiganshire	715	79
Pembrokeshire	795	88

Special grant paid to unitary authorities

£000

	Grant paid in 1995–96	Balance to be paid in 1996–97[1]
Carmarthenshire	881	98
Swansea	867	96
Neath and Port Talbot	862	96
Bridgend	753	84
Vale of Glamorgan	747	83
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	921	102
Merthyr Tydfil	711	79
Caerphilly	881	98
Blaenau Gwent	719	80
Torfaen	730	81
Monmouthshire	724	80
Newport	758	84
Cardiff	857	95
Wales	17,550	1,950

[1] Subject to submission of audited claim.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is the annual increase in the 1996–97 standard spending assessment for each unitary authority excluding funding for the police and community care; [10281]

(2) if he will list the standard spending assessment for each local authority and for Wales as a whole excluding the amount specifically provided for community care *(a)* for 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97. [10282]

Mr. Gwilym Jones *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* The information requested is given in the following tables. Table 1 gives the 1995–96 standard spending assessments excluding allocations for community care for counties and districts. Table 2 shows the indicative 1995–96 SSAs for unitary authorities and compares them to the final SSAs for 1996–97—excluding allocations for community care.

Table 1: Standard spending assessments 1995–96 (excluding community care)

£ thousand

Alyn and Deeside	10,296
Colwyn	8,520
Delyn	9,339
Glyndwr	5,473
Rhuddlan	8,900
Wrexham Maelor	16,574
Carmarthen	7,869
Ceredigion	10,446
Dinefwr	6,027
Llanelli	13,294
Preseli Pembrokeshire	11,477
South Pembrokeshire	8,104
Blaenau Gwent	15,568
Islwyn	11,729
Monmouth	9,879
Newport	22,305
Torfaen	13,584
Aberconwy	8,609
Arfon	9,890
Dwyfor	6,035
Meirionnydd	6,187
Ynys Mon	11,242
Cynon Valley	13,659
Merthyr Tydfil	12,135
Ogwr	21,279
Rhondda	17,622
Rhymney Valley	15,879
Taff Ely	14,662
Brecknock	6,631
Montgomeryshire	7,679
Radnorshire	3,486
Cardiff	45,787
Vale of Glamorgan	15,063
Port Talbot	9,004
Lliw Valley	9,039
Neath	10,389
Swansea	32,710
Clwyd	247,421
Dyfed	225,558
Gwent	273,652
Gwynedd	149,413
Mid Glamorgan	345,059
Powys	85,432
South Glamorgan	252,734
West Glamorgan	224,574
Total Districts	466,373
Total counties	1,803,842
Total local authorities	2,270,215

Table 2: Standard spending assessments (excluding community care)

(£ thousand)

	1995–96[1]	1996–97	Difference	Percentage difference
Anglesey	56,029	57,194	1,164	2.1
Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire	97,151	99,599	2,449	2.5
Aberconwy and Colwyn	81,199	83,563	2,365	2.9
Denbighshire	71,146	73,384	2,238	3.1
Flintshire	104,391	106,166	1,775	1.7
Wrexham	90,503	92,595	2,092	2.3
Powys	105,907	108,961	3,055	2.9
Cardiganshire	54,124	56,162	2,038	3.8
Pembrokeshire	91,748	94,833	3,085	3.4
Carmarthenshire	136,410	138,519	2,109	1.5
Swansea	178,516	181,451	2,935	1.6
Neath and Port Talbot	110,739	112,657	1,917	1.7
Bridgend	100,955	101,186	231	0.2
Vale of Glamorgan	87,991	89,270	1,280	1.5
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	190,489	193,338	2,850	1.5

Table 2: Standard spending assessments (excluding community care)

(£ thousand)

	1995–96[1]	*1996–97*	*Difference*	*Percentage difference*
Merthyr Tydfil	51,315	52,446	1,131	2.2
Caerphilly	134,227	136,242	2,014	1.5
Blaenau Gwent	59,832	60,738	906	1.5
Torfaen	72,584	73,709	1,125	1.5
Monmouthshire	58,768	60,104	1,335	2.3
Newport	108,999	110,963	1.963	1.8
Cardiff	227,193	230,924	3,731	1.6
Wales	2,270,215	2,314,005	43,790	1.9

[1] Indicative SSAs released on 27 October 1995.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms the amount available to local authorities in Wales from non-domestic rates in each year from 1990–91 to 1996–97; and what proportion of local government revenue this was in each year. [10286]

Mr. Jones *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* The information requested is given in the following table.

Distributable non-domestic rates (£ million)

	Cash terms	*At 1990–91 prices*	*As a proportion of local government net revenue expenditure (per cent.)*
1990–91	443	443	19.9
1991–92	525	494	21.1
1992–93	536	485	20.2
1993–94	470	413	17.9
1994–95	464	400	16.5

Distributable non-domestic rates (£ million)

	Cash terms	*At 1990–91 prices*	*As a proportion of local government net revenue expenditure (per cent.)*
1995–96	520	437	17.6
1996–97[1]	459	375	n/a

[1] Revenue expenditure figures are not available for 1996–97.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* the total standard spending allocated to and *(b)* the amount spent by each local authority in each year from 1990–91. [10280]

Mr. Jones *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* Table 1 shows the standard spending assessments for each local authority from 1990–91 to 1995–96, table 2 shows the standard spending assessments for 1996–97 and table 3 shows the net revenue expenditure for authorities over the same period as table 1. No data on expenditure are available for 1996–97.

Table 1: Standard spending assessments for Welsh local authorities 1990–91 to 1995–96[1]

£ thousand

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*[2]
Alyn and Deeside	6,910	7,960	8,882	9,696	10,125	10,296
Colwyn	5,367	6,117	6,704	7,655	8,253	8,520
Delyn	5,796	6,811	7,580	8,615	9,262	9,339
Glyndwr	3,686	4,422	4,829	5,377	5,501	5,473
Rhuddlan	5,807	7,014	7,603	8,458	8,717	8,900
Wrexham Maelor	11,221	13,935	14,864	15,671	16,372	16,574
Carmarthen	5,488	6,421	6,952	7,723	7,762	7,869
Ceredigion	6,581	8,030	8,700	9,684	9,979	10,446
Dinefwr	3,542	4,335	4,977	5,602	5,866	6,027
Llanelli	8,366	10,624	11,581	12,539	12,868	13,294
Preseli Pembrokeshire	7,019	8,624	9,747	10,844	11,273	11,477
South Pembrokeshire	4,675	5,526	6,376	7,342	7,740	8,104
Blaenau Gwent	9,934	12,667	13,843	14,880	15,185	15,568
Islwyn	7,952	9,390	10,231	11,133	11,534	11,729
Monmouth	6,570	7,777	8,574	9,394	9,765	9,879
Newport	16,354	18,905	20,537	22,585	22,472	22,305
Torfaen	9,717	11,769	12,256	13,417	13,702	13,584
Aberconwy	5,341	6,672	7,410	8,488	8,740	8,609
Arfon	6,174	7,963	8,394	9,290	9,826	9,890
Dwyfor	3,734	4,729	5,108	5,882	5,996	6,035
Meirionnydd	3,911	5,099	5,282	5,757	6,068	6,187
Ynys Mon	7,218	8,943	9,539	10,812	11,248	11,242
Cynon Valley	8,517	10,524	11,675	12,966	13,374	13,659
Merthyr Tydfil	8,266	10,192	10,937	11,974	12,226	12,135
Ogwr	14,782	17,218	18,121	20,287	20,598	21,279
Rhondda	11,992	14,739	15,921	17,225	17,746	17,622
Rhymney Valley	10,610	13,426	14,128	15,410	15,882	15,879

Table 1. Standard spending assessments for Welsh local authorities 1990–91 to 1995–96[1]

£ thousand

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*[2]
Taff Ely	9,991	11,701	12,771	14,253	14,644	14,662
Brecknock	4,132	4,904	5,337	5,960	6,257	6,631
Montgomeryshire	4,682	5,420	5,987	6,669	7,132	7,679
Radnorshire	2,074	2,493	2,971	3,281	3,283	3,486
Cardiff	30,461	37,265	41,644	44,209	45,765	45,787
Vale of Glamorgan	10,325	12,086	13,309	15,017	15,257	15,063
Port Talbot	6,348	7,901	8,336	8,790	8,896	9,004
Lliw Valley	5,983	7,322	7,854	8,647	8,827	9,039
Neath	6,991	8,151	9,284	10,088	10,148	10,389
Swansea	23,580	28,427	29,857	32,346	32,781	32,710
Clwyd	225,384	258,105	278,847	266,580	280,306	266,705
Dyfed	202,326	232,562	251,704	242,976	253,355	241,288
Gwent	248,388	286,174	302,433	295,230	306,932	291,717
Gwynedd	142,239	159,307	168,892	162,795	169,002	160,883
Mid Glamorgan	320,076	363,783	381,246	376,664	388,857	366,613
Powys	77,653	87,670	93,187	90,374	93,656	90,776
South Glamorgan	228,696	258,854	273,622	269,164	280,920	268,620
West Glamorgan	205,437	236,544	254,570	243,329	255,622	241,661
Dyfed-Powys Police Authority	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	23,431
Gwent Police Authority	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	25,280
North Wales Police Authority	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	33,329
South Wales Police Authority	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	77,734
Total district councils	310,100	375,500	408,100	447,964	461,071	466,373
Total county councils	1,650,200	1,883,000	2,004,500	1,947,112	2,028,650	1,928,262
Total police authorities	0	0	0	0	0	159,775
Total Wales	1,960,300	2,258,500	2,412,600	2,395,076	2,489,721	2,554,410

[1] No adjustments made for functional changes.
[2] For years prior to 1995-96, the SSAs for police authorities are included in the amounts for county councils.

Table 2: Standard spending assessments for Welsh local authorities: 1996–97

	£ thousand
Anglesey	60,802
Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire	106,403
Aberconwy and Colwyn	90,048
Denbighshire	78,555
Flintshire	112,559
Wrexham	98,558
Powys	115,649
Cardiganshire	59,915
Pembrokeshire	100,430
Carmarthenshire	148,358
Swansea	193,543
Neath and Port Talbot	120,451
Bridgend	107,587
The Vale of Glamorgan	94,634
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	207,086

Table 2: Standard spending assessments for Welsh local authorities: 1996–97

	£ thousand
Merthyr Tydfil	55,859
Caerphilly	144,327
Blaenau Gwent	64,496
Torfaen	77,796
Monmouthshire	64,045
Newport	117,516
Cardiff	245,034
Dyfed-Powys Police Authority	24,338
Gwent Police Authority	31,419
North Wales Police Authority	34,659
South Wales Police Authority	75,827
Total unitary authorities	2,463,649
Total police authorities	166,242
Total Wales	2,629,891

Table 3: Net revenue expenditure for Welsh local authorities 1990–91 to 1995–96

(£ thousand)

	1990–91 outturn	*1991–92 outturn*	*1992–93 outturn*	*1993–94 outturn*	*1994–95 revised estimate*	*1995–96 budget*[1]
Alyn and Deeside	5,875	9,296	9,750	9,866	10,509	11,807
Colwyn	6,219	7,091	7,179	7,672	8,955	9,070
Delyn	7,530	6,247	8,552	8,473	12,542	11,138
Glyndwr	3,875	4,036	5,275	6,075	5,791	6,815
Rhuddlan	6,964	9,207	9,162	8,786	9,378	9,355
Wrexham Maelor	12,645	13,301	14,880	15,988	16,909	18,061
Carmarthen	4,800	5,019	5,091	6,598	8,690	11,560
Ceredigion	6,546	8,968	9,279	9,693	10,637	11,361

Table 3: Net revenue expenditure for Welsh local authorities 1990–91 to 1995–96

(£ thousand)

	1990–91 outturn	*1991–92 outturn*	*1992–93 outturn*	*1993–94 outturn*	*1994–95 revised estimate*	*1995–96 budget*[1]
Dinefwr	3,332	3,878	4,877	5,667	5,695	6,410
Llanelli	8,795	10,557	11,775	13,054	15,544	17,397
Preseli Pembrokeshire	6,971	6,867	7,275	9,945	12,632	14,854
South Pembrokeshire	2,784	4,346	5,019	6,959	7,299	8,349
Blaenau Gwent	12,336	14,605	16,443	14,913	16,260	17,613
Islwyn	9,496	9,401	10,015	10,079	13,199	16,499
Monmouth	7,516	7,758	8,507	9,181	11,183	11,818
Newport	16,240	20,587	19,444	17,727	22,669	25,038
Torfaen	14,251	14,978	12,688	13,657	14,124	14,669
Aberconwy	6,478	8,450	9,129	9,428	9,087	9,490
Arfon	4,980	7,751	8,672	8,571	10,752	10,978
Dwyfor	5,699	4,692	5,106	5,217	7,138	8,172
Meirionnydd	5,495	6,505	6,257	6,003	6,399	7,075
Ynys Mon	9,688	9,686	10,253	10,735	12,514	14,287
Cynon Valley	8,783	10,334	11,845	12,078	13,027	15,248
Merthyr Tydfil	8,648	10,580	11,404	12,033	12,340	12,240
Ogwr	18,657	17,545	18,747	19,952	20,697	21,697
Rhondda	12,630	12,287	12,911	16,746	19,251	23,543
Rhymney Valley	12,826	13,988	15,202	16,863	16,175	16,178
Taff Ely	9,733	10,429	12,195	15,443	16,938	16,183
Brecknock	4,273	4,698	5,077	5,513	7,502	8,266
Montgomeryshire	4,476	5,341	5,671	6,093	7,683	7,978
Radnorshire	2,095	2,817	2,948	3,310	3,733	3,561
Cardiff	38,739	41,397	41,279	44,737	48,269	48,945
Vale of Glamorgan	8,831	12,057	13,280	15,579	16,593	17,330
Port Talbot	8,042	8,212	6,368	6,282	13,145	13,737
Lliw Valley	4,903	5,506	6,585	7,717	8,432	9,319
Neath	6,753	8,942	9,513	10,699	14,269	15,160
Swansea	31,486	36,201	35,091	32,116	35,300	35,904
Clwyd	241,714	269,547	291,250	261,453	288,281	280,517
Dyfed	210,684	234,897	258,161	253,894	266,584	261,088
Gwent	251,273	283,716	304,684	299,215	313,523	301,405
Gwynedd	144,793	158,369	168,423	164,470	175,719	170,079
Mid Glamorgan	323,255	361,185	378,157	381,519	408,049	391,938
Powys	75,332	86,954	95,386	92,917	97,015	97,284
South Glamorgan	232,522	259,964	272,136	270,076	280,334	274,040
West Glamorgan	219,065	238,965	261,812	252,306	268,065	258,048
Dyfed-Powys Police Authority	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	23,031
Gwent Police Authority	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	25,280
North Wales Police Authority	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	33,328
South Wales Police Authority	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	74,733
Total district councils	349,390	393,560	412,744	439,448	501,260	537,105
Total county councils	1,698,638	1,893,597	2,030,009	1,975,850	2,097,570	2,034,399
Total police authorities	0	0	0	0	0	156,372
Total Wales	2,048,028	2,287,157	2,442,753	2,415,298	2,598,830	2,727,876

[1] Police authority budgets adjusted to exclude police grant. For years prior to 1995-96, the expenditure for police authorities is included in the amounts for county councils.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each unitary authority area and for Wales as a whole in 1996 prices the overall central Government support net of community care costs in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97. [12431]

Mr. Jones: The figures for 1995–96, redistributed on a unitary authority basis, and final figures for 1996–97, estimated at 1995–96 prices are set out in the following table.

Government financial support for unitary authorities

Unitary authority	*Central government support net of allocations for care in the community at constant 1995–96 prices (£ thousands)*[1] *1995–96*[2]	*1996–97*[3]
Anglesey	48,805	47,280
Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire	84,787	84,493
Aberconwy and		

Government financial support for unitary authorities

Unitary authority	*Central government support net of allocations for care in the community at constant 1995–96 prices (£ thousands)*[1] *1995–96*[2]	*[3]1996–97*
Colwyn	68,819	67,493
Denbighshire	61,226	63,680
Flintshire	89,704	87,472
Wrexham	78,626	76,836
Powys	92,555	90,351
Cardiganshire	46,862	49,953
Pembrokeshire	79,745	78,432
Carmarthenshire	120,020	115,764
Swansea	156,525	151,340
Neath and Port Talbot	98,393	99,205
Bridgend	88,495	85,476
The Vale of Glamorgan	74,708	71,330
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	172,578	176,136
Merthyr Tydfil	46,985	46,759
Caerphilly	120,393	119,816
Blaenau Gwent	54,145	57,144
Torfaen	64,245	63,311
Monmouthshire	48,917	47,089
Newport	96,171	93,107
Cardiff	197,087	198,101
Wales	1,989,794	1,970,570

[1] Comprises revenue support grant and the distributable amount from non-domestic rates, and, for 1996–97, grant under the council tax reduction scheme.
[2] Derived from indicative unitary authority standard spending assessments issued on 27 October 1995.
[3] Estimates derived from the final 1996–97 local government revenue settlement.

Community Care

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each unitary authority area and for Wales as a whole in 1996 prices the budget for community care *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97. [12430]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not available. Local authorities' budget returns do not distinguish estimated expenditure on care in the community from expenditure on other social services. Local authorities have not yet set their budgets for 1996–97.

Osteoporosis

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what sums were earmarked for *(a)* the treatment of, and *(b)* publicity about, osteoporosis in (i) 1994 and (ii) 1995. [12992]

Mr. Richards: *(a)* This information is not available centrally. The responsibility for providing services for osteoporosis is a matter for district health authorities. *(b)* No Welsh Office funds were earmarked for publicity about osteoporosis in 1994 or 1995.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy concerning the identification and treatment of sufferers from osteoporosis. [12994]

Mr. Richards: The responsibility for the assessment and provision of services for sufferers of osteoporosis is a matter for district health authorities in the light of local priorities and resources.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of *(a)* the number of sufferers from osteoporosis and *(b)* the number of people treated for osteoporosis in Wales in each of the last three years. [12995]

Mr. Richards: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what additional promotional measures he plans in connection with osteoporosis. [12991]

Mr. Richards: The Welsh Office does not at present have any specific plans for promotional measures aimed at reducing the impact of osteoporosis.

School Transport

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which local authorities in Wales provide free transport to schools and colleges for pupils beyond the compulsory school-leaving age. [12894]

Mr. Richards: The information requested is not available centrally.

Elderly People's Homes

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy concerning safety and security and the prevention of accidents in homes for the elderly. [13183]

Mr. Richards: The Health and Safety Executive is responsible for developing and providing guidance on health and safety standards nationally and for the enforcement of health and safety legislation in all nursing homes and in residential homes owned by local authorities. Local authority environmental health departments are responsible for enforcement in private and voluntary residential homes.

Under the Registered Homes Act 1984 local authority social services departments are responsible for the registration of residential homes and health authorities are responsible for the registration of nursing homes.

Baglan Hospital

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money has so far been expended on the site proposed for the Baglan hospital; and which body is bearing the interest charges for costs incurred. [13733]

Mr. Richards: West Glamorgan health authority has invested £5.1 million in the acquisition and initial preparation of land at Baglan moors. The funds were allocated as part of the authority's capital allocation and, as such, do not attract interest charges.

Sheep (Radioactivity)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what considerations have led him to take the view that sheep in the area of north Wales hitherto restricted post-Chernobyl are now fit for human consumption. [13679]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Statutory restrictions are in place to prevent sheepmeat containing levels of radiocaesium in excess of 1,000 Becquerels per kilogram from entering the

food chain. A continuing assessment programme enables suitable areas affected by restrictions to be identified for an intensive monitoring survey to determine the level of radiocaesium activity in the sheep grazing there.

When it can be shown, following intensive monitoring at the time of year when levels of activity are expected to be at their peak, that residual radioactivity has declined to acceptable levels restrictions may be removed from that area.The lat t removal of restrictions form part of the north Wales restricted area follows the successful outcome of such an assessment.

Junior Doctors

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the shortfall of junior doctors in each of the health districts in Wales. [13810]

Mr. Richards: The Department has been discussing with NHS trusts what action can be taken to address the problems arising from a shortage of junior doctors in some specialities. Information on the extent of the shortfall in each health district in Wales can be provided by individual trusts and is not held centrally.

Spare Computer Capacity

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all cases where spare computer capacity has been sold to other Departments since 1987, giving the Department and value of each contract. [14074]

Mr. Hague: There are no cases in which the Welsh Office has sold spare computer capacity to other Departments.

Health Service Materials Management

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *980*, if the sale proceeds of the existing Welsh Health Common Services Authority stores will be available for meeting *(a)* redundancy costs of existing authority employees in the procurement section, *(b)* costs of removal of the contracts division from Crickhowell house and *(c)* other restructuring costs. [14270]

Mr. Hague: Proceeds from the sale of stores will be available to meet restructuring and redundancy costs associated with the market test of materials management. The location of the contracting staff is a separate matter and is for the authority to decide.

NHS EstateCare

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, column *898*, if he will list the date and means by which his predecessor's decision to privatise the EstateCare group of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority was *(a)* first formulated and *(b)* communicated to (i) NHS trusts and (ii) others with an interest; and if he will make a statement. [14272]

Mr. Hague: My Department wrote to health authorities and NHS trusts on 11 April 1994 letting them know that the privatisation of the EstateCare group was under consideration. Detailed proposals were subsequently drawn up by the Welsh Health Common Services Authority with the involvement of health authorities and NHS trusts.

HEALTH

NHS Trusts (Statistics)

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce into NHS hospital trusts annual information on *(a)* the percentage for re-admission after treatment, *(b)* the number of patients who get infections and *(c)* the number of times the hospital has been closed to emergency admission. [13230]

Mr. Horam: No.

NHS Pension Scheme

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the policy of payment of NHS pensions to employees who are certified as long-term sick and unable to return to their employment with the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [13564]

Mr. Malone: The purpose of the national health service pension scheme is to provide pension benefits to employees on retirement. I am satisfied that it should continue to be the case. Where satisfactory independent medical opinion states that he or she is permanently incapable of efficiently discharging the duties of his or her employment an employee shall be entitled to an ill health retirement pension.

Adoption Home Studies

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each English local authority the amount currently charged for inter-country adoption home studies. [13477]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Fundholding Savings (Ownership of Assets)

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who legally owns assets bought from fundholding savings; and if he will make a statement. [13720]

Mr. Malone: It depends on the use to which the savings have been put. For example, if equipment was bought for use in a trust, ownership would probably be with the trust; if the savings were used for developments in the practice, ownership would probably be with the practice.

Such expenditure has to be approved by the regional health authority to ensure benefit for patients and value for money.

Oral Cancer

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what are the annual costs to the national health service of surgery for oral cancer; and what assessment he has made of the potential savings from earlier diagnosis of oral cancer; [13768]

(2) what steps are being taken by his Department to *(a)* set targets for reducing oral cancer incidence and to reduce death rates from oral cancer and *(b)* launch an extensive nationwide public awareness campaign of oral cancer and its risks factors and a programme for dentists to aid early identification of high-risk individuals. [13807]

Mr. Malone: Information on the annual cost of oral cancer is not available centrally. There are no plans at present to introduce set targets for reducing oral cancer morbidity or mortality rates. Dentists are trained in the early recognition of abnormalities in the mouth and will refer patients for the appropriate treatment. Oral cancer can result from excessive alcohol and tobacco consumption, the risks of which are widely publicised and recognised. The Chief Dental Officer chairs the National Advisory Group on Screening for Oral Cancer which was set up last October. The group seeks to co-ordinate various strands of work being undertaken in the field of detecting and preventing oral cancers.

Newham Healthcare NHS Trust

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure early resumption of routine and clinically urgent operations by Newham Healthcare NHS trust. [13790]

Mr. Horam: This is a matter for the trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman, Rosemary Walters, for details.

Job Advertisements

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many jobs have been advertised in each grade in his Department during the last three months for which records are available; and how many people have applied for each such job. [13831]

Mr. Horam: The following posts in the Department of Health and its agencies have been advertised externally since 1 November 1995:

Grade (including professional equivalents)	*Department of Health*		*Medicines control agency*		*NHS estates*	
	Posts advertised	*Number applied*	*Posts advertised*	*Number applied*	*Posts advertised*	*Number applied*
UG2	1	24	—	—	—	—
UG3	3	94	—	—	—	—
UG5	2	90	—	—	—	—
UG6	1	58	—	—	6	258
UG7	4	106	2	104	1	71
NO	5	104	—	—	—	—
SEO	—	—	1	19	5	174
HEO	—	—	2	108	2	18
EO	—	—	—	—	3	220
Unit Manager	1	14	—	—	—	—
Groupworker	6	83	—	—	—	—
AO	7	377	4	58	—	—
AA	—	—	1	12	—	—
PES	—	—	1	27	—	—

City and East London Health Authority

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the difference between the spending plans of the health service providers in City and East London and the available budget. [13789]

Mr. Horam: Health authorities and general practitioners fundholders negotiate and fund an agreed level of service provision with national health service trusts. It is for each trust to provide those services using the available resources.

Accident and Emergency Units (Doctors)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total number of doctors from overseas working in the accident and emergency units of NHS hospitals. [14105]

Mr. Malone: There were 533 overseas-qualified doctors working in accident and emergency in England as at 30 September 1994.

Note: The total includes permanent paid, locums and honorary doctors, ie those in the field of academia and research.

NHS Charges

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase NHS charges and the value of optical vouchers; and if he will make a statement. [14830]

Mr. Malone: I shall shortly lay before the House regulations to increase national health service charges in England and Wales from 1 April 1996. The prescription charge will increase by 25p, from £5.25 to £5.50 for each quantity of a drug or appliance dispensed. The fees for prescription prepayment certificates will also rise by £1.30, from £27.20 to £28.50 for a four-month certificate, and by £3.60, from £74.80 to £78.40, for an annual certificate. This will result in savings for those needing more than five items in four months or 14 in one year.

Charges for elastic stockings and tights, wigs and most fabric supports supplied through the hospital service will be increased proportionately with the rise in the prescription charge.

There will be an increase in the maximum patient charge for a single course of dental treatment begun on or after 1 April 1996. Everyone under 18 will continue to receive free treatment and about 25 per cent. of adult treatments are provided free or at reduced cost. The

maximum patient charge will increase from £300 to £325. More than 99 per cent. of courses of dental treatment will not be affected by this change because fewer than three in 1,000 courses of treatment attract the maximum charge.

From 1 April 1996, the range of optical vouchers issued under the NHS optical voucher scheme will increase in value by 1 per cent. on average. The old values reflected the application of value added tax to the full cost of finished spectacles. A recent decision means that VAT should not be applied to the part of this cost which relates to dispensing the spectacles.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will lay regulations to increase charges in Scotland by the same amounts. Similar arrangements will apply in Northern Ireland.

Details of the revised charges have been placed in the Library.

Safety of Medicines

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the occasions on which *(a)* the Licensing Authority, *(b)* the Medicines Control Agency and its predecessor division of the DHSS and *(c)* the Committee on Safety of Medicines have taken legal action with respect to matters relating to the Medicines Act 1968; and what injunctions on what occasions have been sought preventing publication of any material relating to the efficacy or safety of medicines. [12977]

Mr. Malone: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Oral Contraceptives

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 1995 to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), *Official Report*, column *1153*, if he will publish the full text of the advice of the Committee on Safety of Medicines to the Licensing Authority. [12979]

Mr. Malone: Such advice is confidential. The recommendations made by the Committee on Safety of Medicines at the meeting on 13 October 1995 were published in a letter from the chairman dated 18 October 1995 which was sent to doctors and pharmacists. Copies of this letter are available in the Library.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) under what legislative provision the opinion of the committee for proprietary medicinal products on the safety of combined oral contraceptives, which was requested on 11 October 1995, is being obtained; [12976]

(2) if he will publish the text of the formal referral made on 11 October 1995 by the licensing authority to the committee for proprietary medicinal products; and if he will state the legal basis for that referral. [12973]

Mr. Malone: The Medicines Control Agency has an obligation to keep other member states informed of issues on the efficacy, quality and safety of medicines. In accordance with these obligations, on 11 October 1995 the MCA requested in writing that the safety of combined oral contraceptives be placed on the agenda of the Committee for Proprietary Medicinal Products meeting of 17 to 18 October, after important new evidence about this issue became available. It is not normal practice to publish such documentation. The matter was not referred to the Committee for an opinion under article 12 of directive 75/319/EEC.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if those who made arrangements on 11 October 1995 for the meeting of the Committee on Safety of Medicines on 13 October 1995 were made aware of the formal referral regarding safety concerns relating to desogestrel and gestodene to be considered by the pharmacovigilance sub-committee of the Committee on Safety of Medicines; and what factors led to the referral. [12965]

Mr. Malone: No such referral was made to the pharmacovigilance sub-committee. I presume the hon. Member is referring to the written request made on 11 October 1995 that the Committee for Proprietary Medicinal Products place the issue on the agenda of its meeting of 17–18 October. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns 1149–50.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) of 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1149*, if the outside experts who attended the working group of the Committee on Safety of Medicines on 10 October and the meeting of the CSM on 13 October were informed that the proceedings were subject to the Official Secrets Act 1989. [12966]

Mr. Malone: No. Attendees of the meeting of the Committee on Safety of Medicines on 13 October 1995 and the working group meeting of 10 October 1995 were informed that the papers and proceedings of the meetings were confidential and should not be disclosed. The papers and proceedings are subject to section 118 of the Medicines Act 1968.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors precluded consideration between July 1995 and October 1995 of safety concerns relating to desogestrel and gestodene by the pharmacovigilence sub-committee of the Committee on Safety of Medicines. [12967]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 19 December 1995 at column *1151*.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the licensing authority took prior to issuing the "Dear Doctor" letter of 18 October 1995 to establish the availability of oral contraceptives deemed to be suitable alternatives to those oral contraceptives which had given rise to safety concerns. [12972]

Mr. Malone: Appropriate steps were taken. The Committee on Safety of Medicines did not advise that all women on oral contraceptives containing gestodene or desogestrel should be switched to alternative preparations immediately. In a press release issued by the Department, women taking these pills were strongly urged to continue taking them, but to see their doctor, preferably before finishing their current cycle, to discuss whether a change of pill was necessary. Women who could not visit their surgery or family planning clinic before the end of their present cycle were advised to start the next pack. Discussions regarding supply were held with

pharmaceutical companies. We are not aware of major difficulties in the supply of alternative preparations that arose as a result of the CSM's advice.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received relating to safety concerns on combined oral contraceptives containing desogestrel or gestodene; and what steps he has taken in response to any such expressions of concern. [12974]

Mr. Malone: My Department has received representations from a number of sources, including doctors and other health professionals; bodies representing health professionals; members of the public; the pharmaceutical companies concerned and representatives of the pharmaceutical industry, and has responded to the issues raised.

Medicines Commission

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the chairmen of the Medicines Commission since the inception of the Medicines Commission and give for each chairman the dates on which the chairmanship started and finished, together with the total duration of the chairmanship and if the individual concerned had served as a member of the Medicines Commission other than as chairman. [12921]

Mr. Malone: The available information is as follows:

	Start and finish date
Sir Derrick Dunlop MD FRCP FRCPed	(Chairman) 1969 to December 1971
Lord Rosenheim KBE MD FRCP	(Member) 1969 to December 1971 (Chairman) January 1972 to December 1972 (1 year)
Professor A. Wilson CBE PhD MD FRCP FPS	(Member) 1969 to October 1974 (Acting Chairman) December 1972 to mid 1973
Sir Ronald Bodley Scott GCVO MA MD	(Chairman) Mid 1973 to December 1975
Professor W. Butterfield OBE MA MD DM FRCP FACP	(Member) January 1975 to December 1975 (1 year) (Chairman) January 1976 to December 1981 (6 years)
Professor Dame Rosalind Hurley DBE LLB MD DUniv(Surrey) FRCPath FFPM(Hon) FRCOG	(Chairman) 1982 to December 1993 (12 years)
Professor D. Lawson CBE MD FRCPEdin FRCPGlasg FFPM	(Chairman) January 1994 to Present (2 years 1 month)

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the occasions when the Medicines Commission has exercised its powers under section 3 of the Medicines Act 1968, and for each occasion give the date and nature of the issues examined, at whose request the powers were exercised, and if the results of the deliberations of the commission were published. [12923]

Mr. Malone: Section 3 of the Medicines Act 1968 sets out all of the general functions assigned to the Medicines Commission by or under the Act. To provide the information in respect of all the matters considered by the commission since it was established in 1969 would incur disproportionate cost. Details of matters considered by the commission are published in annual reports which are laid before the House and copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the occasions since 1968 when the Medicines Commission reviewed the committees established under section 4 of the Medicines Act 1968. [12975]

Mr. Malone: Under section 5 of the Medicines Act 1968, all section 4 committees are required to report to the Medicines Commission annually with respect to the performance of their functions. Copies of the reports are placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Clinical Trials

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what clinical trials conducted under a clinical trials exemption certificate were terminated between 1 October 1995 and 30 November 1995 at the request of the licensing authority on grounds of safety; [12922]

(2) if regulatory action relating to clinical trials involving the use of medicinal products containing *(a)* desogestrel and *(b)* gestodene has now been completed. [12971]

Mr. Malone: Any company, or investigator, wishing to conduct a clinical trial with third generation progestogens or their metabolites, would have to apply to the Medicines Control Agency in accordance with the Medicines Act 1968 and its secondary legislation, and would have to provide a justification for the use of third generation progestogens taking into account the recent advice of the Committee on Safety of Medicines in its letter dated 18 October 1995. Any regulatory action relating to clinical trials is treated in confidence between the licensing authority and the company or investigator concerned.

Medicines Act

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the sub-committees established under powers conferred by section 1 (c) of schedule 1 to the Medicines Act 1968 or section 6 of the Medicines Commission and Committees Regulations 1970, giving for each sub-committee the date on which ministerial approval was given for the establishing of the sub-committee, which Minister or Ministers gave such approval, the date on which the sub-committee first met and, where applicable, the date of the final meeting of the sub-committee. [12924]

Mr. Malone: The available information for sub-committees established by powers conferred by section 1(c) of schedule 1 to the Medicines Act 1968 is contained in the annual reports of the section 4 committees of the Medicines Act 1968, copies of which are available in the Library.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date arrangements were made by the Medicines Control Agency for the meetings with Professor Walter Spitzer and colleagues which were held

on Monday 9 October 1995 and Tuesday 10 October 1995. [12925]

Mr. Malone: The arrangements were made in late September 1995.

Committee on Safety of Medicines

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what written reports from the transnational study were received by the licensing authority before to the meeting of the Committee on Safety of Medicines held on 13 October 1995. [12968]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1149*.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the scheduled and actual meeting dates between 1 January 1995 and 31 December 1995 of the Committee on Safety of Medicines and its pharmacovigilance sub-committee. [12969]

Mr. Malone: The scheduled and actual meeting dates of the Committee on Safety of Medicines were as follows:

26 January 1995
23 February 1995
23 March 1995
27 April 1995
25 May 1995
22 June 1995
20 July 1995
21 September 1995
13 October 1995
26 October 1995
23 November 1995
14 December 1995

The scheduled meeting dates of the pharmacovigilance sub-committee were as follows:

3 January 1995
31 January 1995
28 February 1995
28 March 1995
2 May 1995
6 June 1995
4 July 1995
5 September 1995
3 October 1995
31 October 1995
28 November 1995

The meetings scheduled for 31 January 1995 and 28 March 1995 were cancelled.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list travel and subsistence expenses paid to the members of the Committee on Safety of Medicines for journeys in October 1995; and if, for each payment, he will identify the committee members concerned, the starting point, starting date, finishing point and finishing date for each journey, and list separately the sums of travel and subsistence expenses paid; [12920]

(2) if he will list travel and subsistence expenses paid to outside experts who advised the Licensing Authority of the Committee on Safety of Medicines for journeys in October 1995; if he will identify the recipient of each payment, the starting point, starting date, finishing point and finishing date for each journey and if he will identify separately the sums of travel and subsistence expenses paid. [12970]

Mr. Malone: No. This information cannot be provided for reasons of confidentiality.

EU Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on which occasions in the last three years officials have vetoed draft EC legislation on the grounds that a fiche d'impact had not been correctly prepared. [13643]

Mr. Horam: The correct preparation of fiches d'impact is a very important part of our consideration of proposals for EC legislation. It is one of the factors taken into account when Ministers consider the United Kingdom's negotiating position on a particular proposal.

Renal Services

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of patients who die each year due to renal failure through the non-availability of dialysis machines to treat them; and if he will make a statement on the remedial measures he is taking. [14061]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available. It is for individual health authorities to allocate resources to renal services based on an assessment of the needs of their population and taking account of local priorities. Good practice guidance has been issued to help authorities to carry out a proper assessment of need for patients with renal failure. Purchasing guidance will be issued to health authorities shortly.

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date he received the national review of renal services; and if he will now publish it. [14062]

Mr. Horam: My right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State received the report of the national review of renal services in December 1994. We are currently considering a number of issues as to how to take this forward. This includes related guidance on purchasing renal services to be issued to health authorities in time for the next contracting round.

NHS Finance

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide *(a)* for each region and *(b)* for the trusts in each region for each of the last three years (i) the original capital cash limits (ii) the net amount of subsequent transfers or adjustments, (iii) the consequent final cash limits, (iv) receipts from the sale of fixed assets and (v) capital cash payments to acquire assets excluding donated assets. [10933]

Mr. Horam: National health service trusts do not have capital cash limits. Total cash payments are controlled by external financing limits which represent the difference between trusts' internally generated resources and approved capital spend.

Health authorities and national health service trusts are not required to distinguish between the cash flows for purchased and donated assets in their accounts.

The other information requested will be placed in the Library.

Over the period the number of NHS trusts increased. As a consequence the capital resources available to trusts increased and there was a corresponding reduction in the capital resources available to health authorities.

NHS Trusts (Return on Capital)

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the target figure in cash terms for the return on capital for each NHS trust annually since their inception and the actual return on capital annually; and how much of the actual surplus was *(a)* retained by the NHS trusts and *(b)* returned to the Government. [12621]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* National health service trusts are required to make a six per cent. return on their net relevant assets, not a target figure in cash terms. Tables showing the actual return achieved in percentage terms by each trust, and their retained surplus, for the financial year 1991–92 and 1992–93 will be placed in the Library. The equivalent information for the financial years 1993–94 and 1994–95 is already available in the Library within reports on national health service trusts financial performance. Tables showing amounts paid by national health service trusts to the Consolidated Fund in interest and dividends for each financial year since 1991–92—the first year national health service trusts were established—will also be placed in the Library.

NHS Trusts (Legal Costs)

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions the Department has met the legal costs of workers of the boards of health trusts; which trusts were assisted; what was the cost to the Department in each case; and where provision was made for these costs in his Department's estimates. [13806]

Mr. Malone: The Department contributed towards the legal costs incurred by the non-executives of Cornwall Healthcare national health service trust in the libel action brought against them by Mrs. Abigail Kirby-Harris the former chairman. The contribution made by the Department towards the legal costs of all the litigants was £250,000 for which provision was taken in the winter supplementary estimates for 1995–96 presented to Parliament on 16 November 1995.

This is the only case in which such a payment has been made by the Department.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what rules govern the payment by NHS trusts of legal costs incurred in actions involving members of the boards of trusts; and what sum has been incurred to date in meeting these costs. [13808]

Mr. Malone: National health service trusts meet their directors' litigation costs where required to do so under the National Health Service Act 1977, or where vicariously liable at common law for the directors' actions, or where—in appropriate cases—they have indemnified the directors against such costs.

No central record is kept of sums paid by NHS trusts towards legal costs.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

British Library

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to the letter to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, JH/95/M/688, what actions he is taking to pursue the issue of oral scientific history with the national sound archive of the British library. [8247]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* I propose to discuss the subject of oral scientific history with the chief executive of the British library.

Built Heritage

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she expects to publish a Green Paper on possible reforms of legislation to protect the built heritage. [13677]

Mr. Sproat: I hope to do so within the next couple of months.

Job Advertisements

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many jobs have been advertised in each grade in her Department during the last three months for which records are available; and how many people have applied for each such job. [13830]

Mr. Sproat: My Department has not advertised any jobs in the last three months.

Departmental Publications

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which of her Department's administrative manuals and internal guidance are now made public; and which remain private. [14029]

Mr. Sproat: The following internal Departmental guidance is available to the public on request:

- DNH Procedural Note on Open Government
- Code of Best Practice for Board Members
- DNH Finance Guide
- Historic Buildings Conservation Guidance for Government Departments
- Guidance for Departments on Disposal of Surplus Historical Buildings
- Guidance on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration
- Design Guidelines
- Miscellaneous Guidance on Briefing and Drafting
- Miscellaneous Guidance on Personnel Policy
- Health and Safety Guidance
- "Green" Policy Guidance

The following material is not available for public dissemination:

- DNH Security Instructions
- DNH Bomb and Fire Instructions
- DNH IT Security Policy
- DNH Guidance on Honours

Spare Computer Capacity

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list all cases where spare computer capacity has been sold to other Departments since 1992, giving the Department and value of each contract. [14085]

Mr. Sproat: The Department of National Heritage has never sold any spare computer capacity to other Departments.

Teletext

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps she is taking to ensure that providers of Teletext and other additional services, receive parity of treatment with other public service broadcasters in the allocation of guaranteed increased capacity in the digital environment. [13819]

Mr. Sproat: Teletext, the holder of the public service teletext licence, has been guaranteed sufficient digital capacity to simulcast its existing service. The Secretary of State recently met Teletex to discuss its digital service, and is considering further its request for increased capacity.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Prosecutions (Police Officers)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list in each of the last 10 years the cases where the Crown Prosecution Service decided that there was insufficient evidence to prosecute police officers for *(a)* assault, *(b)* wrongful imprisonment and *(c)* malicious prosecution where a private prosecution subsequently produced a conviction; what damages were paid in each such case; and what disciplinary action was taken against each police officer in each of these cases. [13436]

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service came into existence in 1986. It does not maintain statistics of allegations of criminal offences committed by police officers broken down by type of offence. Nor does it collect or maintain statistics about any private prosecution that may follow a decision not to prosecute whether or not that prosecution results in a conviction. Damages are normally only paid in the context of civil rather than criminal proceedings but are, like disciplinary proceedings, matters for the police force concerned and do not involve the Crown Prosecution Service.

DEFENCE

Porton Down Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what have been *(a)* the nature and *(b)* the period of the collaboration between the Porton Down Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment and the common cold unit at Harnham Down, Salisbury since 1966; [13000]

(2) what research the Porton Down Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment has carried out into the common cold since 1966; and what were the conclusions of this research; [12998]

(3) what experiments in conjunction with the common cold unit in Salisbury volunteers from the service volunteer programme organised by the Porton Down Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment have taken part in since 1966; what was the purpose of these experiments; how many volunteers were involved in these experiments; and what were the conclusions of these experiments. [12999]

Mr. Arbuthnot: These matters are for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 8 February 1996:

Your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what research the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment has carried out on the common cold; about collaboration between CBDE and the Common Cold Unit at Harnham Down; and about which experiments volunteers from the Service volunteer programme and the Common Cold Unit worked in conjunction, have been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE. I am answering all three questions in this letter.

CBDE has never carried out research into the common cold. We understand that research on this subject was primarily undertaken by the Common Cold Unit at Harnham, Salisbury which is now closed. That unit was administered by the Medical Research Council and had no connection with CBDE. No collaborative work has been carried out between the two establishments and no experiments were conducted which involved the use of volunteers at CBDE in the work of the Common Cold Unit, nor did volunteers at the Common Cold Unit take part in studies at CBDE.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 January, *Official Report*, columns *528–30*, if he will give the full title of each research contract and the university department involved for each of the contracts listed. [13105]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 8 February 1996:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if he will give the full title of each research contract and the university department involved for each of the contracts listed in my letter to you of 16 January has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

As stated in my letter of 16 January nineteen contractors in ten universities have agreed to make their contractual relationships know to the public. The full titles of the agreements and the department in which they are being conducted are given below.

University of Birmingham—three contracts

Gas Phase Ion Molecule Reactions—School of Physics and Space Science

Decontamination of Chemical Warfare Agents with Dendrimers—School of Chemistry

Identification of the Biological Composition of Ambient Aerosols—School of Biological Sciences

University of Bristol—two contracts

Behaviour and Sleep patterns—Department of Psychopharmacology

Ocular Hazards from Microwaves—Department of Ophthalmology

University of Durham—one contract

Solid State Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Study of Adsorption Processes—School of Chemistry

University of Hull—two contracts

Chemiluminescence Based Detection Systems for Liquid Chromatography—School of Chemistry

Development of Chemiluminescence Based Detection Systems for Organophosphorus Compounds—School of Chemistry

University of Leeds—one contract

Effect of Infusion Fluids on the Host Defence Mechanisms—School of Medicine

University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne—one contract

Synthesis and Reactions of Therapeutic Nucleophiles—Department of Chemistry

University of Southampton—two contracts

EEG, Drugs, Brain Mapping and Cognition—Clinical and Neurological Sciences Group

Adsorption and Desorption of Methyl Salicylate on Colpro Wall Finishes—Department of Chemistry

University of Warwick—one contract

Structural Studies of Peptides using Mass Spectrometry—Department of Chemistry

University of Manchester Institute of Science & Technology (UMIST)—five contracts—all with the Department of Chemical Engineering

Evaporation of Thickened Agency Simulant Droplets from Porous Surfaces

Field Experiments on Secondary Source Generation by Obstacle Wake Entrainment

Atmospheric Dispersion around Elemental Structures

Wind Flow and Dispersion Model Evaluation

Pressure and Temperature Swing Adsorption Model

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 11 January, *Official Report*, column *317*, how many times in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995, the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment placed requirements for volunteers in "Defence Council Instructions"; and if he will place copies of these in the Library. [13092]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 8 February 1996:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how many times in 1993, 1994 and 1995, the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment placed requirements for volunteers in Defence Council Instructions; and if he will place copies of these in the Library has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE.

Requests for volunteers were published in Joint Service Defence Council Instructions (DCIs) on three occasions in 1995, four occasions in 1994, and twice in 1993. Joint Service Defence Council Instructions are restricted documents and we do not normally release them. I have, however, set out below an example of one of these adverts.

I hope this information is helpful.

76/94 Volunteers for Studies at Chemical & Biological Defence Establishment Porton Down (R)

1. Your attention is drawn to NAGO's Article 1095, AGAI Vol 3 Chapter 117 and RAF GA1 J5051, and the requirement for servicemen and servicewomen to volunteer to take part in studies and tests of Chemical and Biological defence equipment at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (CBDE) Porton Down. Volunteers could earn additional pay up to £250 (less tax), or in special cases more, for a three week study and proportionately less for the shorter studies. CBDE is well aware of the many pressures on commanding officers and the difficulties of releasing personnel for duties outside the role of their command. However, it is stressed that this Service volunteer scheme plays an essential part in the development of Chemical and Biological defence equipment. Commanding Officers excluding RAF Germany units are therefore asked to give this requirement maximum publicity by repeating it in daily/unit routine orders and to release volunteers whenever possible to take part in these studies.

2. The dates of assembly and dispersal for the formal programme for the period January to April 1995 are shown at the ANNEX. Additional special intakes are sometimes required which are notified by signal giving as much notice as possible.

3. It should be noted that only regular members of HM Forces serving in the UK and BAOR can be accepted as volunteers.

Annex: Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment Programme for the period 9 January–7 April 1995

Duration	*Dates*	*Number required*	*Special requirements*
3 Weeks	9 January–27 January	4	All the same sex
3 Weeks	9 January–27 January	4M	
2 Weeks	30 January–10 February	2M	
3 Weeks	13 February–3 March	4	All the same sex
3 Weeks	13 February–3 March	4M	
2 Weeks	6 March–17 March	2M	
1 Week	20 March–24 March	4	All the same sex
2 Weeks	20 March–31 March	5M	5'8"–6' tall (bare feet), no beards
3 Weeks	20 March–7 April	4M	
1 Week	27 March–31 March	4	All the same sex

N.B. All volunteers are to be P2 or above and not on any medication.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what restrictions are placed by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment on the provision to volunteers of copies of the original laboratory reports of the experiments in which they participated; what factors underlie the imposition of these restrictions; and if he will make a statement. [13091]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 8 February 1996:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what restrictions are placed by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment on providing volunteers who took part in the service volunteers' programme with copies of the original laboratory reports of the experiments in which they participated, and what factors underlie these restrictions has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE.

It would perhaps be helpful to explain clearly the type of records held by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment regarding the Service volunteer programme. Records of the volunteers involved in the Service volunteer programme from 1940 to 1990 are held in summary books. These summary books contain the volunteer's name, service number, date of attendance and a brief, often one word, description of the study in which they participated. In some cases this information is all that we have to describe the study. We are able to supply some additional details for most volunteers who took part in studies involving exposure to chemical warfare materials such as mustard gas and nerve agent from exposure record books. These laboratory records, containing some experimental detail, were working papers to be used in the preparation of technical reports.

The technical reports on studies in which volunteers participated are themselves available for some areas of work although a number of these remain classified. These reports do not identify individual volunteers but can provide general background information on the type and nature of the study in which the volunteer took part. Since 1990 and the introduction of formal written volunteer protocols the record books identify the protocol number(s) for the trials in which volunteers participated and a cross reference can be made to copy of the protocol held in the archive to determine the experimental details.

It has long been a policy of CBDE to make available to a volunteer's medical practitioner as much information as possible in order to assist with the medical management of the volunteer's case. It has also been policy to give, when they inquire, a general outline of the studies in which they participated to the individual volunteers.

I hope this information is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1172*, if he will list the titles of each of the unclassified documents published under the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment technical papers series since 1991. [13108]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 8 February 1996:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if he will list the titles of each of the unclassified documents published under the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment Technical Paper series since 1991 has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE.

As the list of Technical Papers accompanying this letter is too long to be printed in the Official Report, arrangements will be made for a copy to be deposited in the Library.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the titles and subject matter of the scientific papers in the Porton technical papers series produced by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment which bear the numbers 905, 911, 913, 916, 920 , 921, 922, 923, 924, 925, 926, 927, 928, 930, 931, 933, 934, 935, 936 and 941. [12997]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive tc write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 8 February 1996:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the titles and subject matter of the scientific papers in the Porton Technical Papers series produced by the Chemical Defence Establishment bearing the numbers 905, 911, 913, 916, 920, 921, 922, 923, 924, 925, 926, 927, 928, 930, 931, 933, 934, 935, 936 and 941 has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes CBDE.

All the Porton Technical Papers referred to in your question are available in the Public Records Office at Kew with the exception of Porton Technical Paper 941 which will be released under the 30 year rule in 1997. The title of this paper is "Studies on model compounds related to inhibited cholinesterases". Since it may help your research I have listed below the Public Record Office piece numbers of the Papers that have been released.

PORTON-TECHNICAL-PAPER-0905-WO195/15995
PORTON-TECHNICAL-PAPER-0911-WO195/15996
PORTON-TECHNICAL-PAPER-0913-WO195/15984
PORTON-TECHNICAL-PAPER-0916-WO195/16070
PORTON-TECHNICAL-PAPER-0920-WO195/15985
PORTON-TECHNICAL-PAPER-0921-WO195/15989
PORTON-TECHNICAL-PAPER-0922-WO195/15988
PORTON-TECHNICAL-PAPER-0923-WO195/15986
PORTON-TECHNICAL-PAPER-0924-WO195/15987
PORTON-TECHNICAL-PAPER-0925-WO195/15990
PORTON-TECHNICAL-PAPER-0926-WO195/16031
PORTON-TECHNICAL-PAPER-0927-WO195/16032
PORTON-TECHNICAL-PAPER-0928-WO195/16033
PORTON-TECHNICAL-PAPER-0930-WO195/16085
PORTON-TECHNICAL-PAPER-0931-WO195/16084
PORTON-TECHNICAL PAPER-0933-WO195/16087
PORTON-TECHNICAL PAPER-0934-WO195/16149
PORTON-TECHNICAL-PAPER-0935-WO195/16150
PORTON-TECHNICAL-PAPER-0936-WO195/16137

I hope that this information is helpful.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: Top ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list (i) the categories of *(a)* aircraft and *(b)* types of mission for which aircrew are required to book entry into a low-level operational training area and (ii) the controlling authorities for each of the low-level operational training areas. [13206]

Mr. Soames: Tornado F3 aircraft wishing to conduct intercept training within a low-level operational training area. are required to book into that LOTA. LOTAs are solely a management tool for HQ No. 11 group and have no status in terms of airspace reservation or regulation. There are therefore no nominated controlling authorities for any of these areas. Any aircraft using a LOTA but wishing to operate at low level, is still required to book into the UK low flying system in the normal way.

Mr Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the crew of the Belgium Alpha jet involved in an aircraft proximity incident over East Anglia on 25 August 1994 were found to have breached low flying regulations. [13257]

Mr. Soames: The Alpha jet entered the UK low flying system without authorisation during a transit flight which was intended to be conducted above 2,000 ft.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information is provided to the civil air traffic control authorities concerning levels of military air activity in low-level training areas; and how civil users of that airspace are informed. [13208]

Mr. Soames: All intense or unusual military low flying activity is notified to both civil air traffic control authorities and civil airspace users by means of notices to airmen or aeronautical information circulars.

In addition, general information on military low flying operations is contained in aeronautical information circulars which are widely available within the civil aviation community.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the United States air force F15 crews involved in a breach of controlled airspace at Newcastle airport on 27 June 1994 had received a briefing on the United kingdom low flying system from RAF personnel before flight; if the sortie involved planned interaction with any British military aircraft at low level and in which areas; and if the F15 crews had obtained authorised bookings into *(a)* low flying area 16, *(b)* low flying area 12 and *(c)* low flying area 11 before the flight. [13256]

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

Job Advertisements

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many jobs have been advertised in each grade in his Department during the last three months for which records are available; and how many people have applied for each such job. [13837]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I will write to the hon. and learned Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Services Sound and Vision Corporation (Cyprus)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to *(a)* encrypt the SSVC service in Cyprus and *(b)* provide decoders for people on the bases; what estimate he has made of the cost; and if he will make a statement. [13497]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 6 February 1996]:* Encryption of the SSVC TV service in Cyprus is under consideration, as a means of ensuring that transmissions are not received by those who are not entitled to them under existing commercial rights agreements. The estimated cost of encrypting the TV signal and providing decoders to entitled personnel is £600,000. In addition, there would be an annual cost of about £40,000 in issuing, recovering and maintaining the decoders which would remain MOD property. No decisions will be taken about whether to proceed with encryption of the SSVC service until my Department has established if this could be cost-effective.

Royal Flight

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 1 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *849*, if he will list the dates and destinations of the flights, the type of aircraft, the cost of each, if they were single or return journeys and which royal household was charged. [14038]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is as follows:

Date	*Destination*	*Aircraft*	*Charge £*	*Household*
1 July 1995	Northolt	BAe 125	735	HRH the Prince of Wales
1 July 1995	Aberdeen	BAe 125	735	HRH the Prince of Wales
1 July 1995	Kensington palace	Wessex	1,215	HRH the Duke of Edinburgh
1 July 1995	Sandringham	Wessex	1,325	HRH the Duke of Edinburgh
3 September 1995	Teeside	BAe 146	1,558	HM the Queen
5 September 1995	Aberdeen	BAe 146	1,558	HM the Queen
10 December 1995	Northolt	BAe 146	1,187	HM the Queen
1 January 1996	Zurich	BAe 146	1,232	HRH the Prince of Wales

F16 Aircraft

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what estimate he has made of the cost of leasing American F16 aircraft; and if he will make a statement; [14147]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost of upgrading Tornado F3s; and if he will make a statement; [14146]

(3) what assessment has he made of the interoperability of American F16 aircraft within the Royal Air Force; [14148]

(4) what is the cost per flying hour of *(a)* a Tornado F3 and *(b)* an American F16 aircraft. [14150]

Mr. Arbuthnot: As I told the hon. Member in response to his question of 15 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *430*, we are evaluating a proposal to upgrade the Tornado F3's weapons systems, and as a routine part of this process we are examining the comparative costs of alternative options, including leasing F16 aircraft from the United States.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with Air Chief Marshall Sir Michael Graydon concerning the leasing of American F16 aircraft; and if he will make a statement. [14149]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Options for sustaining the effectiveness of our air defences, pending introduction into service of Eurofighter, are one of a number of subjects covered in discussions between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and Sir Michael Graydon.

Defence Medical Training Organisation

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about defence agency status for the Defence Medical Training Organisation. [14737]

Mr. Soames: Following my announcement in the House on 8 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *304–5*, in which I confirmed the recommendations made by the "Front Line First" medical study, it has been decided that the Defence Medical Training Organisation, is to be considered as a candidate for agency status under next steps procedures. Any interested party should address comments on this proposal to Mr. D. K. Reynolds, Head of Medical Finance and Secretariat, Ministry of Defence, Room 106, Lacon house, Theobalds road, London WC1X 8RY.

Equerries

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *537*, if he will list those responsible in each of the services for nominating equerries for members of the royal family. [14209]

Mr. Soames: The information is as follows:

Royal Navy: the Naval Secretary.

Army: the Military Secretary.

Royal Air Force: the Air Secretary.

Royal Yacht

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost to his Department of the use of the royal yacht at Cowes between 28 July and 2 August 1995; and what use was made of her during this period. [14155]

Mr. Soames: The estimated total operating costs of HMY Britannia for the financial year 1995–96 are £8,933,000. Information on the marginal costs of individual deployments could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Britannia's attendance at Cowes continues the traditional and popular royal patronage of this event.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *534*, what factors led to the presence of the royal yacht in Walvis bay on 14 March 1995. [14210]

Mr. Soames: While sailing to South Africa, in support of the royal visit by Her Majesty the Queen and HRH the Duke of Edinburgh, HMY Britannia stopped in Walvis bay, Namibia, to refuel. The opportunity was taken for the British high commissioner to hold a reception aboard for the Namibian Prime Minister.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *535*, what factors led to the presence of the royal yacht in Piraeus on 4 October 1995; what was the purpose of the reception; what were the costs to his Department; and what payments were received from other Government Departments. [14214]

Mr. Soames: In October 1995, HMY Britannia visited Pireaus in support of the "Britain in Greece" festival, at the request of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Her Majesty's ambassador held a reception aboard Britannia, and British Invisibles held a seminar, lunch and evening reception, to promote British exports and attract inward investment to the UK. There were no additional costs incurred by the Ministry of Defence, over and above normal running costs, and no payments were received from other Government Departments.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *534*, what amount was received in 1994–95 for the use of the royal yacht Britannia from *(a)* Government Departments and *(b)* other organisations. [14211]

Mr. Soames: Charges for the use of Britannia are not levied on the sponsors of commercial events when she is used to promote British exports and attract inward investment to the UK. There were no additional costs incurred by the Ministry of Defence, over and above normal running costs, and no payments were received from other Government Departments or other organisations.

Unexploded Bombs

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he received in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96 in respect of unexploded bombs in the Bristol channel obstructing civil engineering operations. [14271]

Mr. Soames: My Department has received no representations on this matter.

HMS Intrepid

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent in maintaining HMS Intrepid in her current condition; and what time period would be required to bring the vessel into operational capability in an emergency. [14281]

Mr. Arbuthnot: HMS Intrepid is currently undergoing a maintenance period, the total estimated cost of which is £8 million. Operational readiness states of Her Majesty's ships are classified.

HMS Fearless

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money has been spent on HMS Fearless to bring her into operational capability; what exercises she will take part in over the next year; and how long she will remain operational. [14280]

Mr. Soames: HMS Fearless is currently undergoing a routine docking and essential defect maintenance period at Portsmouth to ensure the continuing satisfactory operation of the ship. The total estimated cost of this work is £32 million.

After work-up and trials following her present maintenance period, HMS Fearless is scheduled to take part in Exercise Purple Star off the US coast in April, and then in other amphibious exercises in the Caribbean until the end of July. In October and November, she is planned to participate in exercises in the northern fleet exercise areas. She is also scheduled to take part in a series of exercises in the middle and far east during 1997.

We are currently negotiating with Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd over the replacement of HMS Fearless and her sister ship HMS Intrepid. Assuming a satisfactory outcome to these negotiations, we would envisage entry into service around the turn of the century. HMS Fearless is planned to remain operational until then.

NATO Air Command and Control

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the NATO air command and control system program. [14273]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The ACCS programme will provide NATO with a fully integrated air command and control system covering the NATO Europe area and including a deployable capability. The procurement specification for the first phase of the system is being prepared. British industry has been fully informed of progress with the programme and will be invited to bid for a share of the work.

TREASURY

Single Currency

12. **Sir Roger Moate:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with the Governor of the Bank of England regarding a single currency. [12647]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I meet the Governor regularly to discuss a range of economic and financial issues.

Taxation

15. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the total value to holders of deposit accounts of the proposed 20p tax rate. [12650]

Mr. Jack: The bulk of the £400 million full year cost of reducing the tax rate on savings is in respect of interest from savings accounts.

VAT (Sanitary Products)

16. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to reduce the rate of VAT on sanitary products. [12651]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: None.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

17. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the public sector borrowing requirement. [12653]

Mr. Waldegrave: The 1995 Budget forecast projected a public sector borrowing requirement of £29 billion in 1995–96.

Inflation

18. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest annual rate of inflation. [12654]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Underlying inflation, as measured by the retail prices index excluding mortgage interest payments, was 3 per cent. in December 1995. Inflation has now been below 4 per cent. for 39 months, the longest such period for almost 50 years.

Incomes

19. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the quarterly figures for real personal disposable income for the first three quarters of 1995. [12655]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Latest figures show that the level of real personal disposable income in the first three quarters of 1995 was 2 per cent. higher than in the first three quarters of 1994. The precise figures are published by the Central Statistical Office in table A.9 of "UK Economic Accounts", No. 12, which is available in the Library of the House.

Budget

20. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received on his latest Budget. [12656]

Mr. Jack: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has received a number of representations, both written and oral, since he made his Budget statement in November.

Taxation (Multinational Companies)

21. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the tax revenues lost in transfer pricing abuses by multinational companies in the past five tax years. [12657]

Mr. Jack: The Inland Revenue devotes significant resources to ensuring that the transfer pricing legislation is compiled with, and any evidence of non-compliance is carefully investigated. Over the past five tax years, the estimated total tax from inquiries made by the specialist section at the Inland Revenue which deals with the largest cases with international aspects, including transfer pricing, was £793 million. This does not include additional tax arising from work in the Inland Revenue's local offices or at the oil taxation office, separate records of which are not kept but which would significantly increase the total. It is not possible to estimate the amount of tax revenue lost through any failures to follow the transfer pricing legislation of which the Inland Revenue has not become aware.

Company Taxation

22. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next expects to meet small business men to disclose company taxation; and if he will make a statement. [12658]

Mr. Jack: The Government attach great importance to the role of small businesses in the economy, and Ministers meet small business men and their representatives regularly to discuss their concerns.

As well as the cuts in income tax and the small companies rate of corporation tax, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor announced in the Budget measures on inheritance tax, capital gains tax, employers' national insurance contributions, business rates, and VAT to help small businesses prosper. Representatives of small businesses continue to be fully involved in consultations on the introduction of self-assessment.

Investments

23. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received regarding investment levels. [12659]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Treasury Ministers regularly receive representations on wide-ranging aspects of the economy including, from time to time, investment levels.

Living Standards

24. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the likely change in living standards in the next year. [12660]

Mr. Jack: A family on average earnings will be about £450 better off next year after tax and inflation, if prices and earnings rise in line with the assumptions published in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report". This will take the total increase in real take home pay since 1978–79 for this family to over £4,500.

Bank of England

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors he has taken into consideration in assessing the viability of the Bank of England regional branches; and if he will make a statement. [12643]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Decisions on the Bank of England regional branch network are a matter for the bank. The bank has made it clear that it will maintain and enhance the work of its regional agents in gathering economic and industrial intelligence.

Sanctions (Libya)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what general estimate he has made of the cost to the Treasury of sanctions against Libya in terms of tax and import duties foregone. [12728]

Mrs. Angela Knight: United Nations Sanctions against Libya impose no restriction on the importation of goods from Libya. It is not possible to estimate the effect on tax and import duties as a result of the United Nations sanctions on Libya.

Regional Statistics

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if official statistics for the regions of England will in future be published on the basis of the Government office areas rather than the standard statistical regions used at present. [14716]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Responsibility for general questions on the presentation of official statistics rests with the Director of the Central Statistical Office in his capacity as the head of the Government statistical service. However, I understand that it is now agreed that Government statistical service publications will use the boundaries of the Government offices for the regions as the primary basis for the presentation of statistics from 1 April 1997. Where possible, however, and if required, data will continue to be made available for the standard statistical regions.

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Denham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals are currently *(a)* earning less than £7,500 per annum and *(b)* between £7,500 and £10,000 per annum aged (i) 21 to 25, (ii) 26 to 30 and (iii) 31 to 35 years in (1) the east midlands and (2) the west midlands. [13997]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 7 February 1996]:* Information available from the New Earnings Survey is provided in the following table.

New earnings survey 1995
Full-time employees on adult rates, whose pay was unaffected by absence

	Percentage[1] earning:	
Area/age group	*<£7,500per annum*	*£7,500–£10,000per annum*
West Midlands		
21–25	12.3	27.7
26–30	5.2	14.6
31–35	3.9	10.2
East Midlands		
21–25	16.4	23.3
26–30	5.7	14.9
31–35	4.8	9.6

[1] Figures are based on gross weekly earnings.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of *(a)* the benefits and *(b)* the disbenefits to the United Kingdom of joining the European monetary union. [12672]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: At this stage it is not possible to make precise judgments about the benefits and disadvantages of joining a single currency. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said, we would be operating on hunch rather than facts if we were to make a decision on any assessment now. This is the value of the opt-out. We will only agree to take part in a single currency if it is in our national interest to do so, given the circumstances at the time.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, (1) pursuant to his statement in European Standing Committee B of 12 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *3*, what are the criteria he will use for assessing whether economic convergence has been arrived at to justify entry into economic and monetary union; [13437]

(2) what are the criteria for the national interest which will be used by the Government to determine a view to recommend to Parliament on whether to opt in or out of economic and monetary union. [13441]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The nominal convergence criteria are set out in the Maastricht treaty. All member states need to concentrate on achieving sustainable recoveries and getting unemployment down. The nominal convergence criteria require Governments to bear down on inflation and reduce fiscal deficits. These policies

represent sound economics. As well as the Maastricht criteria, the Government believe that measures to address differences in productivity growth and flexibility of labour markets should also be put in place to help ensure durable convergence. The treaty refers to indicators which reflect these structural differences: trade balances on the current account; the integration of markets; and the development of unit labour costs.

Protocol No. 11, annexed to the EC treaty, means that the United Kingdom shall not be obliged or committed to move to the third stage of economic and monetary union without a separate decision to do so by the Government and Parliament. We will agree to take part in a single currency only if it is in our national interest to do so, given the circumstances at the time. Any decision will be based on a hard-headed assessment of British national interest in terms of jobs, capital investment and ability to sell goods and services in world markets.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what have been the costs to Her Majesty's Government of participating in discussions in the European Monetary Institute and at all ministerial and other meetings to discuss economic and monetary union; and if he will list the costs to date and projected costs up to 1999 in each category of expenditure. [13438]

Mrs. Knight: Ministers and officials attend many meetings on economic or monetary affairs, some of which include discussions of economic and monetary union. It is not possible to separate the costs of participating in discussions on EMU.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 9 February 1996

HEALTH

Community Psychiatric Nurses (Northumberland)

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioner fundholders in the Northumberland health authority employed community psychiatric nurses in each year since 1992. [13485]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Alternative Medicine

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how his Department encourages the provision of alternative medicine in the national health service. [13974]

Mr. Horam: As with other forms of treatment, it is for local purchasers to decide, in the light of available resources and competing priorities, on the purchase of the most appropriate forms of treatment to meet the assessed health needs of their population. The reforms we have introduced into the national health service have made it easier for those doctors who would like to provide alternative medicine services for their patients to do so.

Departmental Publications

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of his Department's administrative manuals and internal guidance are now made public and which remain private. [14030]

Mr. Horam: My Department has a good record for publishing internal guidance documents. In the last 12 months, examples include:

Department of Health: Public Health, the National Health Service and Social Care: Statement of Responsibilities and Accountabilities.

NHS Executive Business Plan—1995–96.

Guidance to NHS bodies—71 health service guidelines were issued in 1995.

The NHS Priorities and Planning Guidance for 1996–97 issued to all health authorities, trusts and general practitioners and freely available to others who have requested them.

Guide to the NHS, published in March circulated to all parts of the NHS to explain to staff and the public how the NHS works and the basis on which it works.

The Medicines Control Agency's updating "Mail", issued bimonthly, giving guidance on new operational procedures and information on licensing times.

Copies of these documents, along with the Department's own guidance to staff on the code of practice on access to Government information, issued in April 1994, have been placed in the Library.

This guidance makes it clear that any requests for information about administrative manuals and internal guidance should be dealt with in accordance with the code of practice. Each particular request should be individually assessed, and non-disclosure of information should occur only where the exemptions in part II of the code apply.

Junior Doctors (Hours)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many junior doctors are currently working more than 72 hours per week. [14056]

Mr. Malone: Our task forces report that at 30 September 1995, there were 1,719 junior doctors and dentists contracted to work for more than an average of 72 hours a week. That is just 6.1 per cent. of the 27,994 junior doctors and dentists in England and includes 1,424 juniors in non-onerous posts where the limit on hours is not due to fall to 72 a week until the end of 1996.

Spare Computer Capacity

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all cases where spare computer capacity has been sold to other Departments since 1987, giving the Department and value of each contract. [14089]

Mr. Horam: We have not sold and do not sell spare computer capacity. The Department of Health's information technology infrastructure comprises personal computers on the desk, linked to servers in each office via local area networks which in turn are linked nationally via a wide area network. Any spare capacity, such as there is, does not lend itself to being sold for both technical and security reasons. The Department outsourced its mainframe computer capacity to the private sector last year following a market test.

Central Sheffield University Hospitals Trust

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to dismiss the chairman of the Central Sheffield University Hospitals trust. [14524]

Mr. Horam: None.

Paediatric Consultant Posts

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many paediatric consultants have been employed by the NHS in each year since 1991. [14459]

Mr. Malone: The information is shown in the table.

England hospital staff as at 30 September each year paediatric and paediatric Neurology Consultants

Consultants	*Number*	*WTE*
1991:		
Paediatrics	789	723.0
Paediatric neurology	16	14.7
Total	805	737.7
1992:		
Paediatrics	839	768.6
Paediatric neurology	15	13.5
Total	854	782.1

England hospital staff as at 30 September each year paediatric and paediatric Neurology Consultants

Consultants	*Number*	*WTE*
1993:		
Paediatrics	917	842.1
Paediatric neurology	15	13.7
Total	932	855.8
1994:		
Paediatrics	996	903.2
Paediatric neurology	13	11.8
Total	1,009	915.0

WTE = whole time equivalent.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will include in the next set of NHS performance tables information on the patients charter standard on emergency admission through accident and emergency departments. [14909]

Mr. Malone: As my answer of 28 November, *Official Report*, columns *601–02* implied, there are no immediate plans to include information on trusts' performance in meeting the patients charter standard on emergency admission through accident and emergency departments.

Disabled People

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to limit direct care payments to physically disabled people under 65 years of age. [14132]

Mr. Bowis: The Government issued a consultation paper on 15 January 1996 on the Community Care (Direct Payments) Bill and copies are available in the Library. The paper sets out a number of alternatives as to which groups of people will be eligible in the first instance to receive direct payments in lieu of community care services, and seeks views. We shall consider carefully the responses that we receive before deciding on the definition of eligibility to be used.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy that those asylum seekers who are granted exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom are not required to renew that leave annually. [14128]

Mr. Kirkhope: Exceptional leave to remain is not a permanent status and it is appropriate to review periodically whether a person granted it continues to qualify. Although exceptional leave is normally granted for 12 months in the first instance, extensions are usually for a three-year period.

Immigration Officers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many immigration officers there are under the enforcement directorate employed in the areas of *(a)* London, *(b)* west London, *(c)* the south-west, *(d)* the midlands, *(e)* East Anglia, *(f)* the north-west, *(g)* the north-east and *(h)* Scotland. [14239]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information set out in the table relates to warrant-holders at all levels in the enforcement directorate engaged in the enforcement of the immigration laws or in detention-related activities. In addition, immigration officers within the ports directorate are engaged in after-entry enforcement work subject to the needs of the on-entry control.

Numbers of immigration officers in the enforcement directorate

	Number
London (excluding west London)	153
West London	144
South-west	1
Midlands	33
East Anglia	1
North-west	13
North-east	7
Scotland	1

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Crown Copyright

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the arrangements proposed for the administration of Crown copyright. [14926]

Mr. Freeman: The Government propose to privatise Her Majesty's Stationery Office during the summer of 1996. We shall retain a residual body, which will keep the title "HMSO", to administer Crown copyright and to fulfil certain statutory responsibilities and oversight of the Gazettes. The residual body could also administer parliamentary copyright if Parliament so wished. Irrespective of the privatisation, we intend that administration of Crown copyright should be further separated from official publishing functions.

The residual HMSO will continue to administer Crown copyright with a view to making official information as widely and readily available as possible, taking into account the need to protect the interests of the taxpayer.

The Government will continue the existing arrangements for non-exclusive licensing of Crown material. These include concessionary arrangements for certain educational and non-commercial purposes. The Government will continue the existing policy of allowing secondary publishers, without charge or prior permission and on a non-exclusive basis, to reproduce in value-added print format Acts, statutory instruments and statutory rules and orders. I have decided that this concession should now be extended to electronic and microform formats.

Reproduction in printed format of quasi-legislative material will continue to be licensed on a non-exclusive basis, according to the policy described in HMSO's "Dear Publisher" letter of 6 February 1995, reference QLM/2, and the Cabinet Office circular DEO (PM)(95)4), copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Protection and enforcement of Crown copyright will be a function of residual HMSO, in collaboration with the originating Department or agency. Where material created in Government has inherent commercial value and the interests of the taxpayer in recovering the costs of preparation and production can best be ensured by a commercial approach to copyright licensing and charging, this will be continued. The existing delegations covering Ordnance Survey and the Hydrographic Office will remain unchanged.

Copyright and charging policy on the statute law database, a value-added electronic version of the whole statute book now in preparation by the Statutory Publications Office, will be decided nearer the time of implementation in 1997.

On privatisation, Crown copyright will be retained by the Crown for all the Crown copyright material in the back catalogue of HMSO publications. The new owner will be licensed to reprint back list titles, but will have obligations to make them readily available. The aim will be to ensure the continuing availability of official publications in response to public demand. In respect of future Crown copyright material, the privatised Stationery Office will be required to be licensed, in the same way as other private sector publishers.

Arrangements for printing and publishing Government material are already designed to secure best value for money in making information available to the public at least cost to taxpayers and purchasers of publications. Except for current arrangements covering certain documents published by order of Parliament, Departments are not tied to HMSO and there will be no change in competitive purchasing arrangements after privatisation of the Stationery Office. There will also be no change in the need to recover, where appropriate, the costs of preparation, production and dissemination of material. As now, some official publications will be made available free of charge while others will be priced.

In addition to paper publications, I shall continue to encourage developments in publishing suitable information by electronic means, including the Internet, other on-line services and CD-ROMs. HMSO is now releasing on to its Internet service the summaries of more than 200 Acts of Parliament from 1984 to date, and is planning to publish henceforth on the Internet the full text of all new Acts.

Parliament, rather than Government, is responsible for policy on charging for reproduction of parliamentary material, including *Hansard* and Select Committee reports.

Deregulation Appeals

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress is being made towards the formulation of a model appeals mechanism as set out in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. [13645]

Mr. Roger Freeman: Following consultation on policy options relating to the model appeals mechanism last year, I intend to issue shortly a draft statutory instrument setting out the model for a further period of public consultation.

Government Surveys

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when the Government will undertake the independent study proposed by the deregulation task force into how the total burden of Government surveys might be reduced by up to 25 per cent. [14976]

Mr. Freeman: I have appointed Edward Osmotherly, chairman of the Commission for Local Administration in England, to chair a steering board to look at ways of cutting the burden of surveys on businesses. The terms of reference for the study are:

> To consider how Government survey compliance costs to business, particularly SMEs, might be reduced; to assess cumulative options for achieving reductions, in light of the Deregulation Task Force recommendation to examine a 25 per cent. saving; to consider any impact on the quality of essential Government statistics and associated policies; and to prepare advice by June 1996.

Internet

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, if he will list all *(a)* Internet and *(b)* other computer network, sites or bulletin boards operated by his Department or containing information supplied by his Department, indicating for each site or bulletin boards *(a)* the inaugural date, *(b)* the timetable and policy in respect of updates, *(c)* the Internet, or other network address and *(d)* to whom the site or board is currently made available and the criteria which must be fulfilled by applicants for access. [14208]

Mr. David Willetts: CCTA, the Government Centre for Information Systems, which is part of the Office of Public Service, operates the CCTA Government Information Service on the Internet. This service was launched in November 1994 and provides front-end indexing and retrieval facilities to information from over 180 public sector organisations, of which 79 are based on the CCTA server. The Internet address is http://www.open.gov.uk/.

Within the CCTA Government information service, the Office of Public Service has home pages for the Cabinet Office (http://www.open.gov.uk/co/cohome.htm), the citizens charter unit, and the machinery of government and standards group. There is also information on open government, competitiveness, civil service personnel statistics and public bodies, and home pages for CCTA, the Buying Agency, the Central Office of Information, the Civil Service College, and HMSO.

The service is updated daily, although individual Departments are responsible for determining policy and practice for updating their own pages. Access to the service is freely available to all Internet users.

TRANSPORT

British Transport Police

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future of the British Transport police under rail privatisation. [14520]

Mr. Watts: As we have made clear on many occasions, the British Transport police will continue as a unified public force responsible for policing Britain's rail network.

Saltaire Tunnel, A650

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the cost to public funds of investigating the option of the Saltaire tunnel on the A650. [14140]

Mr. Watts: The answer is £915,000.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many spot checks were carried out on heavy goods vehicles and how many were found *(a)* not to have a valid heavy goods vehicle licence and *(b)* not to be insured in the last year for which figures are available. [14451]

Mr. Norris: During 1994–95, the Vehicle Inspectorate carried out a total of 243,128 roadside traffic enforcement checks of UK registered vehicles and prosecuted 169 cases for various categories of offence relating to vehicle excise duty, such as expired or no vehicle excise duty or incorrect rate. The Vehicle Inspectorate takes forward a vehicle excise duty offence only where it is one of a number of offences found and the figures given relate to cases brought for prosecution by VI only. If a single VED offence is found, it is reported to the local vehicle registration office for action. I understand from the DVLA that in 1994–95, 800 such cases were pursued, of which 466 resulted in successful enforcement action.

We have no responsibility for the enforcement of insurance; this is a matter dealt with by the police.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects his Department's research into reducing water spray from heavy goods vehicles to be completed. [14488]

Mr. Norris: The report on the work currently commissioned with Transport Research Laboratory is expected to be delivered to the Department by the end of March 1996.

Agencies (Reviews)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the dates of each organisational and structural review of *(a)* the Highways Agency and *(b)* the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency since their creation. [14430]

Mr. Norris: The Highways Agency, which was created in 1994, carried out an organisational and structural review in its first year and embarked on a further review, which is still in progress, in November 1995.

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, which was created in 1990, carried out a pay and grading review in 1991–92; a senior structure review and reorganisation in 1993; job evaluation of senior posts in 1994; and a further reorganisation of its management structure in August 1994 in order to take forward its on-going change programme, including the restructuring of its local office network.

Vehicle Operator Licensing

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if inspections of operating centres are undertaken by traffic examiners prior to the issue of a goods vehicles operator's licence. [14431]

Mr. Norris: When considering an application for an operator's licence, a traffic commissioner will request an inspection of the operating centre by the Vehicle Inspectorate's traffic examiners where he has any doubts about the suitability of the proposed operating centre.

Royal Train

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future of the royal train when privatisation of rail services is completed. [14417]

Mr. Watts: The royal train will continue to be available for use by Her Majesty the Queen and other members of the royal family.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to seek private sponsorship for the cost of the royal train. [14342]

Mr. Watts: None.

Driving Tests, Northumberland

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what facilities are to be provided for residents of the Berwick and Alnwick areas to take the written part of the driving test. [14343]

Mr. Norris: Facilities for residents of the Berwick and Alnwick areas to take the written part of the driving test will be provided by dedicated theory test centres at Galashiels and Morpeth respectively. Initially, daytime test sessions at Galashiels are planned to be available on Mondays and Saturdays, and evening sessions on Fridays. Daytime sessions at Morpeth area planned for Mondays, Wednesday, Fridays and Saturdays, and evening sessions on Tuesday.

Rail Franchise Agreements

Mr. Coe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the franchise agreements and related documents for the LTS Rail, Great Western Trains and South West Trains passenger rail franchise. [13589]

Mr. Watts *[pursuant to his reply, 5 February 1996, c. 8]:* On Thursday 8 February, the chairman of British Rail informed me that the British Railways Board had redeployed the managing director and finance director of LTS Rail. Their decision followed the completion by British Rail's internal auditors of an investigation into alleged ticket irregularities in the company. The investigation found no evidence that they had any involvement in the irregularities. Nevertheless, in the circumstances, the board believed that senior management changes were necessary.

In the light of this decision, the franchising director has told me that he will not proceed with the completion of the franchise agreement. It remains his intention to transfer the LTS franchise to the private sector as soon as practicable, and he intends therefore to give previously

shortlised bidders the opportunity to re-tender for the franchise. Consequently, a franchise agreement and other relevant documentation for LTS Rail will be placed in the Library once it has been completed.

I have consistently made it clear that irregularities of the sort which occurred on LTS Rail are completely unacceptable in either the public or the private sector. I welcome the fact that the systems put in place detected these irregularities so quickly and that the British Railways Board has taken decisive action.

I share the franchising director's desire to see an early transfer of the LTS Rail franchise to the private sector on terms which satisfy his rigorous requirements and those of the Rail Regulator.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates Courts (Staffordshire)

Ms Walley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received from members of the public and organisations within Staffordshire regarding the closure of magistrates courts within the county. [13728]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In the last three months, my officials have received three representations against the closure of magistrates courts in Staffordshire.

Ms Walley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list for each magistrates court within Staffordshire, the number of cases held there in each of the last five years and the number of staff currently employed. [13725]

Mr. Evans: The numbers of defendants in criminal cases completed and civil applications in respect of which a final adjudication was made, in areas under the control of justices' clerks in magistrates courts in Staffordshire, for the last five years are shown in the table.

At the end of September 1995, there were approximately 195 staff employed in the magistrates courts in Staffordshire.

Number of completed cases in Staffordshire

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Cannock	13,132	13,016	12,142	19,357	19,080
Lichfield	18,490	16,384	17,232	19,798	19,041
Newcastle-under-Lyme	13,730	13,587	11,113	12,243	13,167
Mid-Staffordshire	10,276	10,156	8,585	[1]—	[1]—
Stoke on Trent	26,121	23,771	23,387	24,152	25,888

[1] Mid-Staffordshire was amalgamated with Cannock on 1 January 1994.

Ms Walley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) if he will list the magistrates courts within Staffordshire that will be *(a)* closed and *(b)* merged as a result of his Department's proposals to rationalise the magistrates service; [13726]

(2) if he will list those magistrates courts in Staffordshire that have been closed over the last five years. [13727]

Mr. Evans: Magistrates courts are provided by the local paying authority for the use of the magistrates courts committee. Closure decisions are for the MCC to determine, although the paying authority may appeal to the Lord Chancellor against a proposed closure.

Staffordshire MCC closed Eccleshall magistrates court in 1992 and Uttoxeter magistrates court in 1995.

No decision has been made by the Staffordshire MCC to close or merge any other magistrates courts.

Mary Bell Orders

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many Mary Bell orders are currently in force. [13681]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Rhodri Morgan, dated 9 February 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about Mary Bell orders currently in force.

The information requested is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

SCOTLAND

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 31 January *Official Report*, column *499*, about the lapse of time since the destruction of Flight PA 103, what considerations he has given to implications of the statute of [illegible]tions for the prosecutions of those accused of t[illegible]rime; and if he will make a statement. [13613]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Having consulted my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate, I can confirm that the only time limits applying in this case are those which commence after the appearance of the accused on petition before a sheriff in Scotland. In terms of section 101 of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1975 an overall time limit of 12 months from the date of first appearance until the commencement of the trial would apply. This would also be subject to the custody time limits of *(a)* 80 days from full committal (which may be up to 10 days after first appearance) within which an indictment must be served and of *(b)* 110 days from full committal, within which time the trial must commence.

Food Hygiene

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the annual cost of implementing food and hygiene legislation. [13552]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has had from local authorities on matters relating to food hygiene. [13581]

Mr. Robertson: Officials of the Scottish Office regularly receive inquiries from local authorities about food hygiene matters. Within the last 12 months, formal representations have been received about the payment of the costs of a court case and procedures laid down in codes of practice. Representations were also received about the sale of raw goats' milk.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what support he affords local authorities who face legal action for implementing their statutory responsibility under food and hygiene legislation. [13554]

Mr. Robertson: Although my right hon. Friend provides around 85 per cent. of local authorities' total funding for non-housing net current expenditure, most of that support is provided by way of a block grant. No allowance is made, either in deciding the overall level of support or in the distribution of support among authorities, for expenditure resulting from legal action of any kind.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prosecutions there have been of businesses for breach of the food and hygiene legislation in Scotland in each year since 1992. [13580]

Mr. Robertson: The following figures show the numbers of companies in Scotland against which proceedings were brought where the main alleged offence was a breach of the Food Safety Act 1990 or of food hygiene regulations.

1992: 52

1993: 34

1994: 26

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how he ensures that local authorities implement food and hygiene legislation. [13553]

Mr. Robertson: Local authorities submit quarterly statistical returns to the Scottish Office which summarise their activities carried out under food safety legislation.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has had from industry concerning food hygiene legislation; and if he will make a statement. [13582]

Mr. Robertson: During the last 12 months my right hon. Friend has received representations from the industry about the enforcement of food safety legislation and the sale of unpasteurised goats' milk.

Industry guides to good hygiene practice are being developed by various sectors of the food industry in consultation with the Government and food legislation enforcers. These guides should help industry to meet their legal obligations and to ensure food safety.

Soft Cheese

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions in the last five years he has reminded local authorities of their statutory responsibility to inspect the production of soft cheese. [13585]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Guidance notes and code of practice No. 18 were issued on 7 November 1995 to all food authorities in Scotland in relation to their responsibilities under the Dairy Products (Hygiene) (Scotland) Regulations 1995.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of soft cheese producers; and what subjects were discussed. [13583]

Mr. Robertson: Although my right hon. Friend has not met representatives of soft cheese producers, they have regular meetings and correspondence with officials of his Department. The development of a code of best practice is currently under discussion.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the dangers posed to public health by listeria in soft cheese; and if he will make a statement. [13584]

Mr. Robertson: None. However, the current Scottish Office co-ordinated programme on listeria is concentrating on molecular techniques for identifying virulent strains, and on survival and growth of the pathogen in the gut, food and silage systems. The Expert Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food has been asked by the Scottish Office and Department of Health for an expert assessment of current scientific knowledge on the pathogenesis and virulence of listeria with particular emphasis on cheese.

Countryside Conservation

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the annual expenditure figures and forecasts for the *(a)* countryside access scheme, *(b)* environmentally sensitive areas, *(c)* farm conservation grant scheme, *(d)* farm woodland premium scheme, *(e)* habitat scheme, *(f)* nitrate sensitive areas, *(g)* moorland scheme, *(h)* organic aid scheme and (i) countryside stewardship for each year between 1990–91 and 1997–98. [13634]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 5 February 1996]:* There is no countryside stewardship scheme and there are no nitrate sensitive areas. Information about the other schemes is set out in the following table. Provision for 1997–98 has not yet been determined.

£ million

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96 forecast*	*1996–97 planned provision*
Set-aside access scheme	—	—	—	—	—	0.1	0.5
Environmentally sensitive areas	0.9	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.0	2.5	5.0
Farm conservation grant	3.5	3.5	3.1	5.3	5.1	3.8	3.0
Farm woodland premium	—	—	—	0.5	1.1	1.7	3.0
Habitats	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.6
Heather moorland	—	—	—	—	—	—	2.9
Organic aid	—	—	—	—	—	0.1	0.2

Beaufort's Dyke

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals have been made to him by the British Geological Survey for help with monitoring of explosions and related work at Beaufort's dyke and other arms dumps; when he expects to be able to respond; and if he will make a statement. [14112]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 8 February 1996]:* Arrangements have been made to discuss the British Geological Survey proposals. My noble Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and the Environment will write to the hon. Member after these discussions have taken place.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Internet

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what web site her Department maintains on the Internet; what information is provided there; how often it is updated; what is the address; and if she or her Department answers questions and supplies additional information through the Internet. [7565]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department for Education and Employment maintains a web site on the Internet, address http://www.open.gov.uk/dfee/dfeehome.htm. The site is frequently updated and carries a wide range of information pages, including the responsibilities of Ministers, departmental press releases, departmental charters, the 1994 and 1995 school and college performance tables, a guide to the school curriculum, information on nursery education, the national targets for education and training, details for young people and employers on modern apprenticeships and catalogues of careers publications.

The site is also the UK's official site for the encouragement, promotion and development of lifelong learning and will be supporting the 1996 European Year of Lifelong Learning. The Department has an Internet E-mail address—info@dfee.gov.uk. This is sited within the public inquiry unit and it receives and responds to a small but steady stream of general education and employment-related inquiries from home and overseas. Ministers do not use the E-mail for answering inquiries.

Schools Expenditure

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of each of the shire counties education budgets is currently spent on *(a)* school and *(b)* non-school expenditure; and what amount of money this represents per school pupil in each case. [14577]

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) on 13 December 1995, *Official Report,* columns *698–700.*

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of each of the London borough's education budgets is currently spent on *(a)* schools and *(b)* non-school expenditure together with the amount of money this represents per school pupil in each case. [14578]

Mr. Squire: The following table shows for each London borough the percentage of net recurrent expenditure in 1993–94, the latest year for which figures are available, on: *(a)* pre-primary, primary, secondary and special schools; and *(b)* other education services, including education other than at school, adult education, continuing education, discretionary awards, youth and other community services, service strategy and regulation and education support services. The table also shows the amount per pupil which this expenditure represents, though in the case of non-schools expenditure school pupils are not the principal clients.

London boroughs expenditure on education and its cost per pupil pre-primary/primary, secondary and special

Net recurrent expenditure 1993–94

	Percentage of expenditure (a)	*Cost per pupil*	*Percentage of expenditure (b)*	*Cost per pupil*
Corporation of London	45	3,509	55	4,336
Camden	85	2,353	15	430
Greenwich	88	2,510	12	351
Hackney	87	3,803	13	588
Hammersmith and Fulham	74	2,996	26	1,028
Islington	89	3,232	11	398
Kensington and Chelsea	80	3,560	20	883
Lambeth	70	3,626	30	1,586
Lewisham	92	2,963	8	248
Southwark	81	2,685	19	625
Tower Hamlets	91	3,349	9	319
Wandsworth	79	2,861	21	774
City of Westminster	78	2,674	22	772
Barking	90	2,168	10	252
Barnet	96	2,374	4	88
Bexley	94	2,103	6	130
Brent	91	2,979	9	283
Bromley	89	1,952	11	238
Croydon	84	2,423	16	467
Ealing	91	2,863	9	295
Enfield	94	2,414	6	161
Haringey	95	3,208	5	180
Harrow	92	2,473	8	207
Havering	95	2,124	5	112
Hillingdon	95	2,572	5	148
Hounslow	93	2,309	7	164
Kingston upon Thames	88	2,130	12	279
Merton	90	2,427	10	284
Newham	93	2,543	7	203
Redbridge	94	2,411	6	142
Richmond upon Thames	85	1,869	15	319
Sutton	90	2,114	10	243
Waltham Forest	87	2,648	13	408
Total	88	2,624	12	351

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much each training and enterprise council held in reserves in 1994–95. [14543]

Mr. Paice: A list of training and enterprise councils and their accumulated reserves at the end of the financial year 1994–95, as shown in their annual statutory audited accounts, is shown in the following table:

	Accumulated reserves
TECs by region	*1994–95* £
North-east	
County Durham	7,059,949
Northumberland	6,035,186
Teesside	6,797,000
Tyneside	2,306,000
Sunderland City (Wearside)	3,134,941
	25,333,076
Merseyside	
CEWTEC	2,527,191
Merseyside	7,322,108
QUALITEC	1,125,814
	10,975,113
North-west	
Bolton/Bury	4,105,742
Manchester	4,595,103
Metro	758,502
Oldham	1,068,773
Rochdale	1,794,365
South and East Cheshire	2,486,013
Stockport and High Peak	2,763,406
Cumbria	2,699,300
ELTEC	3,334,181
LAWTEC	5,964,015
NORMID	2,457,461
	32,026,861
Yorkshire and Humberside	
Barnsley/Doncaster	3,394,000
Bradford	2,747,661
Calderdale and Kirklees	1,888,275
Humberside	5,809,949
Leeds	4,020,823
North Yorkshire	5,667,000
Rotherham	3,344,596
Sheffield	4,929,000
Wakefield	3,859,649
	35,660,953
Eastern	
Bedfordshire	955,622
Cambridgeshire	908,640
Essex	4,606,599
Greater Peterborough	1,483,695
Hertfordshire	3,250,000
Norfolk and Waveney	2,860,000
Suffolk	1,132,731
	15,197,287
East Midlands	
Greater Nottingham	1,577,000
Leicester	5,220,653
Lincolnshire	1,643,792
Northamptonshire	1,547,891
North Derbyshire	1,100,298
North Nottinghamshire	2,830,683
South Derbyshire	3,319,000
	17,239,317
West Midlands	
Birmingham	2,974,000
Central England	1,542,584
Coventry/Warwick	1,858,305
Dudley	1,217,650
HAWTEC	855,009
Sandwell	1,306,809
Shropshire	1,775,611
Staffordshire	5,244,000
Walsall	690,644
Wolverhamton	1,539,000
	19,003,612
South West	
WESTEC (Avon)	3,975,000
Devon/Cornwall	4,085,000
Dorset	2,891,076
Gloucester	2,639,077
Somerset	2,051,935
Wiltshire	1,523,106
	17,165,194
London	
AZTEC	3,513,182
CENTEC	2,723,980
CILNTEC	2,351,480
LETEC	6,025,164
North London	6,264,339
North West London	1,530,015
SOLOTEC	3,673,984
South Thames	0
West London	1,224,913
	27,307,057
South East	
Hampshire	4,836,520
Isle of Wight	781,212
Kent	4,804,187
Milton Keynes/North Bucks	928,501
Heart of England	2,693,042
Surrey	2,100,631
Sussex	5,484,000
Thames Valley Enterprise	4,998,768
	26,626,861
Grand total	226,535,331

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 12 December, *Official Report*, column *563*, if she will publish the training and enterprise council operating agreement in respect of priorities for training for work for particular age groups when a waiting list for entry may occur. [7644]

Mr. Paice: A copy of the training and enterprise council operating agreement has been placed in the Library. Schedule D of the agreement covers the requirements on TECs as they relate to training for work. Training for work is available to individuals aged 18 to 63.

DEFENCE

Porton Down

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 14 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *763*, if he will make the film of LSD experiments on service personnel available for broadcast when recovered; and if he will make a statement. [14540]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Dr. David Clark, dated 9 February 1996:

Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if he will make the film of LSD experiments on service personnel available for broadcast when recovered has been passed to me to reply as the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency which includes the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

We are making arrangements for the transfer of the film material related to the field trials conducted with LSD to the Film Department of the Imperial War Museum which is an appointed place of deposit for public records.

I am unable to give you a date of transfer at this stage as a number of administrative procedures, including the authorisation of the early release of some material under the Public Records Act, has to be completed before this can take place. I will write to you again to let you know the date from which they will be released to the Imperial War Museum.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Spare Computer Capacity

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all cases where spare computer capacity has been sold to other Departments since 1987, giving the Department and value of each contract. [14083]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Generally, spare capacity is not something that the Department builds in when designing its computer systems. On occasions, computer facilities may be made available to other Departments which have requested assistance and this would normally be on a repayment basis. However, no central record is held of the degree to which its computer systems might contain spare capacity or the extent to which it has been made available for use by other Departments. This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

RB44 Light Vehicle

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which company carried out the repairs to his Department's RB44 light vehicle; how many vehicles were sent for repair; what was the total cost of repair; and who will pay this bill. [9952]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 18 January 1996]:* Modifications to the RB44 heavy utility truck in 1992 were made at the manufacturer's expense. Following the identification of continuing braking problems in 1993, and analysis of these by the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, in consultation with the manufacturer, a further modification programme to 824 vehicles was started in October 1995 and is due to be complete by the end of March 1996. The modification kits have been provided by the company, and about 100 of them have been fitted by the company, at its own expense. The remainder are being fitted by military or civilian personnel in unit workshops. The direct cost to the Department of carrying out these modifications is estimated at some £100,000. In addition, other costs to the Department associated with rectifying the problem include the analysis and trials of DERA at a cost of some £310,000 together with the costs of returning vehicles to serviceable and roadworthy condition and maintaining other vehicles used while RB44 have been out of service. The latter costs are not readily quantifiable. The total costs to the Department on this basis are assessed to be less than £1,000,000.

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the ad hoc programme will be run to resolve the inquiries of Mr. Peter Sutton, national insurance number 25 06 52 67D, into his national insurance contributions as communicated to the hon. Member for Wakefield by the chief executive of the Contributions Agency in December 1995. [13621]

Mr. Heald: This is a matter for Mrs. Faith Boardman, the chief executive of the Contributions Agency. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mrs. Faith Boardman to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 8 February 1996:

As Chief Executive of the Contributions Agency, I have responsibility for answering questions about operational matters relating to the Agency and the National Insurance (NI) scheme.

I have been asked to reply to your enquiry on behalf of Mr Peter Sutton, NI number ZS 065267D, regarding difficulties with his NI affairs.

An amendment was introduced to the live code in late January 1996 to ensure no further occurrences such as Mr Sutton's can reoccur.

The analysis work necessary for the Ad Hoc recovery program, referred to in my previous communication, to identify those affected in the same way as Mr Sutton has now been completed. I am however unable to state how many accounts were affected by the error due to the costs involved in obtaining the information. The programme work will commence on 12 February 1996 followed by a live run in early March 1996.

I am sorry for any difficulties this has caused Mr Sutton, hopefully the action highlighted above will enable the situation to be finally resolved.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the present number of *(a)* temporary and casual staff and *(b)* permanent staff employed by the CSA; and what is the number of DSS staff seconded to, or engaged in, CSA work within the agency. [13501]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Bill Michie, dated 8 February 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the numbers of staff within the Child Support Agency.

At 31 December 1995, the following staff were employed by the Agency in the relevant categories.

	Child Support Agency	*Belfast CSAC (Northern Ireland Civil Servants)*
Permanent staff	6,221	594
Temporary and casual staff	547	110

Notes:
Staff shown as whole time equivalents.
The Child Support Agency is an integral part of the Department of Social Security; everyone working for the Agency is a Department of Social Security member of staff.

Benefit Claims

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of the claims which are disallowed are successful on appeal. [13175]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, columns *584–85*, how the figures for savings on the disability living allowance as a result of improving the quality and level of information to decision-makers were calculated. [13435]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: An examination of a statistically valid sample of new claims suggested that without further evidence the higher rate mobility component would be inappropriately awarded in about 12 per cent. of cases and inappropriately disallowed in a further 1 per cent. Further work to test the assumptions underlying these estimates is currently being evaluated.

The estimated savings took account of factors including forecasts of new claims and survival rates, the proportion of cases already subject to further evidence, the rate at which cases are reviewed, and passporting on to other benefits.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions his officials have had with those of National Grid in respect of the additional power required by the announcement of eligible areas under the cold weather payments scheme. [14046]

Mr. Roger Evans: No discussions have taken place between departmental officials and those of the National Grid. The impact of cold weather on demand for electricity is monitored separately from social fund cold weather payment triggers.

TREASURY

Income Tax

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the full year yield of restricting income tax reliefs and allowances to *(a)* £2,000, *(b)* £3,000, *(c)* £4,000, *(d)* £6,000, *(e)* £8,000, *(f)* £10,000 and *(g)* £12,000, indicating in each case the number of people affected. [14326]

Mr. Jack: The full-year yield of restricting income tax allowances and reliefs and the number of people affected at 1996–97 income levels are given in the table. The estimates do not take account of any behavioural effects which might result from the introduction of such a limit.

Upper limit for total allowances and reliefs[1] *£*	*Yield in full year £ million*	*Number of taxpayers Thousands*
2,000	18,300	[2]25,800
3,000	11,100	[2]25,800
4,000	4,800	15,600
6,000	1,200	1,200
8,000	700	380
10,000	500	190
12,000	400	120

[1] Including only allowances and reliefs given at marginal rates.
[2] This will effect all taxpayers and bring a number of people into tax.

Personal Equity Plans

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the yield from imposing a ceiling of *(a)* £10,000, *(b)* £20,000 and *(c)* £30,000 on the amount that may be held a PEP by any one individual. [14331]

Mr. Jack: Total tax relief for personal equity plans is provisionally estimated at £425 million for 1995–96. Information about PEPs is derived from annual returns provided by plan managers. These show the total value of funds, amount of subscriptions received and number of investors, but do not include information on the distribution of the number of investors by size of total PEP investment on which to base estimates of the yield from imposing ceilings on the amount individuals may hold in PEPs.

Accrued Income Scheme

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the cost of complying with the accrued income scheme following the introduction of the loan relationships legislation; and what is the average annual yield from the accrued income scheme from personal taxpayers. [13797]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 8 February 1996]:* The loan relationship provisions contained in the current Finance Bill will materially reduce the costs of compliance with the accrued income scheme, since companies will no longer be subject to it. So far as individuals are concerned, no yield is necessarily to be expected from the scheme, since it affords relief from tax as readily as it brings additional income into charge. The limited figures available suggest that the scheme does in practice generate a small net yield. its main purpose, however, is

to avoid the much larger loss of revenue which would arise in its absence, from tax-motivated "bond washing" transactions.

Spare Computer Capacity

Mr. Miller: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all cases where spare computer capacity has been sold to other Departments since 1987, giving the Department and value of each contract. [14076]

Mrs. Angela Knight: So far as I am aware, no spare computer capacity has been sold by Her Majesty's Treasury to other Departments since 1987.

Departmental Publications

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which of his Department's administrative manuals and internal guidance are now made public; and which remain private. [14027]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury makes available to the public a large number of publications on various issues, details of which are included in the Treasury's booklet, "Publications in Print". The booklet has been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

Publications include guidance notes from the central unit on procurement, reports of the Treasury's fundamental expenditure review and a variety of other documents plus information via the Internet.

Those manuals and guidance notes which are not published deal mainly with internal staff and security issues. No central record is kept.

Pensions

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what amount of trivial occupational or private pension can be converted into a lump sum; when the figure was last increased and from what sum; and what plans to increase it. [13785]

Mr. Jack: Under the rules for occupational pension schemes, commutation on grounds of triviality is currently permitted if the aggregate benefits, including the pension equivalent of any lump sum benefits, payable from all schemes in respect of the employment are not more than £260 per annum. If total benefits exceed that amount, any residual pension left after taking the normal lump sum retirement benefit cannot be commuted even though it may not exceed the triviality limit.

The limit was increased from £104 to £260 in 1991.

There are no existing arrangements under the personal pension scheme rules to allow the conversion of trivial pensions to lump sums. However, as from 6 April 1996 procedures will be in place to allow personal pension funds which are insufficient to buy a pension of at least £260 per annum and total £2,500 or less to be taken in cash.

The Inland Revenue periodically reviews all administrative limits and announces any changes at the same time. The triviality limit for both occupational and personal pension schemes will be reconsidered at the time of the next review.

EC Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on which occasions in the last three years officials have vetoed draft EC legislation on the grounds that a fiche d'impact had not been correctly prepared. [13646]

Mr. Jack: The correct preparation of fiches d'impact is a very important part of our consideration of proposals for EC legislation. It is one of the factors taken into account when Ministers consider the UK's negotiating position on a particular proposal.

Tax Yield

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much of the yield in 1998–99 to the Inland Revenue forecast in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97", resulting from the change to self-assessment, is attributable to *(a)* business growth and *(b)* changing from the previous year to current year basis. [13748]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 5 February 1996]:* As I said in the debate on clause 112 of the Finance Bill, *Official Report*, 25 January 1996, column 530, just over £700 million of the 1989–99 self-assessment yield shown in table 5B.2 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97" relates to income tax and class 4 national insurance contributions on the profits of trades, professions and vocations. This yield is almost wholly attributable to the interaction between the assumed growth in taxable profits and the move from the preceding year basis of assessment to the current year basis. If either of those factors were not present, there would be no significant effects on tax receipts from these sources of income attributable to self-assessment.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Civil Servants (Vested Interests)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what assessment he has made of the proportion of his officials who have a declared interest in the arms industry; [12331]

(2) in what form his Department's officials' declaration of vested interests are kept; and if he will make a statement. [12332]

Mr. Hanley: We are not aware of any such declarations in recent years, but a check of all personnel files would incur disproportionate cost. I also refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 1 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *854*.

Turkey (Helicopter Sales)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to ensure that helicopters sold by the United Kingdom to the Turkish Government are not used against civilians; and if he will make a statement. [12878]

Mr. David Davis: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 7 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *229*.

Uranium Sales

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received about the possibility of Russia selling weapons-grade enriched uranium to European nuclear research reactors; what assessment he has made of the implications of such sales for nuclear proliferation; and if he will make a statement. [14231]

Mr. David Davis: Euratom has since 1995 been negotiating with Minatom, the Russian nuclear ministry, about the possibility of acquiring non-irradiated highly enriched uranium from the Russian Federation for use in European research reactors. The material in question would be subject to Euratom and international safeguards and to stringent security arrangements and does not, therefore, create a proliferation risk.

Spare Computer Capacity

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all cases where spare computer capacity has been sold to other Departments since 1987, giving the Department and value of each contract. [14080]

Mr. Hanley: The FCO diplomatic and aid wings have not sold spare computer capacity to other Government Departments since 1987.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Telecommunications Licences

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consideration he has given to amending telecommunications operating licences so that telecommunication companies are required to offer discounts and concessions to *(a)* pensioners and *(b)* pensioners who are in receipt of income support. [13550]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Modification of operating licences issued under the Telecommunications Act 1984 is a matter for the Director General of Telecommunications. He is currently consulting on a range of proposals intended to increase the range of tariff packages available to consumers, especially vulnerable users. There are no current plans to develop a special regime for pensioners, as vulnerable users may also come from other sections of society.

Company Bills

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to encourage larger companies to pay smaller companies more speedily. [14465]

Mr. Page: The Government encourage all businesses to settle their bills on time. The 1994 White Paper, "Competitiveness—Helping Business To Win, Cm 2563, announced a number of practical measures to tackle the late payment of commercial debts. These included additional prompt payment requirements for Government departments and their agencies; further development of proposals for a British Standard for prompt payment and the implementation of proposals to require public companies to state their payment policies in their directors' reports. In addition, my Department has published a free guide to credit management and debt recovery for both buyers and suppliers.

Balance of Trade

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 25 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *316*, what estimate he has made of *(a)* the visible trade balance, *(b)* the invisible trade balance and *(c)* the non-oil visible trade balance for 1995, as a percentage of gross domestic product. [14576]

Mr. Page: The information, which is available only for the first three quarters of 1995, is shown in the table.

Percentage of gross domestic product

	Number
Visible trade balance	–1.6
Of which: Non oil visible trade balance	–2.2
Invisible trade balance	1.0

ENVIRONMENT

Clinical Waste Incinerator (Bolton)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding the proposed clinical waste incinerator at Bolton general hospital; when a decision is planned to be made on the proposal; and if he will make a statement. [13630]

Sir Paul Beresford: Approximately 100 individual letters, 2,100 pro forma letters, and a petition containing some 300 signatures have been received concerning the appeal under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 against refusal to authorise operation of the clinical waste incinerator at Bolton general hospital. The hearing into the appeal was attended by 34 members of the public, including representatives of Bolton Friends of the Earth and Clean Air Above All. Correspondence has been received from the appellant concerning the timing of the appeal decision.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State hopes to issue a decision on the appeal by the end of this month.

Industrial Emissions to Air

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provisions of the Clean Air Act 1993, controlling industrial emissions to air, he intends to repeal. [13674]

Mr. Clappison: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) on 22 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *116*.

Departmental Publications

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which of his Department's administrative manuals and internal guidance are now made public; and which remain private. [14033]

Sir Paul Beresford: In line with the code of practice on access to Government information, my Department publishes an index of the explanatory material on how it deals with the public. Each of the manuals and the guidance notes listed in the index is available to the public or is available for public inspection.

The Health and Safety Executive has a programme to make administrative manuals and internal guidance publicly available, except a small proportion coming within the exemptions in the code of practice on access to Government information.

Beyond that, each request for access to manuals and guidance is treated on its merits. The case for allowing access to manuals and so on which are not made public is reviewed regularly.

Hedgerows

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government will publish their consultation paper on the draft regulations to protect important hedgerows as provided for by section 97 of the Environment Act 1995; and when he envisages the final regulations will be brought into effect. [14071]

Mr. Clappison: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) on 20 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1239*.

London Borough of Brent

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what complaints his Department has received alleging anti-competitive actions by the London borough of Brent. [14101]

Sir Paul Beresford: None.

Planning Applications

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, column *39*, concerning planning application No. W95/8535 at Folly lane, Warminster, if he will place the written representations he has received from individuals in the Library. [14392]

Sir Paul Beresford: No. Representations sent to the Secretary of State cannot be copied to third parties without the consent of the individuals concerned.

Legislation (Compliance Cost Assessments)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for primary and secondary legislation passed since 5 April 1995, which measures were subject to a compliance costs assessment; and what was the compliance cost in each instance. [13649]

Sir Paul Beresford: Details of compliance cost assessments for primary and secondary legislation passed in the first half of 1995 are included in a Command Paper, Cm 3075, which was presented to Parliament on 25 January 1996. Copies of the compliance cost assessments listed are available in the House libraries. Further Command Papers listing compliance cost assessments issued in the preceding six-month period will be published at six-monthly intervals.

EU Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he ensures that the negotiating brief for his officials discussing EU legislation takes fully into account the need to minimise the burdens on United Kingdom business. [13714]

Sir Paul Beresford: Guidance on how officials are to apply deregulatory principles when negotiating EC legislation is contained in the booklet "Getting a Good Deal in Europe". This guidance has been supplemented by the recent publication of guidance on the preparation of compliance cost assessments, which stresses that the likely burdens on business highlighted by UK compliance cost assessments of EC proposals should be integral to the UK's negotiating strategy. Copies of both pieces of guidance are in the Library of the House.

Water Leakages

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total leakage from *(a)* water company pipes and *(b)* domestic pipes in 1994–95 in gallons per day; and if he will publish statistics relating to water leakage from domestic pipes and company pipes, referred to in the oral answer of 15 February 1995, *Official Report*, columns 982–83. [14215]

Mr. Gummer: Estimated total leakage, in millions of litres per day, is given in Ofwat's 1994–95 report on the cost of water delivered and sewage collected.

The levels of leakage from household and water company pipes are calculable from the same publication and show that the leakage from household pipes represented some 23 per cent. of the total. I regret if my right hon. Friend's earlier answer misled the House.

English Partnerships

Mr. Prescott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each year since its inception *(a)* the expenditure and *(b)* the retained asset base of English Partnerships in each of its six regions. [14329]

Mr. Gummer: The pattern of English Partnerships' programme expenditure and the distribution of its asset portfolio between its six regions since it came into full operation on 1 April 1994 is as follows:

£ thousand

Region	*1994–95 Outturn development programme*	*1995–96 Anticipated development programme*	*Asset portfolio as at 1 April 1994*	*Asset portfolio as at 31 March 1995*
North-east	47,661	31,673	98,595	106,800
North-west	52,929	51,149	86,088	84,000
Yorkshire and Humberside	43,786	60,698	40,198	44,700
Midlands	63,433	53,773	14,305	18,000
South-east	10,311	26,831	23,453	22,100
South-west	7,260	10,064	4,361	3,900
Total	225,380	234,188	267,000	279,500

Exhibition Centre, London

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will establish a public inquiry into the

planning permission granted by the London Docklands development corporation to London International Exhibition Centre Ltd. for the construction of an 110,000 sq m exhibition centre on the site of the former royal docks. [14429]

Sir Paul Beresford: I expect my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to announce soon his decision on whether or not to call in for his own determination the planning application for which the LDDC has resolved to grant planning permission.

Spare Computer Capacity

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all cases where spare computer capacity has been sold to other Departments since 1987, giving the Department and value of each contract. [14081]

Sir Paul Beresford: No spare computer capacity has been sold by my Department to other Government Departments.

WALES

NHS (Children's Services)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new measures he proposes to ensure an integrated child health service. [13813]

Mr. Richards: I do not, at present, propose any new measures to ensure an integrated child health service.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy on children's services in the NHS. [13812]

Mr. Richards: The policy for children's services in the NHS in Wales is to promote improvements in health by providing the right guidance and care, by the right people, at the right time and place, whether in the hospital, surgery or in the home.

Young People with Disabilities

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will establish in north-east Wales a consultant in rehabilitative medicine with the remit of improving the translation between paediatric and adult services for young people with disabilities. [13811]

Mr. Richards: The responsibility for the establishment of a consultant in rehabilitative medicine, in north-east Wales, is a matter for the relevant district health authorities or trusts to consider, having regard to locally assessed needs and circumstances.

Consultant Paediatricians

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many consultant paediatricians there are in Wales; in which locations; and if he will make a statement. [13814]

Mr. Richards: Information on medical staff in the NHS in Wales is collected annually on the basis of the NHS trust or directly managed unit in which they work. Provisional information on the whole-time equivalent number of consultant paediatricians in post on 30 September 1995 is given in the following table.

Whole-time equivalent number of consultant paediatricans in post on 30 September 1995[1] (a)

	Number
Bridgend and District NHS Trust	3.0
Cardiff Community Healthcare NHS Trust	3.0
Carmarthen and District NHS Trust	1.0
Ceredigion and Mid Wales NHS Trust	1.8
Clwydian Community Care NHS Trust	2.0
East Glamorgan NHS Trust	4.0
Glan Clwyd Hospital NHS Trust	4.0
Glanhafren NHS Trust	3.5
Gwent Community NHS Trust	1.1
Gwynedd Community Health NHS Trust	1.0
Gwynedd Hospitals NHS Trust	2.6
Llandough Hospital NHS Trust	4.9
Llanelli Dinefwr NHS Trust	1.4
Merthyr Cynon Health Unit	4.0
Nevill Hall and District NHS Trust	2.0
Pembrokeshire NHS Trust	2.0
Powys Health Care NHS Trust	1.5
Rhondda Health Care NHS Trust	1.0
Rhymney Valley Health Unit	0.8
Swansea NHS Trust	3.5
University Hospital of Wales Healthcare NHS Trust	11.6
West Glamorgan—District and East Health Units	4.0
Wrexham Maelor Hospital NHS Trust	2.9
Total	66.6

[1] Includes consultants in the specialties of paediatrics, paediatric neurology and paediatric surgery.

South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to ensure that the services provided by the South Wales sea fisheries committee are maintained at present levels in the event of reduced funding from the new unitary authorities in South Wales. [14532]

Mr. Hague: None. Sea fisheries committees are statutory committees of local government. They are created under the Sea Fisheries Act 1966, and they are financed by means of a levy charged to their constituent councils in percentage proportions set down in the individual orders creating them.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the new unitary authorities in south Wales concerning the combined funding of the South Wales sea fisheries committee. [14537]

Mr. Hague: I am currently consulting interested authorities, in accordance with section 1 of the Sea Fisheries Regulation Act 1966, on proposals submitted by the south Wales sea fisheries committee for changes to that committee's constitution.

Bristol Channel Aggregates

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the remit of his Department's steering group on the resources and constraints with regard to Bristol Channel aggregates; who are the members of the steering group; which organisations they represent; on what date they will commence their study; and when he expects its completion. [14534]

Mr. Hague: The steering group will be convened when a contractor has been appointed to carry out the study. It is expected to include representatives from central Government, the Crown estate, mineral planning authorities, coast protection authorities, statutory conservation agencies, port authorities, fisheries organisations and dredging companies. The group's purpose will be to advise the Welsh Office about the research and how best to progress it. The project is expected to commence in the summer and take two to three years to complete. I will ensure that the hon. Member is informed of the steering group's composition when it is established.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the environmental impact on marine ecology and fisheries of aggregate dredging *(a)* from the Nash bank and *(b)* from the Bristol channel more generally. [14533]

Mr. Hague: An environmental assessment is being carried out as part of the application for a licence to dredge sand from the Nash bank. It will include a comprehensive assessment of the impact on the marine ecology and fisheries. A research project, "Bristol Channel Marine Aggregates: Resources and Constraints", which will begin this summer, will provide a systematic overview of the potential environmental impacts of dredging.

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation concerning keeping the barrage construction contract within budget; and if he will make a statement. [14536]

Mr. Hague: I wrote to the chairman in January noting the good progress being made on barrage construction which is being managed within the figure announced to Parliament.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the difference between grant in aid to the Cardiff Bay development corporation for 1994–95 and the final outturn; and how it has arisen. [14531]

Mr. Hague: The grant in aid budget for 1994–95 was £52.272 million and the outturn was £57.237 million. Additional funds come from European regional development fund grants and other receipts.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation concerning the outturn expenditure for the year 1995–96; and if his current estimate involves a variation relative to planned (i) expenditure by the corporation and (ii) grant in aid to the corporation. [14535]

Mr. Hague: None. The Cardiff Bay development corporation estimates its outturn for gross expenditure this year to be around £66 million supported by £57.541 million grant in aid. Planned expenditure at the start of the year was £65.283 million supported by £51.441 million grant in aid.

Hazardous Substances

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hazardous substance consents were made by local councils in Wales in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [15057]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In the period between 1 April 1994 and 31 March 1995, one hazardous substance consent was issued in Wales. Consents are issued under the Planning (Hazardous Substances) Act 1990, which came into force on 1 June 1992. The Act requires that the storage or use of certain substances on particular sites are consented to by the local council.

The one consent issued was a deemed consent relating to a site where hazardous substances were already being stored or used before the Act came into force.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when her Department became aware of a family relationship between the director general of Oflot and directors of companies involved in running the national lottery. [9858]

Mr. Sproat: There is no known kinship between the director general of the national lottery and any of the directors of companies involved in the running of the national lottery. The Department became aware of an acquaintance between the director general and Mr. Menges on 15 December 1995. Mr. Menges's US investment company has a financial interest in GTECH and Mr. Menges is a non-executive director of GTECH. Mr. Menges is not involved in the running of the UK national lottery. The director general declared his acquaintance with Mr. Menges in February 1994, in accordance with agreed procedures for declaring any financial, personal or professional connections with any of the applicants for the licence to run the national lottery.

Offa's Dyke

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans his Department has to preserve the section of Offa's dyke at Rhostyllen, near Wrexham, Clwyd, currently offered for sale; and if he will make a statement. [12871]

Mr. Sproat: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on 2 February 1996, *Official Report*, column 979.

Windsor Castle and Uppark

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *693*, over what period the £25.2 million for the restoration of Windsor castle will be raised. [14539]

Mr. Sproat: It is planned to raise the £25.2 million over the six years 1993 to 1998.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will place in the Library all documents relating to her Department's involvement with the aftermath of the fires at Windsor castle and Uppark. [11999]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 5 February 1996]:* Copies of the report, "Fire Protection Measures for the Royal Palaces", produced following the Windsor castle fire, were placed in the Library of the House on 26 May 1993.

The annual report for 1994–95, "The Grant-in-Aid for the Maintenance of the Occupied Royal Palaces in England" reports progress with the Windsor castle fire restoration. Copies were placed in the Library of the House on 28 June 1995.

Subsequent annual reports will update progress. A written record will be produced on behalf of the royal household when the restoration is completed.

My Department was not involved in the aftermath of the fire at Uppark, which is owned by the National Trust.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 12 February 1996

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Ordtech

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Attorney-General what documents were given by the Law Officers' Departments to *(a)* the prosecuting authorities, *(b)* the defence counsel and *(c)* the judge in the recent appeal case of Ordtech; and if he will make a statement. [14206]

The Attorney-General: The Ordtech case is a matter falling within the scope of Sir Richard Scott's inquiry. The Government do not propose to comment on such matters until it has considered Sir Richard Scott's report.

ENVIRONMENT

House Renovation Grant

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* pensioner households, *(b)* men aged over 65 years and *(c)* women aged over 60 years received a house renovation grant in the latest year for which figures are available. [13783]

Mr. Curry: The Department does not routinely collect information on the age and sex of applicants whose grant application is approved by local housing authorities. Reseach commissioned by the Department estimated, from data collected during 1990–91, the percentage of approvals in England for each type of grant under the current renovation grant system where the applicant was aged 60 or over. Applying these percentages would provide the following estimates for England in 1994, the last calendar year for which data are available:

Type of grant	*All approvals (mandatory and discretionary) Number (000s)*	*Estimates of approvals to applicants aged 60 or over*	
		Percentage	*Number (000s)*
Renovation	40.3	48	19.3
Disabled facilties	23.7	71	16.8
Minor works assistance	32.5	88	28.6

Research data are not available for common parts grants and HMSO grants; the latter is provided to landlords only.

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many pensioner households, men aged over 65 years and women aged over 60 years are currently on the house renovation grant waiting list. [13784]

Mr. Curry: No information is available. The Department does not routinely collect information from local authorities on the status of grant inquiries received by it.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to take account of care for the disabled when deciding the revenue support grant settlement for local authorities; and what estimate he has made of the cost to local authorities of meeting the specific needs of disabled people. [14204]

Sir Paul Beresford: Funding of services for disabled people is provided for through the standard spending assessments for personal social services. In 1993–94, based on figures provided by local authorities, the net cost of providing social services for physically disabled adults aged under 65 was some £350 million. Expenditure on services for disabled children or elderly people cannot be extracted from the figures available: 1993–94 is the latest year for which we have outturn figures.

London Borough of Brent

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of whether the London borough of Brent's procurement of a computer system by its social services department complied with EC procurement rules. [14099]

Sir Paul Beresford: None. The London borough of Brent is responsible for making its own decisions in awarding public procurement contracts.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance his Department has given to the London borough of Brent as to competition policy. [14100]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department has issued guidance about compulsory competitive tendering to all local authorities specifically in Department circular 10/93.

EC Directives

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice his Department has given to local authorities as to EEC Council directive 77/62/EEC, as amended by directive 88/295/EEC; and if he will list the local authorities to which such advice was given. [14102]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department gave advice to all local authorities in circular 46/78 about the provisions of directive 77/62/EEC. This circular was overtaken by circular 6/89, which gave similar advice about directive 88/295/EEC. Further advice was given to authorities in circular 7/90 about avoiding national discrimination in tender documents for supply contracts. These circulars were made available to county councils and district councils in England, London borough councils, the council of the Isle of Scilly, and the City of London.

British Coal Pumping Station, Ushaw Moor

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of environmental problems caused by the closure of

the British Coal pumping station at Ushaw Moor, Durham. [14515]

Mr. Clappison: Ushaw Moor pumping station, now under the control of the Coal Authority, has not been closed. Pumping was temporarily suspended in October 1995, as part of a controlled test programme designed to obtain more information about groundwater flows in the area, and has since been resumed. The National Rivers Authority is monitoring the situation, and I understand that no environmental problems have been identified.

Environmental Services Association

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent discussions he has had and what plans he has to discuss with the Environmental Services Association its planning guidelines for waste management facilities. [14834]

Sir Paul Beresford: My officials discussed the planning guidelines for waste management facilities produced by the Environmental Services Association with representatives of the association on Friday 26 January 1996. They also feature in on-going discussions between the Department and the association and others in connection with the Department's preparation of a planning policy guidance note on waste.

Waste Management

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the organisations which have responded to the consultation paper on the development of a national waste classification scheme. [14494]

Mr. Clappison: My Department has received more than 200 responses to the consultation paper. I am therefore writing to the hon. Member with a list of those organisations that have responded to date.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the final system for the classification of waste substances. [14495]

Mr. Clappison: The precise timing of the publication of the final waste classification scheme will depend on the responses to the second stage, which we are assessing. We are, in any case, committed to a third stage of consultation, which we expect to issue after the responses to this stage have been taken into account.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the organisations charged with the duty of determining the classification of different types of waste; and if there will be an appeals mechanism in respect of waste classification. [14496]

Mr. Clappison: No organisation has been charged with the duty of determining the classification of different types of waste. However, the consultation paper issued on 15 December 1995 invited comments on the possibility of the Environmental Protection (Duty of Care) Regulations 1991 being amended to provide that waste is identified on the duty of care transfer note by reference to the classification system. The responsibility under the duty of care rests with the parties completing the transfer note and an appeals mechanism is not required.

Severe Weather Conditions

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what extra assistance his Department has the power to offer to Copeland borough council and Cumbria county council following the recent severe weather conditions. [14816]

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend has powers to establish a Bellwin scheme, under section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, to provide emergency financial assistance to local authorities. Such schemes are established and resources provided where, as a consequence of an emergency, an authority would otherwise incur an undue financial burden in providing relief and carrying out immediate works to safeguard life or property, or to prevent suffering or severe inconvenience to affected communities.

We have not, to date, received any request from either Copeland borough council or Cumbria county council for support under Bellwin for additional expenditure incurred as a consequence of the recent poor weather conditions. Were we to receive a request, we would, of course, consider it very carefully.

Local Government Ombudsman

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made on the review of the local government ombudsman service; and if he will make a statement. [15016]

Mr. Curry: The first stage of the review, in which the need for a local ombudsman service was examined, has been completed. On 30 November 1995, the reviewer—Sir Geoffrey Chipperfield—presented his report to my right hon. Friend and to the chairman of the Commission for Local Administration in England, and today I have arranged for copies of the report to be placed in the Library of the House.

Sir Geoffrey has concluded that the present centralised investigation and review processes of the CLA would not be able to handle effectively the increasing volume of complaints, which he foresaw with the growth of citizens' awareness of their rights and remedies. He has proposed, therefore, a new complaints regime, under which each local authority would be statutorily obliged to operate its own local complaints system, involving both internal review and an external reviewer or adjudicator. The role of any independent, central body, such as the CLA, would be limited to the validation and monitoring of each local authority's system; such a body would not have any role to investigate specific complaints.

We have carefully considered Sir Geoffrey's report and the CLA's representations on it. We recognise the importance of all local authorities having their own effective local complaints systems, although we are not persuaded of the need to seek legislation imposing a new statutory duty on local authorities to establish and maintain such systems. Nor do we believe that the case has been made that there is at present no continued need for the CLA's role as a wholly independent body to investigate complaints of maladministration.

We have concluded, therefore, that we should proceed with the second stage of the review, which will focus particularly on the efficiency and effectiveness of the

CLA's procedures as an investigatory body. I have today asked Andrew Whetnall, a senior official in my Department, to undertake this stage of the review. I propose that he should be assisted by the advisory group, including representatives of the local authority associations and citizens' advice bureaux, which we established for the first stage of the review. In parallel, I am inviting comments from local authorities and all interested parties on the wider issues raised in the review's first stage. In the light of these comments and the findings of the review's second stage, we intend to take our decisions on the CLA's future.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Arms Exports

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the top 10 companies that have been leading beneficiaries of export credits backing arms sales since 1979. [14866]

Mr. Nelson: It has been the policy of successive Governments not to disclose information about commercial relations between the Export Credits Guarantee Department and individual companies unless the relevant parties have agreed to this.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the largest sum put up by Her Majesty's Government as a financial guarantee or collateral in respect of securing an arms deal; in what year; and with what country the deal was concerned. [14461]

Mr. Lang: It has been the policy of successive Governments not to disclose details of individual contracts unless the relevant parties have agreed to this. I am therefore unable to provide the information which the hon. Member requests.

Late Payment

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his policy regarding the late payment of commercial debt. [14653]

Mr. Page: The Government recognise the problems that late payment can cause for smaller firms and are committed to tackling the issue. In the 1994 White Paper, "Competitiveness-Helping Business to Win", the Government announced a number of practical measures to tackle late payment, including support for the development, by business of a British standard on prompt payment, improvements to court procedures for debt recovery and a requirement for public companies to disclose their payment policies. In addition, we are helping small businesses to improve their cash-flow management.

I also announced to the House on 11 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *293*, that I have agreed to look again at the arguments for statutory interest and will report the outcome in the summer.

Rom Data Corporation

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade between which dates Mr. Holmes was employed in the Department of Trade and Industry south-west regional office; and what was the nature of his work. [8924]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* While he was not an employee of the DTI south-west regional office, Mr. Kenneth Holmes advised it on accountancy and financial issues on an external consultancy basis between 5 February 1991 and 15 April 1995.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 7 December, *Official Report*, column *335*, when he expects to be able to report the findings of his Department's inquiries into the circumstances of the regional selective assistance for the Rom Data Corporation. [8924]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* No DTI south-west regional office employees or former employees are known to have subsequently acted as directors or been otherwise employed by the Rom Data Corporation. However, Mr. Kenneth Holmes, who advised the regional office on regional selective assistance applications on a consultancy basis, became a director and chairman of the Rom Data Corporation.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what advice was received by the Department of Trade and Industry south-west regional office from other DTI regional offices regarding Mr. John Dawson. [8926]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 15 January 1996]:* None was sought or received.

Small Businesses

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next expects the small business ministerial group to meet; and how frequently and on what dates it is expected to meet in the coming year. [14583]

Mr. Page: The small business ministerial group will meet twice a year. The next meeting has been arranged for 1 July 1996.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the remit of his review of the small firms loan guarantee scheme. [14584]

Mr. Page: The review of the small firms loan guarantee scheme rules was announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his November 1994 Budget statement with a view to making the scheme simpler and more attractive.

Regional Supply Network

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what system of monitoring he intends to establish to discover what level of use the regional supply network has had from *(a)* small and medium enterprises and *(b)* all businesses (i) in each region and (ii) in total. [14585]

Mr. Page: A system of monitoring regional supply network usage has been in place since offices opened in April 1995. Quarterly monitoring information reports are obtained from each regional supply office. These include information on the number of businesses that ask the RSN to find suppliers, the number of suppliers who meet the requirements of purchasers and the number of businesses gaining contracts as a result of these inquiries. These

figures are collected for each region and collated as national totals. Information on the size of businesses using the RSN services is not collected.

Trade Union Ballots

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what amount has been paid to date in 1995–96 for the carrying out of ballots by trade unions. [14542]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 9 February 1996]:* During the financial year 1995–96, £831,938 has been authorised for payment to trade unions by the certification office by 31 January 1996 in respect of the statutory funds for trade union ballots scheme.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

International Criminal Tribunals

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to introduce legislation to enable co-operation with the international criminal tribunals for *(a)* the former republic of Yugoslavia and *(b)* Rwanda; and if he will make a statement. [14308]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Legislation to enable the United Kingdom to surrender those indicted by the international criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda will be presented to the Privy Council shortly.

The UK has been co-operating informally with the international criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. We have made voluntary contributions of almost £450,000 to help fund the secondment of seven members of the police force and a military lawyer, and to buy computer and camera equipment. We have also provided a substantial quantity of information.

United Nations Relief and Works Agency

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future of UNRWA in the middle east peace process. [14554]

Mr. Hanley: We support UNRWA's valuable work the Palestinian refugees in the middle east and remain one of its largest donors. UNRWA has an important role to play in the context of a final settlement of the refugee issue.

Bosnia (War Criminals)

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what powers NATO troops in Bosnia have to arrest individuals suspected of war crimes. [14738]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The North Atlantic Council has authorised IFOR to detain any individuals indicted by the tribunal with whom it comes into contact in the execution of its assigned tasks, and to transfer them to the tribunal. However, it is not part of IFOR's mandate to search for these individuals.

EU Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on which occasions in the last three years officials have vetoed draft EU legislation on the grounds that a fiche d'impact had not been correctly prepared. [13652]

Mr. David Davis: The correct preparation of fiches d'impact is a very important part of our consideration of proposals for EC legislation. It is one of the factors taken into account when Ministers consider the United Kingdom's negotiating position on a particular proposal.

European Courts

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total cost to public funds of the United Kingdom's participation in the work of the European Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Justice over the past three years for which figures are available. [14007]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I refer the hon Member to the replies given to the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General on 30 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *12*, and my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 7 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *697*.

These provide costs to public funds relating to decisions of the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights over a two year period from October 1993 to October 1995. These costs include counsels' fees, costs and damages. Wider costs, if any, arising from a particular decision are a matter for the relevant departmental Minister.

The cost to public funds in respect of ECHR judgments for which figures are available including the remaining periods—February to October 1993 and October 1995 to February 1996—is £484,018.90.

On costs to pubic funds for European Court of Justice judgments, and European Court of Human Rights counsels' fees for the two periods above, I shall write to the hon. Member.

Treaty of Rarotonga

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Her Majesty's Government intend to sign the protocols to the treaty of Rarotonga; and if he will make a statement. [14298]

Mr. David Davis: We announced in October last year that we would sign the relevant protocols to the treaty of Rarotonga in the first half of 1996. A firm date has yet to be fixed. But preparations are in hand and we expect to sign in the near future.

Missiles

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the maximum number of warheads that the United States Government intend to deploy on each of their Trident D5 missiles to comply with the START II restrictions will affect the maximum number of warheads which the United Kingdom Government intend to deploy on each of their D5 missiles. [14291]

Mr. David Davis: No.

Iraq

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received from the United Nations Special Commission on Iraq in regard to the loss reported on 30 January by the International Atomic Energy Agency of a high technology furnace ordered by Iraq for use in a centrifuge uranium enrichment plant in 1990. [14855]

Mr. David Davis: We are not aware of any report form the IAEA relating to the loss of a high technology furnace ordered by Iraq for use in a centrifuge uranium enrichment plant.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list those magistrates courts that have been closed in each county in England and Wales since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [14275]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Decisions to close magistrates courts are made by the local magistrates courts committee. The Lord Chancellor is involved only when there is an appeal by a local authority against a proposed closure. Information on magistrates court closures where there has not been an appeal is not collected centrally.

Solicitors Complaints Bureau

Mr. Amess: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what recent assessment he has made of the *(a)* effectiveness, *(b)* speed of delivery and *(c)* independence of the Solicitors Complaints Bureau; [13899]

(2) what assessment he has made of the balance between solicitors, officials and lay people on an adjudication committee of the Solicitors Complaints Bureau; and if he will make it his policy to increase the number of lay people. [13892]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: None. These are matters for the Law Society, which has responsibility for maintaining standards of conduct among solicitors.

However, the Government have established the legal services ombudsman to provide an independent check on the complaints handling procedures of the General Council of the Bar and the Council for Licensed Conveyancers, as well as the SCB. Both in his reports in individual cases, and in his annual report to the Lord Chancellor, which is laid before Parliament, the ombudsman highlights areas of concern and makes recommendations to the professional bodies for improvements in their arrangements for investigating complaints.

Legal Ombudsman

Mr. Amess: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases the legal ombudsman has *(a)* accepted and *(b)* finalised in 1995; and what is the average time between *(a)* and *(b)*. [13889]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In 1995 the legal services ombudsman *(a)* accepted 1,436 cases for investigation and *(b)* finalised and issued reports in 1,041 cases. The average time between *(a)* and *(b)* in 1995 was six and a half months.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many appeals by port-of-entry applicants for asylum were determined; and how many of such appeals succeeded wholly or in part in the last two years for which figures are available. [14490]

Mr. Kirkhope: Over half the 2,440 appeals determined by adjudicators in 1994 had been made by people who had applied for asylum at ports of entry. Table 8.3 of the Home Office statistical bulletin, issue 15/95, provides the available information on the outcomes of asylum appeals to adjudicators and the tribunal. A copy of this publication is available in the Library. Figures for 1995 are not yet available.

Spare Computer Capacity

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all cases where spare computer capacity has been sold to other Departments since 1987, giving the Department and value of each contract. [14088]

Mr. Howard: There are no records of spare computer capacity in my Department having been sold to other Departments since 1987.

Departmental Publications

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which of his Department's administrative manuals and internal guidance are now made public; and which remain private. [14031]

Mr. Howard: The following manuals and guidance are now made public:

Manuals and guidance issued by the United Kingdom Passport Agency.

The Immigration Service complaints handbook.

The Immigration and Nationality Department complaints staff instruction.

74 handouts issued to trainee immigration officers.

Home Office Criminal Statistics:

Volume I Counting Rules for Notifiable Offence.

Volume II Codes for classifying the offence.

Manual on achieving the transfer of data on court ppearances direct from the magistrates' courts computer systems to the Home Office.

Guidance for magistrates' court staff on how to produce accurate statistics for the Home Office from the ICL, EQUIS and UNISYS systems. Data interchange user guides for ICL, EQUIS and UNISYS systems.

Crown Court Statistics Data Interchange Guide.

The National Strategy for Police Information Systems.

Fire Service College:

Safety Management Policy.

Environment Policy.

Quality Policy.

Training Performance Indicators.

Prison Service Standing Order 5—communications.

Instructions to Governors 82/94—Victim Helpline.

Procedures for Open Government.

Guidance setting out the circumstances in which requests for privileged access to closed records may be granted.

It is not possible to list the administrative manuals and internal guidance used in the Home Office which remain private, because there is no comprehensive list of these. However work is in hand in assessing whether more of this material could be made available in future. Current plans include the release of new guidance now being prepared on applying the 1951 United Nations convention on the status of refugees.

Job Advertisements

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many jobs have been advertised in each grade in his Department during the last three months for which records are available; and how many people have applied for such job. [13824]

Mr. Howard: The following information relates to those posts advertised in the Home Office, including its agencies, other than posts advertised by prison establishments. Information about the latter could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Grade	*Number of posts*	*Applications*
Grade 5	1	152
Grade 7	1	17
Grade 7	1	31
Senior Executive Officer	1	20
Higher Executive Officer	3	62
Executive Officer	1	75
Administrative Officer	15	99
Administrative Assistant	40	175
Administrative Assistant	1	23
Administrative Assistant	2	45
Administrative Assistant	1	10
Administrative Assistant	2	10
Administrative Assistant (casuals)	269	1,058
Typist	1	4
Typist	2	6
Chaplain	1	2
Chaplains	1	11
Catering Manager	1	9
Medical Officer	1	7
Medical Officer	1	9
Support Grade	1	25
Support Grade	2	18
Scientists	3	83
Stores Attendant	2	33

EU Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on which occasions in the last three years officials have vetoed draft EC legislation on the grounds that a fiche d'imapct had not been correctly prepared. [13651]

Mr. Howard: The correct preparation of fiches d'impact is a very important part of our consideration of proposals for European Community legislation. It is one of the factors taken into account when Ministers consider the United Kingdom's negotiating position on a particular proposal.

Prisoners

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the relative cost, at the latest estimate, of keeping a prisoner in *(a)* secure prison establishments and *(b)* open prisons and related establishments. [14002]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alan Walker to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 12 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the relative cost of keeping a prisoner in (a) secure prison establishments and (b) open prisons and related establishments.

In 1994–95 the average annual net operating cost per place for open establishments was £13,662, and for secure establishments it was £20,813.

"Haven't They Suffered Enough"

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what aid and assistance his Department proposes to give to the Refugee Council's appeal, "Haven't They Suffered Enough"; and if he will make a statement. [14244]

Mr. Kirkhope: We have no plans to provide assistance to the appeal.

Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines his Department issues on provision of accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees *(a)* to landlords and *(b)* to other bodies; and if he will make a statement. [14246]

Mr. Kirkhope: No guidelines on such matters are issued by the Home Office.

Wood Green Crown Court

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations his Department has received regarding the quality of meals provided by Securicor at Wood Green Crown court; and what response his Department has made. [14582]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mrs. Barabara Roche, dated 12 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the provision of meals by Securicor Custodial Services at Wood Green Crown Court.

No representations have been received about the quality of meals provided by Securicor at Wood Green Crown Court.

Duchess of York

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times during each of the last three years police officers have travelled abroad as part of their duties in connection with the Duchess of York and her family. [14813]

Mr. Howard: For security reasons, it is not the practice to give details of the measures taken to protect the Duchess of York and her family.

Home Country Reports

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library copies of all home country reports currently available; if he will undertake to place in the Library all such reports relating to countries designated as safe; and if he will place in the Library the home country report on Pakistan used by a Home Office presenting officer at an immigration appeal hearing in Leeds during 1995. [14120]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 8 February 1996]:* Two country assessments—on Ghana and on Nigeria—have been completed and have been placed in the Library. Assessments on other countries, including Pakistan, are in preparation and will also be placed in the Library when they have been finalised.

PRIME MINISTER

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will ask Lord Justice Scott to disclose the names of journalists to be briefed and the dates of briefings in relation to the forthcoming report and the progress of the inquiry. [14269]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so.

Rail Privatisation (Directorships)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Prime Minister what guidance he is giving retiring members or former members of his Administration or hon. Members in respect of their accepting directorships in privatised rail companies. [14144]

The Prime Minister: From the start of the current session of Parliament, Ministers who leave office will be expected to ask the independent advisory committee on business appointments about any appointment outside Government which they wish to take up within two years.

Senior Salaries Review Body

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Prime Minister what is the average of the pay increases recommended by the Senior Salaries Review Body in the past year. [14617]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) on 8 February, *Official Report*, columns 294–96.

TRANSPORT

Crash Barriers

16. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what criteria are used when deciding if crash barriers should be installed. [13033]

Mr. Watts: The criteria for the provision of crash barriers are contained in the Highway Agency's departmental standard TD 19/85. "Safety Fences and Barriers" and TD 32/93 "Wire Rope Safety Fences". Copies are lodged in the Libraries.

Disabled People (Access)

21. **Ms Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet representatives of the regional rail users consultative committees to discuss disabled persons' access to *(a)* railway stations and *(b)* trains. [13038]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend meets members of the Rail Users' Consultative Committee from time to time to discuss a range of issues.

26. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet the Rail Regulator to discuss disabled persons' access to the rail network. [13043]

28. **Mr. Ian McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet the Rail Regulator to discuss disabled persons' access to the rail network. [13045]

Mr. Watts: The Secretary of State meets the Rail Regulator on a regular basis to discuss all aspects of Rail Transport. His next meeting will be on Thursday 22 February.

29. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet the Civil Aviation Authority to discuss disabled persons' access to, and safety on, air transport. [13046]

Mr. Norris: I have no plans to do so.

The Civil Aviation Authority is represented on the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee—DPTAC—working group on airports and on the Access to the Skies Committee.

Both these committees, on which my Department is also represented, are concerned with disabled persons' access to, and safety on, air transport.

A540

23. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the delayed start of the A540 Ormskirk bypass. [13040]

Mr. Watts: I met a delegation from Ormskirk in September 1995. I visited Ormskirk and the bypass route in October 1995. I answered a question from my

hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) on 9 January. Following the review of the trunk road programme, the Ormskirk bypass remains in the main programme.

Gospel Oak-Barking Line

25. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had recently with local authorities regarding infrastructure improvements on the Gospel Oak to Barking line. [13042]

Mr. Norris: None.

Public Transport Investment

27. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to increase the level of investment in public transport. [13044]

Mr. Norris: Funding for public transport was given priority in allocating the Department's resources in the last public expenditure round, and we are pressing forward with the policies we have announced for privatising and deregulating the transport market, so giving the private sector the chance to respond to passengers' demands for efficient, modern transport services.

Safe Town Initiative

30. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the first results of his Department's safe town initiative will be available. [13047]

Mr. Norris: The initiative will be closely monitored by the Transport Research Laboratory in conjunction with Gloucester city and county councils to ensure the maximum road safety benefits are obtained. Although full results will not be available until some time after the project is completed in 2001, interim results relating to some of the measures should become available in two to three years.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when consultation work will start on the modernisation of the west coast main line. [14252]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack consulted extensively with local authorities and other parties during the feasibility study. Railtrack continues to communicate with, and inform, those people likely to be affected by the modernisation and will be considering their views at each stage of the modernisation project.

Rail Safety

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many rail vehicles are being prevented from entering service awaiting completion of Railtrack's safety procedure; what is the total value of these vehicles; and what charge is being made by Railtrack for their safety assessment. [14487]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack has advised me that it is not preventing any rail vehicle from entering service. I understand that the relevant safety work is being carried out by the train manufacturers and operators, who are preparing their own safety assessments. Railtrack is working with the manufacturers and operators in accepting these safety assessments. Railtrack does not charge for the acceptance procedure.

Railtrack has appointed a panel of independent experts to review the safety appraisal process for new rolling stock, and to recommend areas for improvement while safeguarding safety.

Driver Licensing

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on *(a)* the progress of the implementation of the second EC directive on driver licensing and *(b)* how the Driving Standards Agency intends to comply with the directive with regard to large goods vehicles. [14434]

Mr. Norris: Work on preparation of the regulations and the operational arrangements to implement the directive is in hand. Last November, the Driving Standards Agency wrote to some 600 interested parties announcing the detailed plans for implementing the directive with regard to driving tests for large goods vehicles, and I have arranged for a copy of that letter to be placed in the Library.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what resources he intends to make available to the Driving Standards Agency for compliance with the second EC directive on driver licensing by July 1996. [14437]

Mr. Norris: The Driving Standards Agency is an on vote non-statutory trading body whose expenditure is fully recovered by the income it receives in fees and charges. Its resources are planned in accordance with expected levels of demand for tests within unit cost targets at agreed service levels. The agency's business plan for 1996–97 is in preparation and will be deposited in the House Libraries, when completed, in accordance with our usual practice.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many large goods vehicle driving tests were conducted by delegated examiners in each of the last three years; and what were the results of those tests; [14433]

(2) if he will list the number of delegated driving examiners employed on large goods vehicle tests by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the arrangements in place for the supervision of such examinations by the Driving Standards Agency. [14438]

Mr. Norris: The Secretary of State for Transport has not appointed any delegated driving examiners to undertake large goods vehicle tests.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many heavy goods vehicles were *(a)* inspected and *(b)* found defective in the last year for which figures are available. [14489]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Vehicle Inspectorate Executive Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 12 February 1996:

The Secretary of State had asked me to reply to your question concerning the number of heavy goods vehicles inspected and found defective in the last year for which figures are available.

The number of vehicles inspected for their roadworthiness during the year April 1994–March 1995, and found with defects serious enough to warrant a prohibition being issued, is shown below.

	Total number inspected	*Number of prohibitions*	
		Immediate	*Delayed*
Fleet checks	50,942	1,813	1,416
Roadside checks	145,157	9,633	9,971
Special checks (smoke checks and lighting checks)	14,878	70	401

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the maximum driving hours within which HGV drivers must operate in the United Kingdom. [14521]

Mr. Norris: Drivers of HGVs over 3.5 tonnes, with the exception of vehicles used for certain purposes, are subject to European Union rules on drivers' hour. They may drive for not more than 90 hours in any fortnight, 56 hours between weekly rest periods, and nine hours between daily rest periods, extendable to 10 hours twice a week. They must also take a break of at least 45 minutes for every four and a half hours of driving.

Certain categories of HGV which are exempt from the EU rules are subject to United Kingdom national rules on drivers' hours which restrict daily driving to 10 hours and daily duty to 11 hours.

Driving Instructors

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the risk assessment of the operational aspects of the duties of the senior examiner (approved driving instructor) grade within his Department to be completed; and if he intends to place a copy of the results in the Library. [14435]

Mr. Norris: The working practices of supervising examiners—approved driving instructor—are covered by several existing generic risk assessments. I will have these placed in the Library.

Peakes Parkway

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when funds from his Department will be released to enable Humberside county council and its successor authorities to construct phase 3 of the Peakes parkway; and if he will make a statement. [14325]

Mr. Norris: My Department is supporting stage 3 of the Peakes parkway with a supplementary credit approval of £2.55 million in 1995–96. This has enabled Humberside country council to carry out works in advance of the main contract. North East Lincolnshire district council has been allocated funds of £1 million to continue work on the scheme 1996–97. It is expected that this will enable the start to be made on the main contract. Subject to satisfactory progress, we expect to continue support for the scheme until its completion.

Departmental Publications

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which of his Department's administrative manuals and internal guidance are now made public; and which remain private. [14025]

Mr. Norris: My Department is reviewing its manuals and guidance. The aim is to make information available to staff and the public in a clear and accessible form. Material may be kept private for security, commercial or legal reasons. The following material is either published by the Department or may be seen on request:

Central Transport Group

"PSV Operators Licensing Handbook";

"Local Bus Service Registrations";

"A Guide to London Local Services Licensing";

"Guidance to Customers on Management of Research Projects";

"Strategy Document";

"Intellectual Property Rights";

"Building to the Transport Road Network";

"Guidance to Using Call-off Contracts";

"Tachograph Centre Manual";

"Tachograph Calibration Manual";

"Code of Practice for Traffic Area Offices";

"Goods Vehicle Operating Licensing–London A Guide for Operators";

"Goods Vehicle Operating Licensing—A Guide for Making Representation";

"Goods Vehicle Operating Licensing—Guide for Maintaining Roadworthiness";

"Goods Vehicles—Customer Service Guide";

"Buses—Customer Service Guide";

"Traffic Policy and the Environment";

"Performance Management, Development and Appraisal—Guidance Pack";

"Brussels: An Officials Guide";

"Parliamentary Questions: A General Guide".

Coastguard Agency:

"United Kingdom Maritime Search and Rescue Handbook";

"Oil Spill Clean-Up of the Coastline—Technical Manual".

Highways Agency:

"Trunk Road Maintenance Manual Vols 1–3";

"Routine Maintenance Management System";

"Manual of Contract Documents for Highways Work";

"Design Manual for Roads and Bridges".

Vehicle Certification Agency:

"Type Approval Handbook";

"A Guide to European Whole Vehicle Approval".

Vehicle Inspectorate:

"MOT Inspection Manual";

"HGV Inspection Manual";

"PSV Inspection Manual";

"Motorcycle Inspection Manual";

"Guidance Notes for Plating Goods vehicles";

"How Safe is Your Motorcycle?";

"Categorisation of Defects";

"HGV Inspection Manual Amplification Notes";

"PSV Inspection Manual Amplification Notes";

"MOT Vehicle Test Regulations 1981";

"MOT Vehicle Testing Guide—4th Edition";

"How Safe is Your Car?";

"Vehicle Safety Recalls Response rate Bulletin—January 1993";

"Guide to Maintaining Roadworthiness";

"Guide to ADR";

"Guide to TIR";

"MOT Inspection Manual Private Bus Testing";

"MOT Inspection Checklist";

"PSV Certificate Manual".

VIDEOS

"MOT Testing—Cars and Light Goods Vehicles";

"MOT Testing—Motorcycles";

"Diesel Testing".

Sugar Beet Transportation

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action is being taken to enforce the requirement to net open loads of sugar beet in heavy goods vehicles on public roads. [14449]

Mr. Norris: The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations require loads carried on vehicles to be secured at all times so that neither danger nor nuisance is likely to be caused by reason of the load falling from the vehicle. These requirements are amplified in the Department's code of practice on load security which advises that loose loads should be covered. The requirements are enforced by the police and the vehicle inspectorate as part of their general duties.

Workplace Regulations

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each agency within his Department the date of completion of the risk assessments required *(a)* by the display screen equipment regulations and *(b)* by the workplace regulations. [14436]

Mr. Norris: Where major programmes of risk assessment have been completed or have a planned completion date that is given in the table. However, the requirement to undertake risk assessments is ongoing, for example, where there are changes in staff and in the workplace, as shown in the table.

Agency	*(a) Display screen equipment*	*(b) Workplace regulations*
Driver and Vehicle Licensing agency	April 1995	HQ completed October 1995; local office network to be completed by May 1996
Driving Standards Agency	Ongoing	Ongoing
Highways Agency	To be completed by March 1996	Inspections completed by January 1996
Marine Safety Agency	September 1995	September 1995
The Coastguard Agency	Ongoing	Ongoing
Transport Research Laboratory	August 1993	February 1996
Vehicle Certification Agency	January 1993	November 1995
Vehicle Inspectorate	To be completed by December 1996	To be completed by December 1996

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by traffic area office the dates on which the risk assessment required by the display screen equipment regulations was carried out. [14441]

Mr. Norris: Information is not readily available on the exact dates of the initiation or completion of the risk assessments. But assessments of workstations already in place before the regulations came into force were carried out during 1994 and 1995 in all offices except the South Eastern and Metropolitan office, where the assessment is expected to be completed shortly.

Assessments of new workstations normally take place as and when the latter are installed.

Job Advertisements

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many jobs have been advertised in each grade in his Department during the last three months for which records are available; and how many people have applied for each such job. [13826]

Mr. Norris: Details of the number of jobs advertised in each grade in the Department and its agencies in the last three months—November and December 1995 and January 1996—are set out in the following table.

Central transport group figures

Grade	*Number of jobs advertised in the last 3 months i.e. November 1995, December 1995 and January 1996*	*Number of applicants who applied*
Estates surveyor	1	166
Administrative officer	6	170
	1	159
	1	43
Administrative assistant	3	64
	1	56
	1	12
Total	14	670

Executive agency figures

Agency/Grade	*Number of jobs advertised in the last 3 months i.e. November 1995, December 1995 and January 1996*	*Number of applicants who applied*
Coastguard (TCA)		
Chief Coastguard (Grade 5 level)	1	closing date 16/2/92– not in a position to say how many applications there have been.
Grade 6 level	1	Same as above.
Coastguard Officer	6	50

Executive agency figures

Agency/Grade	*Number of jobs advertised in the last 3 months i.e. November 1995, December 1995 and January 1996*	*Number of applicants who applied*
Administrative Assistant	1	71—closing date 12/2/96.
Driving Standards Agency (DSA)		
IT Programme Manager (Grade 7 level)	1	25
Communications Manager (SEO level)	1	44
Communications Executive (HEO level)	1	59
Support Grade Band 2	1	25
Driver Vehicle & Licensing Agency (DVLA)		
Administrative Officer	3	8
Administrative Officer (Inquiry)	1	13
Administrative Assistant	2 2 4	8 14 9
	of which two jobs were re-advertised.	of which 304 applicants (to date) applied when the 2 remaining posts were re-advertised.
Highways Agency (HA)		
Senior Information Officer	3	37
Information Officer	2	98
Marine Safety Agency (MSA)		
Administrative Officer	1	18
Administrative Assistant	3 2	20 11—closing date 9/2/96.
Transport Research Laboratory (TRL)		
Senior Scientific Officer	1	17
Higher Scientific Officer	1	19
Scientific Officer	2	84
Assistant Scientific Officer	1	11
Support Grade Band 2	1	2
Vehicle Inspectorate (VI)		
Senior Professional & Technology Officer	1	25
Higher Professional & Technology Officer	1	6
Professional Technology Officer	3	12
Support Grade Band 2	1	3
Vehicle Certification Agency	None advertised.	—
Total	48	993

Road Traffic Act 1988

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the Department of Health about repealing section 157 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 *(a)* in total and *(b)* for pensioners only. [14307]

Mr. Norris: None. This is a matter for which the Secretary of State for Health has policy responsibility.

EU Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on which occasions in the last three years officials have vetoed draft EC legislation on the grounds that a fiche d'impact had not been correctly prepared. [13650]

Mr. Watts: The correct preparation of fiches d'impact is a very important part of our consideration of proposals for EC legislation. It is one of the factors taken into account when Ministers consider the United Kingdom's negotiating position on a particular proposal.

Traffic Lights

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to speed up the installation of traffic lights at roundabouts at appropriate locations; and if he will make a statement. [13223]

Mr. Norris: It is for the highway authority concerned to decide whether to instal traffic signals at particular roundabouts, normally for reasons of safety or capacity.

Roadside Checks

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the results of the roadside survey of illegal operators undertaken by the Vehicle Inspectorate in October 1995. [15167]

Mr. Norris: The preliminary results of the survey indicate that, of the total heavy goods vehicle mileage travelled in Great Britain, around 1.6 per cent. is by vehicles operated without an operator's licence where one should be held. The survey also indicate that vehicles operating without a licence are disproportionately likely to have roadworthiness defects and to be involved in other traffic offences such as drivers' hours and driver licensing offences. A number of more minor operator licensing offences were also found, for example involving vehicles operating outside the terms of the licence of their operator. A detailed report on the survey will be published shortly, once all the figures have been fully checked.

Severe Weather Conditions

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what extra assistance his Department has the power to offer to Copeland borough council and Cumbria county council following the recent severe weather conditions. [14817]

Mr. Norris: The winter maintenance of local authority roads is funded through revenue support grant. Emergency assistance to local authorities is covered by the Bellwin scheme, which may be activated by my right

hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment under powers in section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is his estimate of the costs arising from the provisions of the Street Works (Sharing of Costs of Works) Regulations 1992 to *(a)* gas, *(b)* electricity, *(c)* water and sewerage and *(d)* telecommunications industries associated with the planned rapid transit schemes known as (i) Docklands light railway extension, (ii) Rochdale to Manchester/Oldham extension to Metrolink, (iii) Reading bus lane construction and (iv) Greater Nottingham rapid transit; and if he will make a statement; [14627]

(2) what estimate he has made of the costs to *(a)* the gas, *(b)* the electricity, *(c)* the water and sewerage and *(d)* the telecommunications industries associated with the planned rapid transit schemes known as (i) Croydon Tramlink, (ii) Birmingham Metrolink, (iii) Leeds Supertram and (iv) the channel tunnel rail link under the provisions of the Street Works (Sharing of Costs and Works) regulations 1992; and if he will make a statement. [14469]

Mr. Norris: The regulations provide for the utilities to bear 18 per cent. of the allowable costs of diversionary works, the remaining 82 per cent. being borne by the promoter. Estimates of scheme costs, including diversionary works costs, are a matter for the promoter in the first instance.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many written parliamentary questions were passed for answer to executive agencies and non-governmental departments in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [14991]

Mr. Norris: The information requested is a matter of public record.

Public Transport

Mr. Alan Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet representatives of the Disabled Persons' Transport Advisory Committee to discuss access to public transport. [13031]

Sir George Young: My Department has regular meetings with the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee to discuss a wide range of issues relating to the transport needs of disabled people. I will be seeing the Chairman on the day of the June quarterly meeting.

Public Records Office

Mr. Tam Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, column *57*, in what circumstances he is able to release official files other than at the appropriate time under the procedures and criteria set down by the Public Records Office. [13032]

Sir George Young: My Department may grant "privileged" access to official files earlier than their normal review date. The decision to give such access, and the conditions which are imposed with it, are at the discretion of the Department, in line with the criteria set down by the Public Records Office.

TREASURY

VAT (Computer Equipment)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what considerations led Her Majesty's Customs and Excise to begin to collect VAT on computer equipment for the blind and partially sighted; and if he will publish the directive ordering the change. [14526]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 31 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *754*.

Trusts

Miss Hoey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the amount of money held in trust *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* outside the United Kingdom by United Kingdom residents. [14260]

Mr. Jack: The information requested is not available.

Housing Investment Trusts

Miss Hoey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost of tax relief provided to the proposed housing investment trusts in the first full year; and how many properties he anticipates will be made available for rent under the scheme in a full year. [14258]

Mr. Jack: We estimate the cost of tax relief in the first full year to be negligible. We have made no estimate of the number of properties that will be made available for rent through housing investment trusts. That will depend on how promoters and prospective investors respond to the new opportunity.

Cross-channel Shopping

Miss Hoey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his most recent estimate of the loss of revenue from cross-channel shopping; if he will make a statement on his underlying assumptions in formulating this estimate; and what estimate he has made of the number of cross-channel trips made annually for the primary purpose of avoiding excise duties. [14261]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise's latest estimate of the loss of revenue cross channel shopping is as follows:

Total revenue losses

£ million

	12 Months to June 1995		
	Excise duty	*VAT*	*Total*
Alcoholic drinks	160	60	220
Tobacco products	120	30	150
Total	280	90	370

Source:
OPCS Omnibus Survey.

The estimate of revenue loss assumes that only 50 per cent. of cross-border purchases of alcohol represent a loss of UK sales and duty; the other 50 per cent., is assumed to be additional spending associated with the lower prices on the continent. For tobacco, it is assumed that all cross-border shopping replaces UK sales. The calculation also requires assumptions about the average strength of alcohol purchased abroad and the average prices at which this alcohol or tobacco would have been sold in the UK.

The omnibus survey does not identify how many trips are made for the primary purpose of purchasing alcohol or tobacco abroad.

Public Supply Contracts

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans his Department has to seek to raise the limit on the value of public supply contracts in excess of which EC directive 77/62/EEC as amended by 88/295/EEC applies. [14103]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Council directive 77/62/EEC, as subsequently amended, on the award of public supply contracts, has been replaced by Council directive 93/36/EEC. The Commission has proposed a marginal increase to align the threshold at which the directive applies with the multilateral Government procurement agreement under the World Trade Organisation that came into effect on 1 January 1996. My Department has no plans to seek a further increase but will wish to consider an impact assessment being undertaken for the Commission.

Job Advertisements

Mr. Janner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many jobs have been advertised in each grade in his Department during the last three months for which records are available; and how many people have applied for each such job. [13836]

Mrs. Angela Knight: In the period from November 1995 to January 1996 there were two advertisements to recruit staff. One is to fill the post of head of internal audit, which may be filled at grade 5, 6 or 7 and the application process is currently on-going. The other was to fill economic adviser posts in a number of departments, including two Treasury grade 7 economist posts, for which there were 33 applications.

European Monetary Institute

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the capital cost provided by the Bank of England toward the funding of the EMI, in total and annually including projected contributions to 2000; and if this will be refunded if a European central bank is created but Britain does not participate in a single currency. [13439]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Article 16 of the protocol on the statute of the European Monetary Institute, annexed to the EC treaty, provides for member states' central banks to make contributions towards the capital resources of the EMI. The Bank of England has contributed 94.5 million ecu—equivalent to £74.7 million at the time—towards the capital of the EMI. The Bank of England made its contributions to the EMI from its own resources and its share of the EMI's capital is one of its own assets.

Article 1091 of the treaty states that the EMI shall go into liquidation upon the establishment of the ECB—European central bank. The proceeds of the liquidation will be distributed to national central banks in the same proportion as capital was provided, under the terms of article 23 of the protocol. This procedure will apply whether or not the United Kingdom participates in the single currency.

Suppliers Charter

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to publish a suppliers charter to ensure that *(a)* all suppliers and *(b)* small and medium enterprises have the opportunity to compete for the provision of goods and services in open competition. [14586]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury follows the good customer practice for Government relationships with suppliers. This is set out on page 41 of the White Paper "Setting New Standards, A Strategy for Government Procurement", published by HMSO in May 1995.

Pension Schemes

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the annual limits below which no tax is paid on contributions for *(a)* employers' contributions and *(b)* employees' contributions to (i) executive pension plans, (ii) personal pension plans and (iii) small self-administered pension schemes. [14667]

Mr. Jack: In occupational pension schemes, which includes executive pension plans and small self-administered pension schemes, employee members may annually contribute up to 15 per cent. of their salary with tax relief. There is no specific limit on employer contributions, but they should not exceed the amount required to provide the benefits promised by the scheme.

In personal pension plans, employee members may annually pay a percentage of their salary as follows:

Age of member on first day of tax year	*Maximum percentage of salary payable*
35 or less	17.5
36–45	20
46–50	25
51–55	30
56–60	35
61–74	40

These annual limits for personal pension schemes may be increased by unused contributions relief from past tax years. Any employer contributions to personal pensions must, when aggregate with the employee's contribution fall within the above limits.

Government Bonds (Payment)

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to ensure that a present purchaser of Her Majesty's Government's bonds with a redemption date after 1999 will receive payment in pound sterling. [13615]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The presidency conclusion from the European Council on 15 to 16 December 1995 in Madrid state that, on the assumption that the third stage of EMU starts on 1 January 1999, in participating member states,

"by 1 January 2002 at the latest, public debt denominated in the former national currencies will be redeemable only in the single currency".

Protocol No. 11 annexed to the EC treaty means that the United Kingdom shall not be obliged or committed to participate in the third stage of economic and monetary union without a separate decision to do so by the Government and Parliament. We will agree to take part in the single currency only if it is in our national interest to do so, given the circumstances at the time.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Visitors' Facilities

31. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission what new proposals he has to improve facilities for visitors to the House. [13049]

Mr. Beith: On 12 July 1994, the House approved a recommendation from the Catering Committee that the area currently occupied by the Westminster Hall cafeteria should be converted into a visitors' centre.

Cleaning Contracts

Mr. Key: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission which company holds the cleaning contract in respect of common areas, kitchens and men's and women's lavatories, and rooms other than Members and Members' staff rooms, at 7 Millbank; when it commenced; when it will terminate; what is its value; and if it was awarded by competitive tender. [14467]

Mr. Beith: The cleaning contract for the parliamentary estate, including 7 Millbank is held by ISS London Ltd. The contract commenced in August 1992 and will terminate in August 1997. The value of the contract is subject to commercial confidentiality, but the annual cost of contract cleaning at 7 Millbank, excluding the rooms of Members and their staff, is £190,000. The contract was awarded by competitive tender.

Job Advertisements

Mr. Janner: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, how many jobs have been advertised in each grade in each Department of the House during the last three months for which records are available; and how many people have been applied for each such job. [13894]

Mr. Beith: In the three months ending 31 January 1996 details of recruitment exercises held to fill vacancies in Departments of the House, together with the number of applicants for each, are as follows:

Vacancy	*Department*	*Number of applications*
Legal Assistant (Grade 8–10)	Clerk's	48
Secretary (Grade 3)	Serjeant at Arms	33
Network Planning Officer (Grade 7)	Serjeant at Arms	24
Doorkeeper (Grade 12)	Serjeant at Arms	1,002
Word Processing Assistant (Grade 13)	Official Report	66
Foreman (DEL1)	Parliamentary Works Directorate	6
Fitter (DEL3)	Parliamentary Works Directorate	18
Storekeeper (DEL4)	Parliamentary Works Directorate	14
Craft Auxiliary (DEL6)	Parliamentary Works Directorate	5
Heating Attendant (DEL6)	Parliamentary Works Directorate	19
Assistant Financial Controller (Grade 10)	Refreshment	13
Income Control Clerk (Grade 13)	Refreshment	5
Food and Beverage Control Clerk (Grade 13)	Refreshment	14
Chefs (7 vacancies)	Refreshment	28

Westminster Hall (Media Use)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he will assess the advantages of allowing live media use of Westminster Hall. [13054]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The authorities controlling Westminster Hall have already agreed that permission may be granted to film interviews in the Hall before 9.30 am on sitting Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, and during recesses.

Filming is also permitted in any of the six interview rooms off the Hall, and in the Jubilee Room.

Photocopiers

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what are the rules governing the use of photocopiers owned and maintained by the House authorities; what assessment he has made of the extent to which photocopiers are being used to excess; and what measures are being pursued to prevent such abuses. [13051]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: Photocopiers owned and maintained by the House are intended for use by hon. Members in connection with their parliamentary duties. They are not intended to be used for work in connection with hon. Members' party political or non-parliamentary work outside Parliament. Detailed guidance on their use is given in a notice adjacent to each photocopier.

As a result of a recent study into control systems to prevent abuse of photocopying facilities, the Administration Committee approved a trial of overprinted photocopy paper in 7 Millbank, to run from the return of the House from the Christmas adjournment, until its rise for the Easter adjournment. The results will then be considered in order to establish what effect the introduction of this paper has had on consumption, and will enable the Committee to decide on any further action.

Catering Facilities

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee what plans he has to upgrade catering facilities for visitors to the Palace of Westminster. [13052]

Sir Colin Shepherd: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave on 15 January, *Official Report*, column *350*.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee what additional provision he plans to make for additional catering facilities at the House of Commons in the next financial year. [13056]

Sir Colin Shepherd: There are no additional catering facilities planned in the next financial year.

However, the refurbishment of existing outlets will continue, which will update and improve the facilities currently available to hon. Members and all others who work in the Palace.

Legionnaire's Disease

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he will make a statement on the measures taken to combat the presence of Legionnaires' disease. [13060]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply I gave on 15 January, *Official Report* column *350*.

EU Decision Making

38. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has to improve parliamentary scrutiny of European Union decision making; and if he will make a statement. [13064]

Mr. Newton: Scrutiny procedures are kept under review, but I have no specific plans for change at present. Careful consideration will be given to any proposals emerging from the Select Committee on European Legislation intergovernmental conference inquiry.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Lord President of the Council, pursuant to his answer of 15 January, *Official Report* column *365*, what factors preclude him from setting up a Select Committee on the destruction of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie. [13063]

Mr. Newton: There have already been a number of investigations and inquiries including the fatal accident inquiry, the Transport Select Committee and the US presidential commission. It is difficult to see what further areas a Select Committee on the destruction of Pan Am 103 could look at without encroaching on evidence which can properly be addressed only in the context of a criminal trial of the two Libyans accused.

All-night Sittings

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many all-night sittings there have been in the period since the Jopling report recommendations were introduced. [13062]

Mr. Newton: None.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Departmental Publications

Dr. Wright: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which is his Department's administrative manuals and internal guidance are now made public; and which remain private. [14037]

Mr. Boswell: In accordance with paragraph 3(ii) of the "Code of Practice on Access to Government Information", we have already made available the great majority of the Ministry's administrative guidelines on our dealings with the public. These are as listed. The remainder, some chapters in the "Instructions for Regional Service Centres and Instructions for Veterinary Officers", will be made available as soon as possible.

Where guidance contains information which should properly be kept confidential under the code, relevant sections have been removed and each has been marked to this effect.

Guidelines released to date:

Instruction on period to be allowed for public consultation exercises.

Aide-Memoire on open government.

Control manuals for the UKROFS certification system.

Operating manual for the UKROFS certification scheme for organic food production.

Guidance for dealing with complaints received by the MAFF consumer helpline.

Checklist for dealing with applications for export certificates for food additives.

Desk instructions for processing applications for certificates for exports of animal feedingstuffs, feed additives, fertilisers and related products.

Desk instructions on the fishing vessels decommissioning scheme 1994.

Desk instructions for handling harbours legislation.

Instructions for dealing with the fishing vessel safety improvements grants scheme 1993.

Classification of shellfish production and relaying areas.

Wildlife and Countryside Act licensing.

Internal instructions for dealing with the monitoring for algal toxins.

Several regulating orders.

Instructions (for the Sea Fisheries Inspectorate) for dealing with sea fish licensing in "Community" waters.

Handbook for nuclear accident response.

HMI instruction manual for dealing with quality standards for fruit and vegetables.

Library procedures manual.

D3/94: "Library Visitors".

D2/94: "Handling Enquiries from the Public".

Land use planning handbook.

Desk instructions for dealing with the processing of licences for deposits at sea including burial under Food and Environment Protection Act.

Guide for enforcement of the Dumping at Sea Act 1974—version 2 (January 1985).

Divisional desk instructions for dealing with the marketing development scheme.

Desk instructions for dealing with the processing and marketing grant scheme.

Instructions on the operating of the egg marketing regulation.

Instructions on the operation of the hatching eggs and chicks regulation.

Desk instructions for issuing of licences to import and/or retain prohibited plant material etc. under the provisions of the Plant Health (GB) Order 1993.

Plant Health and Seed Inspectorate (PHSI) handbook.

Desk instructions for issuing phystosanitary certificates for export of plant products to third countries.

Desk instructions on the handling of applications for plant breeders' rights and national listing.

Desk instructions for processing applications under the postgraduate agricultural and food studentship scheme.

The introduction of fish from other member states, the licensing of live fish imports from third countries and movements of dead fish and fish viscera.

Desk instructions on licensing live fish and shellfish imports from third countries.

Assessment handbook: "Methods for the Assessment of the potential Impact of Authorised Disposal of Radioactive Waste into the Atmosphere".

Food and agriculture radioactivity monitoring programme 1995 (FARM) 1995—analytical requirements.

Radioactivity monitoring: TRAMP and FARM sampling requirements 1995.

Terrestrial Radiological monitoring programme (TRAMP) procedures document.

Instructions for veterinary officers and local veterinary inspectors (part released).

Regional service centre instructions relating to:

Misuse of pesticides (ENV 15).

Destruction of moles by Strychnine (ENV 11).

Agricultural wages enforcement (GEN 5).

Apple orchard grubbing up scheme (GRA 21).

IACS (GEN 19).

Habitat scheme (GRA 30).

Beef special premium scheme (LIV 12).

ALT land drainage cases (GEN 14).

Terrestrial radioactivity monitoring programme (TRAMP) (ENV 16).

Agricultural wages committees (GEN 4).

Agricultural dwelling house advisory committees (GEN 9).

Environmentally sensitive areas (GRA 8).

Environmental pollution (ENV 5).

(New) Nitrate sensitive areas (GRA 29).

Pilot nitrate sensitive areas (GRA 20).

Sheep annual premium scheme (LIV 1).

Hill livestock compensatory allowances (HLCS's) 1988–93 (LIV 2).

Hill livestock compensatory allowances 1994 (LIV 11).

Suckler cow premium scheme (LIV 8).

Refund on starch used in the manufacture of approved products (IB 38).

The declared stocks scheme for barley and malt (IB 8).

Support buying and sale of cereals (IB 1).

Farm woodland premium scheme (GRA 24).

Agricultural and horticultural co-operation scheme (AHCS) (GRA 5).

Aid for concentrated grape must: Sampling and testing procedures (IB 29).

Certification scheme for hops and hop products.

Apple orchard grubbing up scheme 1994–95 (GRA 33).

Intervention arrangements—fresh fruit and vegetables (IB 2).

Short term lettings and licences (GEN 10).

Infestation control mammals and birds: badgers—licensing arrangements (ENV 17).

Rabbits (ENV 12).

Non-indigenous species (ENV 14).

Licensing procedures for the killing or taking of wild birds (ENV 10).

Infestation control mammals and birds: legislation (ENV 9).

Infestation control mammals and birds: introduction (ENV 8).

Infestation control mammals and birds: deer (ENV 13).

SLOM II (LIV 7).

Aid for Liquid Skimmed Milk, Buttermilk for use as stockfeed (IB 15).

Milk supplementary levy (IB 33).

SLOM III (LIV 9).

Milk supplementary levy: temporary reallocation of quota arising from herd movements restrictions (MIL 8).

SLOM compensation (LIV 10).

Statistics: Agricultural censuses and surveys (GEN 6).

Dehydrated fodder (IB 5).

Aid for refining raw cane sugar (IB 41).

Olive oil consumption aid (IB 32).

Flax and hemp subsidy (IB 7).

Isoglucose production levy (IB 30).

Consultants (Expenditure)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the expenditure of his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all external consultants including management consultants for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will estimate the savings accruing to his Department for the use of consultants in each of these years. [11351]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* Expenditure on consultants in the financial year 1979–80 could be provided only at disproportionate expense. Expenditure in each of the other years concerned was as follows:

Financial year	*Expenditure (£)*
1989–90	2,972,150
1991–92	5,374,284
1993–94	13,071,785
1994–95	12,259,782
1995–96 (to date)	10,245,969
1995–96 (whole year estimated)	14,736,635
1996–97 (estimated)	11,328,389

These figures exclude the Veterinary Medicines Directorate and the Meat Hygiene Service, which will be submitting separate replies.

It is not possible to quantify savings accruing from this expenditure, since most of the benefits derive from new systems and working methods, and from the consultants' expertise in certain fields, in which permanent staff do not have the necessary knowledge and experience.

Letter from J. M. Rutter to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 26 January 1996:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about expenditure on external consultants by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, for 1979–80 and each year since 1989–90, as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.

The Directorate was established as a Next Steps Agency on 2 April 1990 and did not maintain its own accounts until 1991–92.

Details of expenditure on external consultants since that date are as follows:

1991–92: £ 5,869

1992–93: £ 41,272

1993–94: £ 34,281

1994–95: £ 12,705

1995–96: £ 4,042 (to date)

1995–96: £ 5,500 (Forecast)

1996–97: £ 6,000 (Forecast)

It is not possible to quantify savings accruing from this expenditure, since most of the benefits derive from new systems and working methods and from the consultants expertise in certain fields, in which permanent staff do not have the necessary knowledge and experience.

Imported Animals and Birds

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list mortalities amongst wild birds imported into the United Kingdom in each year since 1989. [8776]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 19 January 1996]:* Mortality statistics for wild birds imported into the UK have been published for the years 1988 and 1992 and copies have been placed in the Library of the House. A summary of the results is set out. Statistics for 1993 and 1994 are in preparation and these will also be placed in the Library as soon as they are published.

	Number imported	*Dead on arrival*	*Percentage*	*Dead in quarantine*	*Percentage*
1988	184,577	4,732	2.56	20,619	11.17
1989	184,601	4,015	2.17	19,471	10.55
1990	175,967	3,543	2.01	18,138	10.31
1991	129,490	3,444	2.66	15,734	12.15
1992	94,927	3,573	3.76	9,506	10.01

Job Advertisements

Mr. Janner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many jobs have been advertised in each grade in his Department during the last three months for which records are available; and how many people have applied for each such job. [13834]

Mr. Boswell: The number of jobs advertised by his Department by grade during the last three months, and the number of applicants for each job, is as follows:

	Casual		*Permanent*	
Grade	*Number of posts*	*Number of applicants*	*Number of posts*	*Number of applicants*
Grade 6	—	—	1	16
Higher Scientific Officer/Senior Scientific Officer	—	—	4	691
Scientific Officer/Higher Scientific Officer	—	—	2	38
Horticultural Marketing Inspector	—	—	8	146
Animal Health Officer	—	—	2	172
Scientific Officer	—	—	1	26
Assistant Scientific Officer	2	123	—	—
Technical Grade II	—	—	1	7
Administrative Officer	6	367	1	12
Administrative Assistant	236	840	4	202
Typist	5	17	—	—
Support Grade Band I	1	11	4	31
Support Grade Band II	23	101	1	4

NORTHERN IRELAND

Job Advertisements

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many jobs have been advertised in each grade in his Department during the last three months for which records are available; and how many people have applied for each such job. [13829]

Sir John Wheeler: The information in respect of the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments is in the table.

1. Permanent non-industrial staff, figures for October–December 1995

Grade	*Number of posts advertised*	*Number of applicants*
Grade 5: Chief Executive, Business Development Service	1	31

1. Permanent non-industrial staff, figures for October–December 1995

Grade	*Number of posts advertised*	*Number of applicants*
Grade 6/5: Business Co-operation Manager	1	90
Grade 6: Divisional Water Manager	1	28
Grade 7: Accountant	1	18
Grade 7: Corporate Finance Director	3	30
DP: Assistant Corporate Finance Executive	3	26
DP: Accountant	1	18
SO: Accountant	2	2
Senior Scientific Officer: Ruminant Nutrition Research	1	15
Senior Scientific Officer: Pig Production Research	1	10
Higher Scientific Officer: Food Chemistry	1	14

1. Permanent non-industrial staff, figures for October–December 1995

Grade	*Number of posts advertised*	*Number of applicants*
Scientific Officer: Information and Library	1	42
Scientific Officer: Marine Biologist	1	120
Lecturer in Equine Studies	1	26
Legal Assistant	1	39
Law Clerk	1	46
Graduate Trainee Civil Engineer	4	165
Graduate Trainee Electrical Engineer	1	37
Stores Officer Grade C	1	46
Management Trainee	Up to 20	1,964
Support Grade Band 2: Laboratory Attendant	2	42

2. Casual and Industrial Staff, figures for November 1995–January 1996

Grade	*Number of posts advertised*	*Number of applicants*
Casual Administrative Assistant	55	499
Casual Administrative Assistant	[1]Not specified	1,028
Casual Assistant Scientific Officer	4	33
Casual Support Grade Band 2: Laboratory Attendant	12	25
Casual Support Grade Band 2	[1]Not specified	221
Casual Inspector Group 1	15	27
Casual Inspector Grade III/IV	9	66
Temporary Instructional Officer	1	5
Part-time Medical Referee	[1]Not specified	51
Sessional Inspector	[1]Not specified	20
Sessional Health Education Nurse: Grade D	[1]Not specified	41
Casual Typist	[1]Not specified	24
Casual Contractor	[1]Not specified	54
Miscellaneous Industrial Posts	32 Permanent 12 Casual	301
Casual Typist	2	16
Ranger	1	3
Water Operator	3	6
Road Worker	5	79
Motor Mechanic	2	2
Fitter	1	4

[1] DHSS and NIO advertised periodically to create a pool of suitable candidates.

Water Leakage

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made over the last five years of leakage from the public water supply on a comparable basis with those figures that have been produced by the privatised water companies in England and Wales. [13422]

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 6 February 1996]:* Losses from the public water distribution system in Northern Ireland are currently estimated to be 9.5 cu m per kilometre of main per day. This is in the mid range of figures issued by Ofwat for England and Wales. Earlier leakage assessments for Northern Ireland were not made on the comparative basis issued by Ofwat.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the expenditure of his Department, his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses for *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96 and *(g)* 1996–97. [11426]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, information on all travel, accommodation and other associated expenses of Northern Ireland Departments is listed.

£000s

1979–80: n/a

1989–90: 8,758[1]

1991–92: 13,744

1993–94: 15,207

1994–95: 14,204

1995–96: 15,798

1996–97: 4,657[2]

Note:

[1] Information not available in DHSS and DANI.

[2] Excludes DED, DOE and DHSS as budgets have not yet been agreed.

Information on the Northern Ireland Office is not included.

Information on non-departmental public bodies could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

River Maine (Pollution)

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what attempts have been made by the fishery division to investigate the damage inflicted on the River Maine system by pollution. [13203]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 5 February 1996]:* The statutory responsibility for investigating damage inflicted on water courses by pollution incidents lies with the Department of the Environment. The Fisheries Conservancy Board for Northern Ireland, acting as agents for the DOE, investigated a total of 29 reported incidents of pollution in the River Maine and its tributaries in 1995. As a result five prosecutions are pending and 12 warning letters were issued.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Prescott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the expenditure on regional selective assistance offers accepted by companies in *(a)* 1991–92, *(b)* 1992–93, *(c)* 1993–94 and *(d)* 1994–95, the proportion of regional selective assistance expenditure on foreign-owned firms and regional selective assistance expenditure per employee in manufacturing. [12701]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* In Northern Ireland selective financial assistance is administered by the Industrial Development Board and the local enterprise development unit. The information set out in the following tables shows the value of SFA offers

accepted, total expenditure to date under such offers, the proportion paid to foreign-owned firms, and expenditure per employee in manufacturing industry.

Selective financial assistance

Industrial Development Board

	Value of SFA offers accepted in each year (£ million)	*Payments to date under those offers (£ million)*	*Percentage of payments by value made to foreign owned firms*
1991–92	64.34	30.29	37
1992–93	95.12	46.74	63
1993–94	127.08	64.23	49
1994–95	102.14	26.26	36

Local Enterprise Development Unit

	Value of SFA offers accepted in each year (£ million)	*Payments to date under those offers (£ million)*	*Percentage of payments by value made to foreign owned firms*
1991–92	not available	not available	nil
1992–93	not available	not available	nil
1993–94	19.54	10.58	nil
1994–95	21.93	10.62	nil

Foreign-owned firms are those whose country of ownership is outside the United Kingdom.

The average selective financial assistance expenditure to date per employee in manufacturing was £732 in respect of the 1993–94 offers and £355 in respect of the 1994–95 offers.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Student Funding (North Yorkshire)

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students received funding from the North Yorkshire county council for courses outside the county in 1994 and 1995. [14238]

Mr. Forth: Information is not available in the form requested.

In the academic year 1993–94, the latest year for which data are available, North Yorkshire local education authority made 12,380 mandatory awards and 230 discretionary awards to higher education students and 5,880 discretionary awards to students on courses of further education. Information on the place of study is not collected by the Department for these award holders.

Information Technology

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *285*, if the current survey into IT provision will list information relating to *(a)* the number of schools and pupils with access to the Internet, *(b)* the number of schools with a local area network, *(c)* the number of CD-ROM machines in each school and *(d)* the number and type of computers available to pupils in their home. [14197]

Mr. Robin Squire: The survey will collect information on access to the Internet, the number of computers linked by internal networks and the number of computers with CD-ROM drives. No information is being collected on computers used by pupils at home. Information on the number of households with home computers is collected by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys on the general household survey and published in "Social Trends".

Benefit Agency Staff (Safety)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will carry out an audit of safety for staff working in Government benefit agencies throughout the country. [14050]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Ms Joan Walley, dated 12 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your question about safety for staff working in government benefit agencies.

I can confirm that all of our offices carry out regular risk assessments that take account of all known risks that arise out of our work. These include customer aggression, general office hazards and use of display screen equipment.

All assessments are reviewed regularly through our normal safety inspection procedures.

I hope that this is helpful.

Education Funding (Warwickshire)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment pursuant to her answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, columns *982–83*, (1) what proportion of the figure of £52,239,000 is apportioned to schools in Warwickshire; [14265]

(2) how much is spent by Warwickshire local education authority in administration; and if this is additional to the figure of £52,239,000. [14266]

Mr. Robin Squire: The figure of £52,239,000 quoted in my answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, columns *982–83*, is taken from the authority's 1995–96 local management of schools budget statement and, as such, relates wholly to schools covered by the authority's LMS scheme. Within that total the budget head "management and administration" accounts for £2,924,000.

Figures for expenditure on administration outside the general schools budget for 1995–96 are not yet available.

Jobcentres

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make it her policy that jobcentres should identify to hon. Members companies using the jobcentre services. [14090]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Denis McShane, dated 12 February 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question asking if she will make it her policy that Jobcentres should disclose to honourable Members the companies using the Jobcentre services.

The Employment Service treats information provided by companies using our services as confidential and will only use such information for the purpose it was provided. In the case of vacancies, the information is used in discussion with interested applicants. The Employment Service will not disclose information from companies for other purposes without informing them of the nature of any request and obtaining their permission.

I hope this is helpful.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the estimated cost *(a)* to each local education authority in England and *(b)* nationally of a 3.8 per cent. increase in teachers' pay in 1996–97. [14480]

Mr. Robin Squire: The total estimated cost in England of a teachers' pay increase in 1996–97 of 3.8 per cent. is around £395 million. The following table illustrates the cost of such an award by updating the 1993–94 expenditure recorded by local education authorities in England for teaching staff salaries in nursery, primary, secondary and special schools by the teachers' pay awards of 2.9 per cent. in 1994–95 and 2.7 per cent. in 1995–96 and an increase of 3.8 per cent. in 1996–97. The 1993–94 expenditure figures are the latest available for local education authority maintained schools in England. The figures in the table take no account of changes in teacher numbers or other factors that affect the teachers' pay bill.

LEA expenditure on teachers' salaries

Per-Primary and Primary, Secondary and Special Schools	*1993–94 (actual) £000*	*1994–95 increase (2.9 per cent.) £000*	*1995–96 increase (2.7 per cent.) £000*	*1996–97 increase (3.8 per cent.) £000*
Corporation of London	378	11	11	15
Camden	37,774	1,095	1,049	1,517
Greenwich	53,751	1,559	1,493	2,159
Hackney	41,871	1,214	1,163	1,681
Hammersmith and Fulham	25,087	728	697	1,007
Islington	37,294	1,082	1,036	1,498
Kensington and Chelsea	15,922	462	442	639
Lambeth	39,698	1,151	1,103	1,594
Lewisham	43,235	1,254	1,201	1,736
Southwark	38,056	1,104	1,057	1,528
Tower Hamlets	58,012	1,682	1,612	2,330
Wandsworth	31,532	914	876	1,266
City of Westminster	30,151	874	838	1,211
Barking	34,487	1,000	958	1,385
Barnet	55,491	1,609	1,542	2,228
Bexley	40,962	1,188	1,138	1,645
Brent	39,613	1,149	1,101	1,591
Bromley	35,283	1,023	980	1,417
Croydon	51,278	1,487	1,425	2,059
Ealing	46,119	1,337	1,281	1,852
Enfield	51,873	1,504	1,441	2,083
Haringey	48,595	1,409	1,350	1,951
Harrow	38,702	1,122	1,075	1,554
Havering	41,677	1,209	1,158	1,674
Hillingdon	26,648	773	740	1,070
Hounslow	46,927	1,361	1,304	1,884
Kingston Upon Thames	21,879	634	608	879
Merton	33,279	965	925	1,336
Newham	54,533	1,581	1,515	2,190
Redbridge	49,548	1,437	1,377	1,990
Richmond Upon Thames	25,724	746	715	1,033

LEA expenditure on teachers' salaries

Per-Primary and Primary, Secondary and Special Schools	*1993–94 (actual) £000*	*1994–95 increase (2.9 per cent.) £000*	*1995–96 increase (2.7 per cent.) £000*	*1996–97 increase (3.8 per cent.) £000*
Sutton	22,531	653	626	905
Waltham Forest	46,867	1,359	1,302	1,882
Birmingham	211,785	6,142	5,884	8,505
Coventry	69,840	2,025	1,940	2,805
Dudley	55,540	1,611	1,543	2,230
Sandwell	66,061	1,916	1,835	2,653
Solihull	41,921	1,216	1,165	1,683
Walsall	55,669	1,614	1,547	2,236
Wolverhampton	53,635	1,555	1,490	2,154
Knowsley	34,935	1,013	971	1,403
Liverpool	104,939	3,043	2,916	4,214
St. Helens	39,149	1,135	1,088	1,572
Sefton	57,370	1,664	1,594	2,304
Wirral	69,278	2,089	1,925	2,782
Bolton	54,728	1,587	1,521	2,198
Bury	33,505	972	931	1,345
Manchester	91,541	2,655	2,543	3,676
Oldham	56,483	1,638	1,569	2,268
Rochdale	39,389	1,142	1,094	1,582
Salford	47,641	1,382	1,324	1,913
Stockport	53,551	1,553	1,488	2,150
Tameside	39,501	1,146	1,097	1,586
Trafford	36,262	1,052	1,007	1,456
Wigan	66,655	1,933	1,852	2,677
Barnsley	41,363	1,200	1,149	1,661
Doncaster	62,198	1,804	1,728	2,498
Rotherham	58,540	1,698	1,626	2,351
Sheffield	92,046	2,669	2,557	3,696
Bradford	109,072	3,163	3,030	4,380
Calderdale	37,935	1,100	1,054	1,523
Kirklees	81,076	2,351	2,253	3,256
Leeds	146,072	4,236	4,058	5,866
Wakefield	63,131	1,831	1,754	2,535
Gateshead	40,458	1,173	1,124	1,625
Newcastle upon Tyne	53,518	1,552	1,487	2,149
North Tyneside	40,501	1,175	1,125	1,626
South Tyneside	31,493	913	875	1,265
Sunderland	65,654	1,904	1,824	2,637
Isles of Scilly	608	18	17	24
Avon	177,289	5,141	4,926	7,120
Bedfordshire	105,301	3,054	2,926	4,229
Berkshire	135,540	3,931	3,766	5,443
Buckinghamshire	112,209	3,254	3,118	4,506
Cambridgeshire	103,041	2,988	2,863	4,138
Cheshire	185,457	5,378	5,153	7,448
Cleveland	124,442	3,609	3,457	4,997
Cornwall	86,653	2,513	2,407	3,480
Cumbria	88,947	2,579	2,471	3,572
Derbyshire	168,175	4,877	4,672	6,754
Devon	175,999	5,104	4,890	7,068
Dorset	98,186	2,847	2,278	3,943
Durham	120,743	3,502	3,355	4,849
East Sussex	116,123	3,368	3,226	4,663
Essex	211,358	6,129	5,872	8,488
Gloucestershire	74,050	2,147	2,057	2,974
Hampshire	256,960	7,452	7,139	10,319
Hereford and Worcester	128,339	3,722	3,566	5,154
Hertfordshire	186,227	5,401	5,174	7,487
Humberside	177,122	5,137	4,921	7,113
Isle of Wight	24,264	704	674	974
Kent	227,895	6,609	6,332	9,152
Lancashire	294,517	8,541	8,183	11,827
Leicestershire	18,004	5,365	5,140	7,429
Lincolnshire	88,099	2,555	2,448	3,538

LEA expenditure on teachers' salaries

Per-Primary and Primary, Secondary and Special Schools	*1993–94 (actual) £000*	*1994–95 increase (2.9 per cent.) £000*	*1995–96 increase (2.7 per cent.) £000*	*1996–97 increase (3.8 per cent.) £000*
Norfolk	124,807	3,619	3,468	5,012
North Yorkshire	138,958	4,030	3,861	5,580
Northamptonshire	109,086	3,163	3,031	4,381
Northumberland	62,398	1,810	1,734	2,506
Nottinghamshire	204,137	5,920	5,672	8,198
Oxfordshire	105,430	3,057	2,929	4,234
Shropshire	79,422	2,303	2,207	3,189
Somerset	84,749	2,458	2,355	3,403
Staffordshire	193,818	5,621	5,385	7,783
Suffolk	130,118	3,773	3,615	5,225
Surrey	143,690	4,167	3,992	5,770
Warwickshire	90,965	2,638	2,527	3,653
West Sussex	128,568	3,728	3,572	5,163
Wiltshire	96,340	2,794	2,677	3,869

Teachers' Pensions

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what was the total amount paid in pension contributions *(a)* by employers of teachers in the public sector and *(b)* by teachers; [14810]

(2) if she will estimate the cost of the pensions of teachers in the public sector for the current year. [14790]

Mr. Robin Squire: The total amounts paid in pension contributions to the teachers' superannuation scheme during 1994–95 were £971,009,000 by teachers' employers and £687,743,000 by teachers. The cost of pensions for teachers in the teachers' superannuation scheme, as measured by the most recent approved estimate for gross expenditure for 1995–96 on the teachers' superannuation vote is £2,952,145,000.

Access to Work

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has had on the decision to limit the access to work scheme announced in her answer on 14 December, *Official Report*, column *738*; and if she will make a statement. [14137]

Mr. Paice: Since the announcement about access to work, made on 14 December by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, we have received requests for further clarification of the announcement; expressions of concern about the immediate measures taken and about the level of planned expenditure for 1996–97 and requests for information about the review of the programme and its future operation.

Nursery Inspectors

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has for nursery inspectors to be required to undergo police checks. [14771]

Mr. Robin Squire: Subject to parliamentary approval, it will be for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools to recruit, train and register funded nursery education inspectors. This Department will agree with the chief inspector general criteria relating to suitability.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what instructions jobcentre staff receive about reporting employers to the Equal Opportunities Commission when there has been no complaint of sex discrimination. [14501]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Barry Field, dated 12 February 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about what instructions Jobcentre staff receive about reporting employers to the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) when there has been no complaint of sex discrimination.

It may be helpful if I begin by explaining that both employers and the Employment Service (ES) are required to operate within the provisions of the Sex Discrimination Acts 1975 and 1986. Whilst doing all we can to help employers fill their vacancies, the ES is required to challenge any indication that an employer may be seeking to recruit unlawfully. In the first instance, my people would attempt to resolve the matter by explaining what the law requires and asking the employer to reconsider their recruitment practices. Where instances of this sort cannot be resolved by the ES in that way, details are referred to the EOC for their consideration.

I should also stress that my people at Jobcentres run the risk of being a party to discrimination if they display a vacancy for an employer who has indicated they intend unlawfully to discriminate against a job applicant. This position is not affected by the absence of a complaint by a jobseeker.

I hope this helps to clarify the position.

DEFENCE

Joint Service Command and Staff College

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what *(a)* was his original estimate and *(b)* is his current estimate of the total cost of locating the new joint service command and staff college at Camberley; [14421]

(2) when his Department concluded that the works programme for the new joint service command and staff college would be delayed; and what reasons were given; [14422]

(3) what studies his Department has commissioned to investigate the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of locating the new joint service command and staff college at Camberley; from whom; and at what cost; [14423]

(4) if he has commissioned studies investigating the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of locating the new joint service command and staff college elsewhere than Camberley; from whom; and at what cost; [14424]

(5) what is his estimate of the financial involvement expected from the private sector in the provision of accommodation and services for the new joint service command and staff college; [14425]

(6) what sites in (i) Scotland, (ii) England and (iii) Wales he has examined as possible locations for the joint service command and staff college; [14426]

(7) how many proposals he has received for alternative locations for the joint service command and staff college; [14427]

(8) what is his estimate of the financial cost of the delay to the works programme for the new joint service command and staff college. [14428]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 9 February 1996]:* My Department has examined in detail the Royal Naval college Greenwich, the Army staff college at Camberley and RAF Bracknell as potential locations for the joint service command and staff college.

The estimated cost of establishing a JSCSC at Camberley, which I placed in the Library of the House on 31 March 1995 following the consultation period, was £208 million over 25 years at net present value. Our current estimate of the costs, on a comparable basis, is some £239 million.

The increase in estimated cost is principally the result of an increase in student numbers—from 312 to 367 on the main course—IT and academic support. These changes would be applicable to the JSCSC irrespective of its location, so the conclusion that Camberley is the most cost-effective and appropriate of the sites examined remains robust.

By bringing to the project private sector skills and disciplines, we expect to make significant savings over the current estimate. No proposals exploring the feasibility of alternative locations for the JSCSC have yet been received, nor will we be able to estimate the financial involvement from the private sector until we have received expressions of interest, for which we will advertise shortly.

In September 1995, we received the initial report from the works project manager and subsequently concluded that the works programme for the JSCSC buildings could not realistically be completed by September 1997.

We have since commissioned work to examine how staff training would best be delivered until the main works programme is complete. We have examined Queen Elizabeth Park barracks at Guildford and the royal military academy Sandhurst as possible options for an interim site for the JSCSC as well as split site options, but work to date indicates that RAF Bracknell is likely to be the most appropriate and cost-effective temporary site.

There will be some additional costs in establishing the JSCSC at an interim site and I will publish these once the formal appraisal of the options is complete. It will, however, enable us to avoid delay in introducing this key change to officer training, and, on current evidence, is also likely to be significantly cheaper than running on the existing staff colleges.

Details of the studies into the JSCSC are as follows:

£ thousand

Subject	*Consultant*	*Cost*
JSCSC options study locations for JSCSC	Building design partnership	43
Further investigations of Camberley site	Building design partnership	10
Detailed work to develop JSCSC proposals at Camberley	White Young (works project manager)	328
Site options within Camberley for junior college	Cecil Denny Heighton	12
Options for interim sites (not yet complete)	Campbell Reith Hill	[1]15

[1] Estimate.

Royal Flights

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give a breakdown of the sum spent by his Department on royal flights in civil aircraft in 1994–95. [14894]

Mr. Soames: The Ministry of Defence arranges commercial air travel for certain members of the royal family where such travel is made on official business and where a commercial aircraft would provide a more appropriate form of transport than a military aircraft. The details for 1994–95 are:

Destination	*Cost £*	*Member of the Royal Family*
Brasilia	[1]27,545	HRH The Prince of Wales
Zimbabwe	23,245	HRH The Princess of Wales
Geneva	[2]1,445	HRH The Princess of Wales
Los Angeles and Hong Kong	82,410	HRH The Prince of Wales
Japan	[3]24,906	HRH The Prince of Wales
Total	[4]160,000	HRH The Princess of Wales

[1] Relates to a visit made in an earlier financial year.
[2] Amount covers 2 separate visits.
[3] Amount covers the outward leg of the journey only. Payment for the return leg will fall in financial year 1995–96.
[4] Rounded to nearest £ thousand.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which members of the Government used the services of No. 32 (the Royal) Squadron in 1994–95 and the Queen's Flight in 1993–94. [14812]

Mr. Soames: The following members of the Government used the services of the Queen's Flight in financial years 1993–94 and 1994–95:

1993–94

Prime Minister;

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs;

Secretary of State for Defence;

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland;

Minister of State for Defence Procurement;

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence.

1994–95

Prime Minister;

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs;

Secretary of State for Defence;

Secretary of state for Northern Ireland;

Minister of State for the Armed Forces.

No. 32 (the Royal) Squadron was not formed until 1 April 1995.

Munitions Exports (Form F680)

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the nature and number of missiles and munitions involved and their destination country, together with the country named as an end user on each occasion Ministers or officials in his Department signed form F680 since 1985 covering the export of munitions or missiles having either a nuclear conversion capability or a nuclear engineered version. [14856]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have nothing to add to the replies that I gave to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *247-48*.

Unexploded Bombs

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the procedures to be followed by construction companies on *(a)* private sector building contracts and *(b)* Government contracts, when they discover unexploded bombs and other ordnance material in the course of excavation or other work; and if he will make a statement. [14303]

Mr. Soames: Any building contractor discovering a suspected piece of unexploded ordnance should immediately contact the local police, who, after conducting a risk assessment, will request assistance from the joint services EOD operations centre at Didcot. A service explosive ordnance team will be tasked to deal with the item.

International Criminal Tribunal

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many troops serving with the implementation force are under orders to co-operate with the international criminal tribunal; if this co-operation extends to *(a)* searching for, *(b)* reporting, *(c)* detaining and *(d)* handing over any persons suspected of committing crimes within the jurisdiction of the tribunal; and if he will make a statement. [14315]

Mr. Soames: NATO and IFOR fully support the efforts of the United Nations tribunal, which is responsible for investigating war crimes in the former Yugoslavia and bringing to justice those individuals indicted by the tribunal. IFOR has clear instructions to pass on to the tribunal any information it acquires about indicted war criminals, to detain any such individuals encountered during operations and to transfer them immediately to the tribunal. It is not part of IFOR's mandate to search for these individuals. The chief prosecutor of the tribunal has said that he is satisfied with the level of support offered by IFOR and has agreed that this should be provided within the limits of its mandate and available resources.

Land Mines

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what countries *(a)* the Ranger or *(b)* the Barmine mine systems have been exported. [14556]

Mr. Arbuthnot: It remains Government policy normally not to reveal details of specific exports. However, we have not exported land mines for over a decade.

Asbestos

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will take steps to expedite the processing of compensation claims relating to asbestos injuries relating to the work of his Department. [14349]

Mr. Soames: Claims for compensation from MOD civilian employees, both past and present, for asbestos-related illness are dealt with on our behalf by an insurance company. Neither the company nor the Ministry of Defence is aware of any unwarranted delay in settling these claims. However, if the hon. Member has specific cases in mind I should be glad to take them up.

Bosnia

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what have been the costs incurred by his Department in chartering merchant vessels to transport British troops and equipment to the IFOR operation in Bosnia. [14602]

Mr. Soames: The cost of chartering merchant vessels for the IFOR operation is £483,599.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by name of vessel and flag of registration the merchant vessels chartered by his Department to transport British troops and equipment to the IFOR operation in Bosnia. [14603]

Mr. Soames: The names and flags of registration of merchant vessels chartered for the IFOR operation are as follows:

Yuriy Maksaryov: Ukrainian

Elein K: Cypriot

Women Officers (Pregnancy)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total cost to public funds to date of compensating serving women who lost their service careers through pregnancy. [14008]

Mr. Soames: As at 5 February 1996, £5,704,197 has been paid to 342 officers discharged on grounds of pregnancy between 1978 and 1990—an average of £16,678 each.

Trident

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 18 December, *Official Report*, column *985*, what is *(a)* the full complement deployment of the two Trident submarines currently operational and *(b)* the full potential complement for HMS Victorious; for what reason there is a difference between these figures and the number of missiles collected by his Department

for deployment on (i) the two submarines and (ii) HMS Victorious. [14292]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Each of our Trident submarines is capable of carrying 16 missiles. To date, we have collected 32 missiles from the US, of which four have been test fired. I am not prepared to give details of missile deployment.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer of 18 December, *Official Report*, column *985*, if HMS Vigilant and HMS Vengeance will each need to conduct two test firings of Trident missiles before entering operational service. [14290]

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is the norm for each strategic submarine ballistic nuclear to conduct at least one test firing, as part of its demonstration and shakedown operation, before its entry into operational service. The actual number fired will depend on a variety of factors, including the requirement to gather launch data for various modelling purposes.

Aircraft Sales (Indonesia and Nigeria)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his current policy on the sale of *(a)* aircraft and *(b)* other armaments to Indonesia and Nigeria. [14345]

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is the Government's policy to support the sale of British defence equipment overseas where this is compatible with our political, strategic and security interests. All licence applications for the export of defence equipment are considered on a case-by-case basis in the light of established criteria, including the international guidelines to which we are committed. In particular, we do not export defence equipment that is likely to be used for internal repression.

In the case of Nigeria, the Prime Minister announced a full UK arms embargo against the Nigerian military on 11 November 1995. On 20 November 1995, the European Union adopted a full scope EU-wide arms embargo against the Nigerian regimes.

Equerries

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *537*, if he will list the differences between the stated duties of equerries and those of other staff responsible for visits, engagements and dealing with routine correspondence. [14888]

Mr. Soames: Equerries provide support across the full range of activities undertaken by members of the royal family but they have special responsibilities relating to the many ceremonies and military events in which the Queen, as head of the armed services, and other members of the royal family participate at home and abroad.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Deregulation

Dr. Spink: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what consultation he is undertaking with small and medium enterprises regarding deregulation. [13058]

Mr. Freeman: I have regular meetings with various representative bodies of small and medium businesses about deregulation. I have invited all businesses, including members of the Federation of Small Businesses, to write to me with details of those regulations which are unnecessarily hampering their business and have so far received over 400 replies. I am also responsible for implementing the small business litmus test, which requires all Government Departments to consult some typical small businesses to ensure they will not be disproportionately affected by proposed regulations.

Fire Safety Legislation and Enforcement

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he will publish his response to the recommendations made by the interdepartmental review of fire safety legislation and enforcement. [14670]

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he will announce his response to the interdepartmental review of fire safety legislation and enforcement. [14595]

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he will publish the response of the Government to the recommendations contained in the report of the interdepartmental review team into fire safety legislation and enforcement. [14846]

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to respond to the recommendations of the interdepartmental review of fire safety legislation and enforcement in the United Kingdom. [14796]

Mr. Willets: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) on 8 February, 1996, *Official Report*, column *283*.

Departmental Publications

Dr. Wright: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which of his Department's administrative manuals and internal guidance are now made public; and which remain private. [14020]

Mr. Willetts: The Cabinet Office and Office of Public Service make available internal guidance and administrative manuals in line with the Government's code of practice on access to Government information. A significant number of such documents have been published, including:

Code of Practice on Access to Government information.

Code of Practice on Access to Government Information: Guidance on Interpretation.

Civil Service Code.

Civil Service Management Code.

Departmental Report.

NDPBs: A Guide to Departments.

The Ombudsman in Your Files.

The Governments Guide to Market Testing.

Efficiency plans: Guidance for Development and Use.

Efficiency Scrutinies: Guidance for Ministers and Managers, Action Managers and Scrutiny Teams.

CCTA's Total Acquisition Process Guidance.

A Guide on Public Appointments Procedures.

A Review of Guidance on Public Appointments.

Dear Publisher Letter.

Dear Librarian Letter.

Dear Establishment Officer Letter.

Copyright: A brief guide for Government Departments.

HMSO catalogues.

Agencies' annual reports.

Agencies' framework documents.

This is not a complete list, as there is no central record of manuals made public, nor of those where disclosure is not in the public interest.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is his estimate of the expenditure of his Department and his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies on all forms of overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses for *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97. [11507]

Mr. Willetts *[pursuant to his reply, 7 February 1996, c. 203-04]:* I regret that the figure quoted on total expenditure by the Cabinet Office, including the Prime Minister's office and the Office of Public Service, and its executive agencies, excluding HMSO and the Buying Agency, on overseas travel, overseas accommodation and other associated expenses of £1,178,000 in 1993–94 was incorrect. The correct figure should have been £1,850,000.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

"Tackling Drugs Together"

39. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what recent consultations he has had with ministerial colleagues about the implementation of "Tackling Drugs Together"; and if he will make a statement. [13065]

Mr. Newton: I have received regular progress reports on the implementation of "Tackling Drugs Together" from ministerial colleagues. I am pleased to say that all Departments are on track with their major White Paper commitments. For example, the Department of Health has launched a £5 million per annum publicity strategy, run by the Health Education Authority; the Department for Education and Employment has disseminated guidance on drugs issues to all schools; and all criminal justice agencies have completed their operational reviews and are on track to produce their drug strategies in line with the White Paper. In addition, 105 drug action teams have been set up across England to tackle the drugs problem at local level, and have submitted their first plans.

SCOTLAND

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent on official hospitality by agencies associated with his Department in 1993–94, 1994–95 and projected for 1995–96. [9091]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is set out in the table.

Agency	*1993–94* £	*1994–95* £	*Projected budget 1995–96* £
Scottish Office Pensions Agency	2,232	628	1,000
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	700	1,015	1,015
Scottish Agricultural Science Agency	6,341	4,973	3,889
Student Awards Agency for Scotland	—	332	215
Historic Scotland	4,687	8,538	4,500
Scottish Courts Service	—	—	2,100
Scottish Prison Service	4,000	6,000	8,000
Scottish Record Office	185	117	1,166
Registers of Scotland	6,000	7,000	7,250
Total	24,145	28,603	29,135

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 14 December, *Official Report*, column *817*, if the figures for hospitality spending in 1994–95 and 1995–96 included expenditure by his Department's agencies. [9092]

Mr. Forsyth: No. Moreover, it has come to my attention that the information provided in my answer of 14 December was in other respects incomplete. This arose from a misunderstanding of the implications of a change made in the financial year 1990–91 to the arrangements for recording hospitality expenditure by my Department.

The corrected information is as follows:

1994–95: £79,510

1995–96: £89,868 (Projected outturn)[1]

Note:

[1] In addition, in 1995–96, the Scottish Office spent £34,680 on hospitality as part of the Government's contribution to the VE-day and VJ-day commemorations.

I regret that, for the same reason, information previously provided to hon. Members on hospitality expenditure for the years 1991–92 to 1993–94 was similarly incomplete. The correct information for these years is as follows:

1991–92: £83,836

1992–93: £125,118

1993–94: £76,088

Farm Holdings

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total number of farm holdings in Scotland, the number of *(a)* self-employed and *(b)* employed people working in Scottish agriculture, and the number of people employed in agricultural contract work (i) in 1978 and (ii) in the most recent year for which figures are available. [11967]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information required is shown in the table. The data on farm holdings and the farm work force are from the June agricultural census of main holdings and the information on agricultural contractors' employees is drawn from the March 1980—the nearest date to 1978—machinery census and the April 1994 survey of agricultural contractors.

	1978	1995
Number of holdings	31,090	32,800
Occupiers	23,600	21,700
Spouses	8,000	12,000
Employees	40,600	25,600

Figures rounded to nearest 100.

	1980	1994
Contractors' employees	960	1,090

Figures rounded to nearest 10.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of expenditure on all forms of hospitality and entertainment by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his Department's agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies, for (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1989–90, (iii) 1991–92, (iv) 1993–94, (v) 1994–95, (vi) 1995–96 and (vii) 1996–97. [11408]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* Following is the information:

Year	The Scottish Office £	Scottish Office Agencies £
1979–80	15,283	Not applicable
1989–90	60,173	Not applicable
1919–92	83,836	5,700
1993–94	76,088	24,145
1994–95	79,510	28,603
1995–96 (estimate)	[1]89,868	29,135
1996–97 (estimate)	86,400	26,825

[1] In addition, in 1995–96, the Scottish Office spent £34,680 on hospitality as part of the Government's contribution to the VE-day and VJ-day commemorations.

Information on hospitality spending by non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Prison Service

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what proportion of the prison population in Scotland is currently held in *(a)* secure prisons and *(b)* open prisons and related units; [14004]

(2) how many prisoners are currently held in open prisons and related units in Scotland. [14006]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of the questions relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 12 February 1996:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your two Questions relating to the current prison population in Scotland.

The information as at Friday 2 February 1996 is given in the table.

	Number of prisoners	Percentage[1]
Secure establishments		
Aberdeen	173	3
Barlinnie	1,070	20
Cornton Vale	171	3
Dumfries	135	2
Edinburgh	593	11
Friarton	65	1
Glenochil	531	10
Greenock	230	4
Inverness	122	2
Longriggend	155	3
Low Moss	319	6
Perth	456	8
Peterhead	194	4
Peterhead Unit	4	[2]—
Polmont	415	8
Shotts	448	8
Shotts Unit	9	[2]—
National Induction Centre, Shotts	27	[2]—
Sub-total	5,117	93
Open establishments		
Castle Huntly	105	2
Dungavel	89	2
Noranside	114	2
Penninghame	59	1
Sub-total	367	7
Total	5,484	100

[1] Components may not add to totals due to rounding.
[2] Less than 0.5.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the relative cost and latest estimate of keeping a prisoner in *(a)* secure prisons establishments and *(b)* open prisons and related units. [14005]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 12 February 1996:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your question about the relative cost and latest estimate of keeping a prisoner in (a) secure prison establishments and (b) open prisons and related units.

The average cost per prisoner place at HMP Prisons in Scotland in 1994–95 was £23,324 for secure prisons and £18,046 for open prisons and is estimated to be £23,217 and £18,150 respectively in 1995–96. This has been calculated as total net expenditure (excluding capital, Headquarters and other central costs) divided by the average number of places available.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what resources have been made available to the Scottish Prison Service in each of the last two financial years; what resources are proposed for the next financial year to support the drug reduction and rehabilitation programme; and if he will make a statement. [14581]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Mr. James Wallace, dated 12 February 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked the Chief Executive, Mr Frizzell, to reply to your Question about resources made available to the Scottish Prison Service in each of the last two financial years and resources for drug reduction and rehabilitation programmes in 1996–97. I am replying to his absence from the office.

The total net resources made available to the Scottish Prison Service was £162.5 million in 1994–95 (of which £15.4 million was capital) and £166.0 million in 1995–96 (of which £16.8 million was capital). The total net resources for 1996–97 is £173.9 million (of which £16.8 million is capital). Resources for 1996–97 will be allocated to governors of establishments on the basis of their strategic plans for all purposes: provision for drug reduction and rehabilitation programmes is not separately identified but is taken into account as appropriate in the budgets allocated for staffing, medical expenses etc.

Health Boards (Administrative Costs)

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the administrative costs of health boards expressed as a percentage of the total spend for each of the last five financial years for which figures are available. [14133]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is shown in the table. The figures have been calculated using audited annual accounts of health boards. From 1992–93 onwards, the percentage decreases relative to total spend are due to an increasing proportion of NHS administration costs being attributable to NHS trusts. The figures are not therefore directly comparable.

1990–91: 7.6 per cent.

1991–92: 7.4 per cent.

1992–93: 8.0 per cent.

1993–94: 6.0 per cent.

1994–95: 3.4 per cent.

Fishing Industry

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what factors determine the dates on which he *(a)* closes applications for financial assistance under the financial instrument for fisheries guidance and *(b)* announces the award of grant; and when he expects to give his decision in respect of applications for financial assistance under the financial instrument for fisheries guidance submitted for consideration in the current round. [14134]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The financial instrument for fisheries guidance—FIFG—schemes opened on 1 July 1994 and applications may be submitted at any time. However, to allow sufficient time to appraise, consult and select the best applications, only applications submitted earlier than three months prior to the planned announcement of awards are considered in that tranche. The timing of each tranche is determined by the number of applications and the total amount of grant sought, the quality of applications, and the availability of funds at the appropriate time to service successful projects.

The present intention is that the next round of FIFG awards will be announced in June 1996.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been *(a)* the grant value and *(b)* the number of applications for financial assistance under the financial instrument for fisheries guidance currently lodged with his Department which (i) have been received since the present round opened and (ii) have been carried over from an earlier round. [14136]

Mr. Robertson: There have been 42 applications seeking grant totalling £5,031,319 since the last tranche closed. In addition, there are 50 applicants carried over from previous rounds seeking grant of £7,765,172.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his oral answer of 5 February 1996, *Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, column 6, if he will relax his policy of non-disclosure in respect of the location and current possession of the timing device; and if he will make a statement. [14544]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has made it quite clear that he cannot discuss evidence in the case.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance he has given to general practitioner fundholders via their health boards concerning the placing of contracts for their long waiting list patients with individual private consultants and the British United Provident Association; if he will place a copy of such guidance in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [14883]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No specific guidance on this matter has been issued to general practitioner fundholders.

Glasgow Zoo

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) to which organisations CITES-listed animals from Glasgow zoo have been transferred; [14777]

(2) if he will set up an inquiry into the transfer of ocelots, Geoffroy's cats and margay cats from Glasgow zoo to other organisations. [14776]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not held centrally and my right hon. Friend has no reason to set up an inquiry. The Department of the Environment has issued Glasgow zoo with sales exemptions in relation to several ocelots, geffroy cats and margay cats, all of which are CITES listed animals. These exemptions allow Glasgow zoo to sell the animals within the UK. There is no requirement for the zoo to specify the destination of the animals.

HEALTH

NHS Pension Scheme

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the appeals procedure for members of the NHS pension scheme who have been refused pension benefits after submitting positive medical evidence that they can no longer follow their regular employment. [13568]

Mr. Malone: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the NHS Pensions Agency under its chief executive, Mr. A. F. Cowan. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from A. F. Cowan to Mr. William O'Brien, dated 12 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Health has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question as it falls within my area of responsibility.

There are no formal rights of appeal, but members of the NHS Pension Scheme have a number of avenues for challenging a decision affecting their pension rights. The NHS Pensions Agency operates it own internal procedures, involving reviews through senior officers not involved in the original decision. In ill-health retirement cases, where the Agency's medical advisors are unable to recommend acceptance of an application, they will at any time reconsider against further medical evidence.

If in any case a member remains dissatisfied with the Agency's decision they can request a formal determination by the Secretary of State, under Regulation U2 of the NHS Pension Scheme Regulations 1995 [SI 1995 No. 300]. If the dispute relates to a divergence of medical opinion it would be usual to seek an independent specialist's report before making a determination. Determinations are handled outside the Agency, by the NHS Executive.

If the member remains discontent they have the right to raise their complaint with the Occupational Pensions Advisory Board and the Pensions Ombudsman. The findings of the Ombudsman are binding upon the Scheme and may only be overturned by a High Court ruling.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the trustees of the NHS pension scheme. [13570]

Mr. Malone: The national health service pension scheme is a notionally funded statutory scheme set up under the provisions of sections 10 and 12 of the Superannuation Act 1972 and therefore does not have trustees.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the qualified medical advisors who advise on the payment of NHS pension benefits to NHS employees who are unable to continue their work because of illness. [13565]

Mr. Malone: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the NHS Pensions Agency under its chief executive, Mr. A. F. Cowan. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from A. F. Cowan to Mr. William O'Brien, dated 12 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Health has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question as it falls within my area of responsibility.

The NHS Pensions Agency receives independent medical advice under an agreement from BA Medical Services, part of the Department of Social Security. BAMS employ only registered full-time and sessional doctors to co-ordinate and provide advice to the NHS Pensions Agency. In doing so they may seek views of professional colleagues both inside and externally in order to reach consensus medical opinion on advice appropriate to each case.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many members of the NHS pension scheme who have had their application for retirement pension payment on ill health grounds turned down by his Department or the NHS executive have been the subject of an independent specialist medical report; and if he will make a statement. [13569]

Mr. Malone: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the NHS Pensions Agency under its chief executive, Mr. A. F. Cowan. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from A. F. Cowan to Mr. William O'Brien, dated 12 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Health has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question as it falls within my area of responsibility.

I am afraid I cannot provide information in the form requested except at disproportionate cost, because it would require a review of the files of the individuals concerned.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the procedure for applicants who apply for pension rights under the NHS pension scheme for a medical examination by the medical advisers appointed by his Department. [13567]

Mr. Malone: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the NHS Pensions Agency under its chief executive, Mr. A. F. Cowan. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from A. F. Cowan to Mr. William O'Brien, dated 12 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Health has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question as it falls within my area of responsibility.

In order to approve the award of an ill-health pension the NHS Pensions Agency must be satisfied that the illness will permanently prevent the member continuing in their employment. Applications must, therefore be supported by medical evidence. The type of evidence is not currently prescribed, but in all cases the Agency will seek advice upon it from its independent medical advisers, the Benefits Agency Medical Service (BAMS). Where it is appropriate, BAMS may seek a specialists report to augment the initial evidence. If BAMS cannot advise that the illness will permanently prevent the member continuing in their employment the Agency will usually reject the application, but procedures currently allow for the submission of further medical evidence at any time. This always leads reconsideration of the case by BAMS. I should add that once an ill-health pension is awarded, the Agency has no powers to withdraw it.

Northern RHA Headquarters

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on repairs, maintenance and improvement of the former Northern regional health authority headquarters at Benfield road, Newcastle, since January 1986; who owns the building; when it will be vacated; and what receipts from the sale of the lease or freehold of this building will be released. [13731]

Mr. Malone: Capital expenditure on repairs, maintenance and improvement of the former Northern regional health authority headquarters at Benfield road, Newcastle since 1986 totals £896,500, mostly before 1992. The building is owned by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Following the move of the staff from Benfield road to Durham in Spring 1996, the building will be occupied by Newcastle and North Tyneside district health authority, and North Tyneside family health services authority—Newcastle and North Tyneside health authority from 1 April 1996—who had previously occupied four separate

buildings in Newcastle and north Tyneside. As the property will remain in use for health service accommodation, there will be no receipts for the sale of the freehold.

Waiting List Helplines

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding was given to waiting list helplines in each of the last five years. [14055]

Mr. Horam: In 1992–93, the College of Health received £25,600 in support of the development of a national waiting list clearing house which encompassed a telephone helpline. A further £109,750 was allocated to the project in 1993–94.

Waiting times information is now available to the public on a freephone telephone link—0800 66 55 44—through the health information services which were established in 1993. For details of the funding for health information services, which is the responsibility of regional health authorities, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) on 25 January, *Official Report*, column *377*.

Patient Referrals

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what differences apply in relation to the options available to *(a)* fundholders and *(b)* non-fundholders when referring patients for treatment. [14063]

Mr. Malone: The difference between fundholding and non-fundholding general practitioners is the freedom fundholders have to manage resources and directly to purchase the care they judge best on their patients' behalf.

Multiple Sclerosis

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will be making a statement on the content of the executive letter to the national health service in November concerning new drugs for multiple sclerosis. [14093]

(2) if he will set out the guidelines which has been issued to authorities regarding the prescription of interferon-beta-1b for the treatment of multiple sclerosis. [14091]

Mr. Malone: Executive letter EL(95)97 about the introduction of beta-interferon drugs for multiple sclerosis was issued on 15 November 1995. It suggested that beta-interferon should be prescribed by hospital neurologists where clinically appropriate. The guidance was accompanied by clinical advice from the Standing Medical Advisory Committee. Copies of both documents are available in the Library.

Hospices

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is his policy on the provision of health authority funds to hospices; and if he will make a statement; [14109]

(2) what regulations or agreements cover the provision of NHS funds to assist in the running costs of hospices. [14108]

Mr. Horam: As with other services, health authorities have a duty to ensure that specialist palliative care services, including hospice care, are in line with the assessed health needs of their populations. Since 1994–95, funding for specialist palliative care has been built into health authorities' general funding allocations. Those providing the care, including hospices, receive funding from health authorities according to their contracts. The level and form of financial support is a matter for local negotiation.

Accident and Emergency Services (Private Hospitals)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of private hospitals provide full accident and emergency services. [14107]

Mr. Horam: This information is not collected.

Drugs (Side-effects)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent guidance he has issued in respect of side-effect warnings for *(a)* doctor-prescribed drugs and *(b)* drugs bought across the counter. [14057]

Mr. Malone: No guidelines have been issued. However all medicines have data sheets which give details of side-effect. New medicines now have patient information leaflets which also give this information, and all other medicines will have such a leaflet by 1998. Information on side-effects of medicines is also available in the "British National Formulary", which is provided free to all doctors by the Department of Health.

In addition, all health professionals are sent the bulletin from the Committee on Safety of Medicines, "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance", four times a year and the bulletin "Update" from the Chief Medical Officer, which contain information on the safe use of medicines whether they are prescribed by a doctor or brought over-the-counter. Both the Committee on Safety of Medicines and the Chief Medical Officer may also send out letters of advice to health professionals on specific issues as they arise.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what duty a doctor has in relation to informing patients about the side-effects of drugs. [14058]

Mr. Malone: Doctors have an ethical responsibility to inform patients about the treatment proposed, including the effects of prescribed medicines.

Renal Services

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will place a copy of the review of renal services commissioned by his Department in the Library; [14562]

(2) what assessment he has made of the review of renal services; and if he will make a statement. [14563]

Mr. Horam: We are still considering the review of renal services, including the question of publication, and intend to issue purchasing guidelines in time for the next contracting round.

Steroid Treatment (Deaths)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have died as a result of steroid treatment in each of the last five years. [14059]

Mr. Horam: Deaths in England and Wales due to adrenal cortical steroids—ICD[1] E932.0—causing adverse effects in therapeutic use, as an underlying or secondary cause of death[2]:

	Underlying cause	*Secondary cause*	*Total*
1988	0	9	9
1989	0	9	9
1990	1	9	10
1991	1	7	8
1992	0	5	5

[1] International Classification of diseases, 9th Revision.
[2] Does not include adverse effects from androgens and anabolic congeners (ICD E932.1) or ovarian hormones or synthetic substitutes (ICD E932.2).

Drugs Prescription

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if a drug which has been given market authorisation to be prescribed can be prevented from being administered to patients if the national health service executive so wishes; [14094]

(2) in what circumstances the national health service executive can restrict the prescription of a drug which has received market authorisation. [14092]

Mr. Malone: Doctors have the clinical freedom to prescribe the drugs their patients need, whether or not the product has a marketing authorisation or product licence. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has powers under the National Health Service Act 1977 to list in schedules 10 and 11 of the NHS (General Medical Services) Regulations 1992 drugs or other substances which are not to be prescribed, or which are to be prescribed only in certain circumstances, by general practitioners under the NHS. Drugs or other substances can be included in these schedules on the advice of the Advisory Committee for NHS Drugs and the Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances.

Doctor Recruitment

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the amount of money paid by NHS trusts to agencies for the purpose of recruiting doctors in each year since 1985. [14106]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally. It is the responsibility of trusts at local level to decide whether or not they wish to use an employment agency for the purpose of recruiting doctors.

Accident and Emergency Units (Doctors)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the NHS trusts which in the past 12 months used recruitment agencies to hire doctors on short-term contracts to work in accident and emergency units. [14104]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally. It is the responsibility of trusts at local level to decide whether or not they wish to use an employment agency.

Social Services Information

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has given local authorities advice on the purchase of social service information database systems. [14098]

Mr. Bowis: My Department has issued in various contexts advice on the importance of soundly based local information systems, and has provided nearly £50 million of supplementary credit approvals in cash terms over the period 1991–92 to 1995–96 for the purchase of computers and systems as part of the implementation of "Caring of People". The Department has also from time to time supported projects to develop information systems of use to social services departments, but in all cases decision to purchase a system is one for individual authorities to take.

Empty Buildings

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many empty buildings his Department currently owns; what is the cost of insuring and securing these buildings; how many were designed as residential properties; and what was the total amount spent by his Department on empty property taxes in each of the last five years. [14572]

Mr. Horam: The buildings occupied by the Department of Health are part of the Government common user estate. Vacant buildings on the common user estate are the responsibility of Property Holdings. Over the last five years, the Department of Health has not incurred any costs in respect of empty taxes on the common user estate.

Paediatric Consultant Posts

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS paediatric consultant posts are *(a)* currently unfilled or *(b)* filled by a locum; and how many of the vacant posts have been unfilled for (i) six months, (ii) 12 months, (iii) 18 months and (iv) 24 months. [14525]

Mr. Malone: Data are not available in the form requested. The available information is shown in the table.

Hospital staff in England—as at 30 September 1994 Paediatrics—vacant consultant posts

Consultants	*All vacant posts*		*Locum occupied*		*Unoccupied*	
	Number	*WTE*	*Number*	*WTE*	*Number*	*WTE*
Paediatrics	21	20.6	5	5.0	16	15.6
Paediatric neurology	1	1.0	1	1.0	—	—
Total	22	21.6	6	6.0	16	15.6

WTE = whole time equivalents.

EU Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he ensures that the negotiating brief for his officials discussing EU legislation takes fully into account the need to minimise the burdens on United Kingdom business. [13715]

Mr. Horam: Guidance on how officials are to apply deregulatory principles when negotiating EC regulations is contained in the booklet "Getting a Good Deal in Europe". This guidance has been supplemented by the recent publication of guidance on the preparation of compliance cost assessments, which stresses that the likely burdens on business highlighted by United Kingdom compliance cost assessment of EC proposals should be integral to the UK's negotiating strategy. Copies of both pieces of guidance are in the Library.

Unsafe Medicines

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statutory responsibility applies to the licensing authority in respect of the protection of public health from unsafe medicines. [14296]

Mr. Malone: Functions of the competent authorities of member states in respect of the licensing of medicinal products for human use are laid down in directive 65/65/EEC and subsequent EC legislation. For the United Kingdom, these functions fall to the licensing authority and these obligations and licensing requirements are set out in SI 1994/3144, the Medicines Acts and other relevant subordinate legislation. The requirements are intended to ensure that unsafe medicines are not marketed, and to safeguard public health.

Refugee and Asylum Seekers

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the services of *(a)* NHS general practitioners and *(b)* health visitors are available to refugee and asylum seekers; and if he will make a statement. [14492]

Mr. Malone: Refugees and asylum seekers have access to any NHS services which are immediately required.

Oral Contraceptives

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the risks posed by *(a)* second and *(b)* third generation oral contraceptives. [14293]

Mr. Malone: The safety of second and third generation combined oral contraceptives has been assessed according to normal procedures over a period of many years since they were first marketed. In October 1995, the Committee on Safety of Medicines, an independent expert advisory committee which advises the licensing authority, reviewed the safety of these oral contraceptives after new evidence about the cardiovascular risks associated with them became available. I refer the hon. Member to the statement my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made in the House on 23 October 1995, *Official Report*, columns 701–02.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the licensing authority will vary the product licences of combined oral contraceptives containing desogestrel and gestodene. [14295]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1149*.

Paracetamol Deaths

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths attributable to paracetamol were reported via the yellow card system for each year from 1990 to 1995; and what proportion of fatal reports received these deaths represented for each year. [14294]

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the table.

Suspected adverse reaction reports to the Committee on Safety of Medicines from 1990–1995 related to the use of paracetamol and all drugs in the United Kingdom

Year received	*Reports with a fatal outcome where paracetamol is a suspect drug (percentage of all fatal)*	*All reports where paracetamol is a suspect drug*	*Total number of reports to all human medicinal products with a fatal outcome*	*Total number of reports*
1990	3(0.91)	65	328	17,963
1991	2(0.43)	56	467	19,492
1992	1(0.22)	60	455	20,184
1993	3(0.64)	60	471	18,082
1994	1(0.25)	43	408	17,566
1995	3(0.63)	49	476	17,749

The table provides information on the numbers of reports of suspected adverse drug reactions received by the Committee on Safety of Medicines from health professionals over the period1990–1995. This includes the number of reports associated with paracetamol and with all drugs and the number associated with a fatal outcome. A report does not necessarily mean that the reaction was caused by the drug. Many factors influence reporting rate, comparisons across drugs may therefore be misleading.

Bradford Health Commission

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to announce the name of the chairman of the Bradford health commission. [14468]

Mr. Horam: Mrs. Zahida Manzoor was named as chairman of the proposed Bradford health authority in a press release issued by the Northern and Yorkshire regional office of the NHS executive on 21 December 1995.

GP Fundholding

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *810*, when information on GP fundholding savings will be available. [14890]

Mr. Malone: Information about fundholder efficiency savings for 1994–95 will not be available until final audits are completed.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has given to general practitioner fundholders via their family health service authorities concerning the placing of contracts for their long waiting list patients with individual private consultants and

BUPA; and if he will place a copy of such guidance notes in the Library. [14884]

Mr. Malone: The 1994 review of contracting guidance, which was issued to general practitioner fundholders, as well as district health authorities, encourages them to secure the best quality and value for money services possible from either NHS or independent sector providers. A copy of the guidance, EL(93)103, is in the Library.

Psychiatric Beds

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the average cost of a psychiatric bed in each year since 1980. [14876]

Mr. Bowis: The information is shown in the table.

Average cost of a psychiatric bed in the Hospital and Community Health Services in each year since 1980.

Year	*Unit cost £*
1980–81	16,600
1981–82	17,000
1982–83	17,000
1983–84	17,500
1984–85	18,300
1985–86	18,800
1986–87	20,500
1987–88	24,000
1988–89	26,300
1989–90	27,500
1990–91	28,700
1991–92	36,200
1992–93	38,500
1993–94	39,500

1. All figures are rounded to the nearest £100 and are expressed in real terms at 1993–94 prices using the gross domestic product deflators issued by Treasury on 20 November 1995.

2. Unit costs are calculated by dividing expenditure by available beds in the mental health sector of Hospital and Community Services.

3. Figures for 1991–92 onwards cannot be compared with those for earlier years due to changes in accounting practices following the NHS reforms.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what he estimates the level of savings to be from psychiatric bed closures since 1986. [14877]

Mr. Bowis: The reprovision programme for mental health has been geared to improved care and treatment of mentally ill patients. Closure or adaptations of old-style long-stay hospitals have resulted in resources being available for the provision of a spectrum of care, including new long-stay beds, hospitals, hostel and supported accommodation and services to support patients in home and homely settings. It is not possible to estimate an exact figure for this.

Clinical Negligence Scheme

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those trusts which *(a)* are and *(b)* are not members of the clinical negligence scheme in each region. [14774]

Mr. Malone: The latest information will be placed in the Library.

Psychiatric Care

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people his Department estimates need access to medium-secure psychiatric care; and how many beds are available in each region. [14878]

Mr. Bowis: The Glancy committee in 1974 recommended a total of 1,000 medium secure beds. By 1979, there were none provided. We are now on target to reach a total of 1,200 places in medium-secure units by the end of this year. A further 300 secure places are being developed from the mainstream NHS capital programme. In addition, there are about 450 places in other secure units and some 400 NHS-purchased places in the independent sector.

Assessment of further local needs is the responsibilities of the health authorities concerned.

For the number of beds in each NHS region, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) on 5 February, *Official Report*, columns *19–20*.

Registered Homes (Police Checks)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that owners, managers and staff of registered homes for the elderly are subject to police checks. [14874]

Mr. Bowis: The Registered Homes Act 1984 requires local and health authorities to ensure that anyone running or intending to run a residential care or nursing home is suitable to do so. Departmental guidance has been issued about procedures for making criminal checks on applicants for registration as owners or managers of homes. Regulations under the Act require anyone running a home to provide adequate and suitable staff, and it is for employers to ensure that procedures are in place for vetting prospective employees.

Special Transitional Grant

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *531*, when he will make available the special transitional grant figures. [14892]

Mr. Bowis: The Audit Commission is following up the outstanding audited returns for the 1994–95 special transitional grant. Final figures will not be available until all returns have been received and any queries raised by the auditors resolved with the local authorities concerned.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish indicative budgets for the special transitional grant in 1996–97; and what conditions will be applied to it. [14875]

Mr. Bowis: Indicative allocations of the special transitional grant for 1996–97 were issued to local authorities on 30 November. The conditions to be attached to the special transitional grant for 1996–97 will be announced shortly.

Child Abuse

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review his policy that, in the

event of a doctor being instructed by a local authority to carry out the examination of a child for signs of sexual abuse, the doctor does not owe a duty of care to the child or parents; and if he will make a statement. [14724]

Mr. Bowis: It is a matter of law, not policy, as set out in the judgment in the House of Lords in the case of M(A minor) and Another *v.* Newham London borough council that the doctor's duties in such cases are to the local authority by whom he is instructed.

Consultants Complaints Procedure

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review his policy that, under the hospital consultants complaints procedure, a complaint to the health service commissioner about a consultant's clinical judgment cannot progress to stage 3 if the consultant in question does not agree to co-operate; and if he will make a statement. [14725]

Mr. Horam: Under the existing legislation, the Health Service Commissioner may not investigate a complaint about action arising solely from the exercise of clinical judgment. The Government have introduced a Bill to extend the commissioner's jurisdiction to cover complaints about clinical judgment, and this is being considered currently by Parliament. The commissioner has wide-ranging powers to require co-operation with his investigations where necessary. There are no plans to change this.

Mental Health Services

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 25 January, *Official Report*, column *373*, what has been the annual expenditure on mental health services in each year since 1988–89 in each region. [14889]

Mr. Bowis: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Bolton Hospitals

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* administrative and *(b)* medical staff were on the staff of each Bolton hospital in each of the last five years. [10465]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 22 January 1996]:* The number of staff in each Bolton hospital is not available centrally.

Bolton Hospitals national health service trust attained trust attained trust status in April 1994. The only year for which administrative and clerical staff figures are available is 1994. Before then, administrative and clerical staff at the district health authority provided some services to directly managed units and so comparable figures for earlier years are not available.

The number of administrative and clerical staff is collected by the Department of Health's non-medical work force census. The census results are published at national level in a statistical bulletin, copies of which are available in the Library. Regional tables for the 1994 census will also be placed in the Library shortly. Results are not normally published below regional level but are available on request for 1994 at health authority, trust or directly managed unit level. Only limited detailed figures are available for earlier years.

Figures for medical staff are collected by the Department of Health's medical and dental work force census. Since some medical staff are reported at regional level rather than by the individual organisations for which they work it is not possible to identify all medical staff in individual organisations. The results of the medical and dental work force census are available at national and regional level in the Library.

References:

DH Statistical Bulletin Non-medical Workforce Census: 95/18;

DH Statistical Bulletin Non-medical Workforce Census: 1994/11;

DH Statistical Bulletin Non-medical Workforce Census: 13/93;

DH Statistical Bulletin Non-medical Workforce Census: 1/93;

DH Statistical Bulletin 1995/14: Medical and Dental Workforce Census 1984–1994;

DH Hospital Medical Staff—England and Wales Regional Tables 30 September 1994.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefit Payment Card

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will name the consortia bidding to act as prime contractors for the automated benefit payment scheme; when he will make a final decision on the contract; who will be the first group to receive the card; and when the system will become fully operational. [11752]

Mr. Heald: The final three shortlisted service providers are; Cardlink, UK, IBM and Pathway. Subject to a successful completion of the procurement process, we expect to award a contract by late spring. Our current planning assumption is that the first group to be issued with a benefit payment card will be child benefit customers, although this may be subject to change. It is expected that the first payments by card will be made in the autumn with full roll-out taking up to three years from that date.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the proposed social security smart card will bear a photograph of the claimant and have a memory capacity. [14862]

Mr. Heald: The card technology and security features are a matter for the supplier under the private finance initiative.

Decisions will not be finalised until a successful supplier is chosen. It is not mandatory for the initial version to be a smart card, but there will be provision to migrate to a smart card technology in the future if required.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what effect the possession of a nursery voucher will have *(a)* on a claimant's entitlement to income-related benefits and *(b)* on the child care disregard under family credit and disability working allowance. [13094]

Mr. Roger Evans: Possession of nursery education vouchers will not generally affect entitlement to income-related benefits. In family credit and disability working allowance, parents will continue to be eligible for help with the child care charges for which they pay, subject to the normal qualifying conditions.

Office Thefts

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* the number and *(b)* the value of items of equipment and furniture that have been (i) stolen and (ii) are otherwise unaccounted for from (1) DSS offices and (2) executive agency offices in each region, for each of the last five years; and if he will list by name those items valued at £5,000 or more. [13088]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. The Department of Social Security does not separately maintain centralised records of individual items stolen. Losses due to theft, fraud, arson or sabotage are recorded in a single category. The number of individual losses recorded within this category, and the total value for each of the last five years is in the table:

Financial year	*Number of individual cases*	*Total value £*
1990–91	364	89,799
1991–92	411	72,315
1992–93	94	84,500
1993–94	192	222,382
1994–95	360	851,020

The estimated total value of the Department's tangible fixed assets, excluding land and buildings, is approximately £330 million for 1994–95.

Benefits Agency Medical Service

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the savings to his Department resulting from the contracting out of the Benefits Agency medical service. [14769]

Mr. Burt: It is not possible at this stage to estimate the precise level of savings. However, experience of similar exercises within the Department has identified that both savings and a better service for customers are achieved by competitively tendering the service.

Income Support

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many recipients of income support payable with a disability premium also receive housing benefit; and what is the average amount payable. [14775]

Mr. Roger Evans: A total of 460,000 recipients of income support payable with a disability premium were also receiving housing benefit at an average weekly rate of £39.02 in May 1994, the latest date for which figures are available.

Source:
Housing benefit management information system annual 1 per cent. sample inquiry, taken May 1994.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many recipients of income support receive housing benefit; and what is the average amount payable. [14772]

Mr. Evans: In August 1995, the latest date for which information is available, 3.1 million income support recipients were receiving housing benefit, at an average weekly rate of £45.14.

Source:
Housing benefit management information system 100 per cent. quarterly caseload count taken August 1995.

Family Credit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently claiming family credit; and what are *(a)* the total administration costs and *(b)* the average weekly administration cost per beneficiary. [14773]

Mr. Roger Evans: As at 30 April 1995, 606,000 families were receiving family credit. The estimated total administration costs for 1993–94, the latest date for which information is available, was £53 million, an estimated weekly average cost of £1.90 per beneficiary.

Note:
Administration costs include an apportionment of DSS general and central administrative costs not related to specific benefits.

Sources:
Family Credit Statistics Quarterly Enquiry April 1995.
1995 Social Security departmental report.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average time it currently takes to process *(a)* a new claim for family credit and *(b)* a claim renewal. [13177]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 9 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what is the average time it currently takes to process (a) a new claim for Family Credit (FC) and (b) a claim renewal.

Statistics are produced on a monthly basis and the latest details available are for December 1995. These show the average clearance times to be as follows:-

New Claims: 11.87 working days

Renewal Claims: 10.90 working days

The Secretary of State for Social Security has set a target for the clearance of claims to FC. This is that 60% of claims be processed within 13 working days and that 95% be processed within 42 working days. As at 31 December 1995, the FC unit had cleared 70.4% within 13 working days and 98.3% within 42 working days.

The FC Unit also operates a Fast Track system for processing claims from the newly employed through the Employment Service. Information required for the assessment is provided by the customer's Client Adviser which enables the unit to assess the claim more quickly. Figures for the month ending 31 December 1995 show that 97.2% of customers using the Fast Track system had their claim decided in 5 working days.

I hope you find this reply useful.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants there are of invalidity

benefit; what is the annual cost; and what were the equivalent figures for *(a)* 1985 and *(b)* 1975. [14880]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

Year	*1975–76*	*1985–86*	*1995–96*
Number of claimants	[1]450,000	[1]849,000	[3]1,700,000
Expenditure[2] (£ million)	1,925	3,743	[4]7,713

[1] Figure for end November 1995, taken from a 5 per cent. sample of claims; excludes a small number of cases paid clerically.
[2] At 1995-96 prices.
[3] Taken from a 1 per cent. sample of claims. 1975-76 figures as at 31 May 1975.
[4] Latest estimate.

Child Benefit

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to reform child benefit. [14860]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Two reforms of child benefit are planned:

(i) Draft regulations are currently the subject of statutory consultation with the Social Security Advisory Committee and the local authorities. These restructure child and one-parent benefit to provide a more flexible mechanism for considering the relative level of support provided to lone parents as against that for two-parent families with children.

(ii) Clause 10 of the Asylum and Immigration Bill provides that persons who require leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom shall not be entitled to child benefit except under such conditions as may be prescribed in regulations. The intention is to bring child benefit into line with other social security benefits.

Benefit Claims

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average time for a claim renewal. [13174]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 9 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what is the average time for a claim renewal.

The benefits that require renewal claims are Family Credit, Disability Living Allowance, Disability Working Allowance and Attendance Allowance.

Statistics for the average clearance time of a renewal claim are produced on a monthly basis and the figures below show the year to date achievement between April 1995 and December 1995:-

Family Credit: 11.7 days

Disability Working Allowance: 18.5 days

Disability Living Allowance: 23.0 days

Information about Attendance Allowance could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Official Documents (Braille)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 is available in braille. [13446]

Mr. Burt: Yes. Braille copies of the Act can be obtained from the Department's information division. The Department has sent out a number of braille copies to individuals.

Disability Living Allowance

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the types of disability for which information is available for the numbers of *(a)* applications for, and *(b)* awards of, disability living allowance. [13561]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested. Information about a person's main disabling condition is recorded only where an award of disability living allowance is made. The table sets out the different types of disability and the numbers of first awards arising from initial, review or appeal decisions. Where there is more than one disabling condition, only the main condition is recorded.

Awards of Disability Living Allowance between 1 March 1993 and November 1995[1][2][3]

Main disabling condition	*Numbers (000s)*
Arthritis—including rheumatoid and osteoarthritis	131
Malignant disease—including cancer, carcinoma and leukaemia	63
Heart disease—including coronary, ischaemic, myocardial or heart attack	52
Disease of the muscles, bones or joints	47
Mental subnormality	43
Psychosis—including schizophrenia and manic depression	42
Spondylosis—including disc disease, cervical/lumbar etc	38
Chest disease—including bronchitis, emphysema, chronic obstructive airways disease and bronchiectasis	31
Cerebrovascular disease—including stroke, cerebral vascular accident and hemiplegia	27
Back pain—not specified	26
Asthma	23
Psychoneurosis—including anxiety, depression, phobia and hysteria	21
Epilepsy	18
Neurological diseases—not specified	17
Blindness	17
Trauma to limbs—loss of fingers/toes/amputation	15
Diabetes mellitus	14
Behavioral disorder—including enuresis and hyperactivity	10
Peripheral vascular disease including thrombosis and claudication	10
Multiple sclerosis	9
Major trauma other than traumatic paraplegia/tetraplegia	6
Renal disorders—including dialysis (not deemed)	5
Skin disease—including eczema and psoriasis	5
Deafness	5
Acquired immune deficiency syndrome—including human immune deficiency virus infection	4
Chronic fatigue syndromes—including myalgic encephalomyelitis post viral	4
Parkinson's disease	4
Dementia—including senile, pre-senile, Alzheimer's and traumatic	4
Bowel and stomach disease—including ulcer, constipation and not stated	4
Personality disorder	2
Blood disorders—including anaemia, clotting disorder and not specified	2

Awards of Disability Living Allowance between 1 March 1993 and November 1995[1][2][3]

Main disabling condition	*Numbers (000s)*
Multi system disorders, ie sarcoidosis, systemic and disseminated lupus erythematosus and scleroderma	2
Alcohol abuse	2
Metabolic disease—including phenylketonuria	2
Inflammatory bowel disease—including Crohn's ulcerative and colitis	2
Cystic fibrosis	2
Traumatic paraplegia/tetraplegia	2
Motor Neuron disease	1
Frailty—including senility/not specified	1
Severely mentally impaired	1
Haemophilia	—
Total parenteral nutrition—any cause	—
Haemodialysis	—
Multiple allergy syndrome	—
Double amputee	—
Hyperkinetic syndrome	—
Deaf/blind	—
Other unspecified conditions	[4]29
All conditions	742

Notes:
[1] Include first awards made on initial claims, on review and on appeal.
[2] Numbers do not sum owing to rounding.
[3] '—' Means nil or negligible.
[4] This data is not capable of being further broken down.
Source:
DSS (Analytical Services Division)—5 per cent. data.

Fraud, Northumberland

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the level of social security fraud in *(a)* Blyth Valley and *(b)* south-east Northumberland. [13489]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Statistics for individual fraud cases investigated by the Benefits Agency are collected for the Northumberland area, which covers Ashington, Berwick-on-Tweed, Blyth and Hexham, and are given in the table. Figures for organised fraud investigations are not available locally.

	Number of cases where fraud established	*Benefit savings £*	*Prosecutions*
1994–95	1,484	3,046,542	37
1995 to 31 October 1996	1,397	3,024,750	29

State Earnings-related Pension Scheme

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the SERPS pension that would be paid, on retirement, under current regulations to a person with an annual income of *(a)* £5,000, *(b)* £7,500 and *(c)* £10,000 and (i) 45 years contribution record and (ii) 30 years contribution record and no contributions in other years. [13767]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

Additional Pension £pw 1996–97 prices

	Annual gross income		
	5,000	*7,500*	*10,000*
45 years contributions	28.50	51.80	71.50
30 years contributions	20.10	35.80	48.90

1. It is assumed that the annual gross income was the same in all years at either £5,000, £7,500 or £10,000, i.e. that the gross income was at these levels in 1978 and was not increased in line with increases in prices or earnings.
2. It is assumed the individual retires at SPA in 2023 after a working life of 45 years. Where the individual has made just 30 years of contributions it is assumed that their working life was also 45 years, but that they did not contribute in every third year.
3. In the calculation of additional pension, earnings have been revalued on the basis of historical data from the Average Earnings Index: all employees and on the assumption of constant future real terms earnings growth of 2 per cent. per annum.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his yield from employers class 1A national insurance contributions on *(a)* company cars and *(b)* fuel for the year 1996–97. [13773]

Mr. Heald: The latest estimate for the total class 1A receipts to the national insurance fund in 1996–97 from both company cars and fuel is £439 million. Of that total £379 million is attributable to cars and £60 million to fuel.
Source:
Government Actuary's Department.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many employees fell *(a)* below the lower earnings limit and *(b)* above the upper earnings limit for national insurance contributions in each year since 1978. [14628]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is below.

The estimated number of employees who fell below the lower earnings limit at April 1994 is 2.7 million[1].

Information regarding the number of employees earning at the upper earnings limit and above for every week in the tax years from 1986–87 to 1992–93 is in the table.

Tax year	*Number of employees (millions)*[2]
1986–87	1.09
1987–88	1.27
1988–89	1.59
1989–90	1.74
1990–91	1.82
1991–92	1.70
1992–93	1.84

Source:
[1] New Earnings Survey and Labour Force Survey.
[2] 1 per cent. sample of national insurance records.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the amounts paid out on benefit claims from political refugees and asylum seekers

in the United Kingdom over the last five years for which figures are available. [14010]

Mr. Roger Evans: Information about benefit expenditure in relation to political refugees is not available because they are not identified separately in departmental records. Information about asylum seekers has been recorded only for income support purposes from May 1993. Estimated annual expenditure is set out in the table.

Asylum seekers claiming income support: estimated annual expenditure

Enquiry data	*Estimated annual expenditure (£ millions)*
May 1993	105
May 1994	124
February 1995	125

Notes:

1. Expenditure has been rounded to the nearest million.
2. Estimated annual expenditure has been calculated by multiplying the number of cases by the average weekly income support paid, then by multiplying the resulting figure by 52.
3. Figures given relate to Great Britain. No data are available in this format for Northern Ireland.
4. Data was not collected prior to 1993.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Enquiries May 1994 and February 1995. Income Support Annual Enquiry 1993.

One-parent Benefit

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of those currently claiming one-parent benefit are *(a)* single, *(b)* divorced, *(c)* widowed, *(d)* legally separated and *(e)* living apart. [14011]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many parents under the age of 25 years are currently in receipt of one-parent benefit. [14012]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: It is estimated that there are 107,500 parents aged under 25 who are in receipt of one-parent benefit.

Retirement Pensioners

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the total sum of the social security budget for the financial year 1996–97 which will be devoted to benefits, pensions and other payments made to people over retirement age. [14013]

Mr. Heald: The information is set out in table 5 of the 1995 social security departmental report (Cm 2813), a copy of which is in the Library.

The 1996 departmental report, to be published at the end of March, will include updated figures. Copies of the report will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the total cost of increasing the state retirement pension level by £1 for every entitled pensioner in the financial year 1996–97. [14014]

Mr. Heald: The gross cost of giving all pensioner who receive some basic retirement pension a flat £1 per week increase in their pension is £540 million in the 1996–97 financial year. This cost includes giving £1 per week to the small number of pensioners receiving non-contribution retirement pensions.

The total cost, net of income related benefits is estimated at £400 million.

Note: All costs are rounded to the nearest £10 million.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the change in income in real terms of the average pensioner since 1979; and how this is made up between *(a)* state retirement pension, *(b)* state earnings-related pension scheme and *(c)* personal or occupational pension. [14859]

Mr. Heald: Pensioners' average gross incomes increased by 50 per cent. in real terms between 1979 and 1993, the latest available information—a rise of £56.80 per week. It is not possible to provide separate figures for basic retirement pension and SERPS but taken together they account for approximately a quarter of the increase, while occupational pensions account for about two-fifths. No separate information on personal pensions is available.

Source:

Family Expenditure Surveys 1979 and 1993.

Note:

The information contained in this reply is based upon pensioner units. A pensioner unit is defined as a single person over state pension age or a couple where the head of the household, or husband, is over state pension age.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many persons of pensionable age are in receipt of *(a)* occupational pension, *(b)* personal pension and *(c)* state earnings-related pension scheme. [14870]

Mr. Heald: The latest information available shows that 6.5 million people were in receipt of an occupational pension in 1991, and that an estimated 60 per cent. of occupational pensioners are over state pension age[1]. A total of 4.2 million people were in receipt of a SERPS pension in March 1995. It is estimated that in 1993–94, around 150,000 taxpayers over state pension age were in receipt of income from a personal pension[2].

Source:

1. GAD Survey of Occupational Pension Schemes 1991 and DSS statistics.
2. Inland Revenue. This figure relates to taxpayers only. There will also be non-taxpayers in receipt of a personal pension, but no data is available on this group.

Private Pensions

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total sum invested in funded private pensions in the United Kingdom; and what are the equivalent figures for *(a)* each country in the European Union and *(b)* each country in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. [14861]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

£ billion cash prices

	Estimated fund
UK	600
Germany	157
Netherlands	138
Sweden	53
Denmark	38
France	33
Finland	20
Belgium	12
Spain	11
Ireland	9
Italy	5
Portugal	4
Greece	1
Austria	1
Luxembourg	Negligible

Sources:

1. Finnish and Swedish data relate to 1993 and are from Finnish Central Pensions Institute.
2. UK data from DSS estimate, and relates to 1993.
3. Austrian data from Austrian Government, and relate to 1994.
4. Other data from "Supplementary Pensions in the European Union"; 1994. Data for Greece relate to 1989; for Italy, Belgium and Denmark to 1991; for france to 1991/92; for Germany, Netherlands, Spain and Ireland to 1992; and for Portugal to 1992–93.

Note:

Information on the level of pension funds in OECD countries, other than for those countries which are members of the EU, is not available.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the effects of reduced equity investment yields on the incomes to beneficiaries of occupational and personal pensions. [14873]

Mr. Heald: All things being equal, any reduction in yield would mean that members of occupational and personal pension schemes would retire with lower pensions or that they and their employers would have to contribute more.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of contributors to occupational pension schemes in *(a)* 1966, *(b)* 1975, *(c)* 1985 and *(d)* 1995. [14868]

Mr. Heald: Information on the number of active members of occupational pension schemes, some of whom will be in non-contributory schemes, is given by the "Survey of Occupational Pension Schemes" by the Government Actuary's Department. This is conducted every four years. The available information is in the table. Data for 1995 are not yet available.

Year	*Active members of occupational pension schemes (millions)*
1967	12.2
1975	11.4
1983	11.1
1987	10.6
1991	10.7

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many retired persons were in receipt of occupational private pensions in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1995. [14863]

Mr. Heald: It is estimated that around 6.5 million people were in receipt of an occupational pension in 1991, the latest year for which information is available. Some of these people received more than one pension. The total number of occupational pensions in payment was 7 million. In 1979, there were 3.7 million occupational pensions in payment; information on the number of people receiving these pensions is not available.

Source:

GAD Survey of Occupational Pension Schemes 1991.

Long-term Sick and Disabled People

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the current total spending on long-term sick and disabled people and their carers; and what were the equivalent figures for 1979, 1985 and 1990. [14869]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

£ million

Year	*Long-term sick and disabled*
1978–79	1,770
1985–86	5,220
1989–90	8,420
1994–95	19,600

Figures include payments to carers.

WALES

Cardiff Bay Land Sales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average price per acre of land sold for *(a)* industrial, *(b)* housing and *(c)* office development by the Cardiff Bay development corporation in each year since 1989. [14304]

Mr. Hague: I have asked the chief executive of the Cardiff Bay development corporation to write to the hon. Member and will arrange for a copy of his reply to be placed in the Library of the House.

EU Funding

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was for each county and for Wales in constant prices for each of the last four years for which figures are available *(a)* the total amount and *(b)* the amount per 100,000 population in pounds sterling of money received in grants from the European Union, indicating for each year the percentage change for each category. [13395]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The figures are not readily available by county. For Wales, the information is as follows for each structural fund.

European Regional Development Fund[1]

£ million at 1995 prices

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Total amount[2]	73.664	46.129	51.141	52.519
Amount/100,000 population[3]	2.548	1.591	1.760	1.803
Percentage change	—	[4]–38	+11	+2

[1] Figures relate to payments made in the financial years specified.
[2] Using GDP deflator at 1 December 1995.
[3] Population figures based on the Registrar General's mid-year estimates office of Population Censuses and Surveys.
[4] The decrease in European regional development fund payments made during 1992–93 was a result of the delayed approval of the 1992–93 operational programmes.

European Social Fund[1]

£ million at 1995 prices

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Total amounts[2]	20.882	19.809	38.087	37.481
Amount/100,000 population[3]	0.722	0.683	1.310	1.287
Percentage change	—	–5	+92	–2

[1] Figures relate to expenditure in a calendar year; the information is not available by financial year.
[2] Using GDP deflator at 1 December 1995.
[3] Population figures based on the Registrar General's mid-year estimates—office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund[1]

£ million at 1995 prices

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Total amount[2]	108.639	121.707	171.339	167.368
Amount/100,000 population[3]	3.757	4.199	5.895	5.745
Percentage change	—	+12	+40	–3

[1] Figures relate to receipts from the EC.
[2] Using GDP deflator at 1 December 1995.
[3] Population figures based on the Registrar General's mid-year estimates—office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

National Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 5 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *58*, what assessment he has made of the factors underlying the increase in numbers in Wales classified as NVQ sub-level 1 and the decrease in the numbers classified as NVQ level 2 between 1993–94 and 1994–95; and if he will make a statement. [14908]

Mr. Hague: NVQ sub-level 1 relates to basic skills training in literacy and numeracy. My Department has encouraged training and enterprise councils in Wales to do more to promote these qualifications as a means of helping unemployed people who need to improve their basic skills to find work. I am very encouraged by the improvement in the number of trainees achieving these qualifications.

There is no obvious explanation for the decrease in the number of level 2 NVQs achieved, but is more than compensated for by the increase in the attainment of the other levels.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Morgan: To ask Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of his recent departmental letter of guidance to the South Glamorgan family health services authority encouraging the use of individual private consultants and the British United Provident Association by general practitioner fundholders to obtain out-patient and in-patient access to consultants for their long waiting list patients; [14882]

(2) if the recent departmental letter of guidance to the South Glamorgan family health services authority on the placing of contracts by general practitioner fundholders for their long waiting list patients with individual private consultants and BUPA has been copied to the other family health service authorities; what representations he has received on its contents; and if he will make a statement. [14885]

Mr. Hague: I have arranged for a copy of the correspondence with South Glamorgan family health services authority to be placed in the Library of the House. It has not been copied to other health authorities.

The letter neither encourages nor discourages the use of private consultants or hospitals. It is the duty of all commissioners, whether health authorities or fundholders, to provide the best possible care for the patient, having regard to value for money and the patient's best interests. If earlier treatment can be obtained in the private sector, I expect commissioners to consider this option rather than allow a patient to suffer unnecessarily.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 13 February 1996

ENVIRONMENT

Empty Buildings

Dr. Lynne Jones : To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many empty buildings his Department currently owns; what is the cost of insuring and securing these buildings; how many were designed as residential properties; and what was the total amount spent by his Department on empty property taxes in each of the last five years. [14574]

Sir Paul Beresford: Property Holdings is responsible for the whole of the Government civil office estate known as the common user (office) estate in which Government Departments and their agencies are housed. At 31 December 1995 there were 195 empty buildings on the CUE, 38 owned by the Government and the remainder held on lease.

As a general rule, the Government carry their own insurance risk. Where premises are leasehold, some landlords require formal insurance cover. This invariably forms part of the service charges. The security and insurance elements within such charges cannot readily be disaggregated and consolidated without disproportionate cost.

Until vacation the empty properties on the CUE have been used by the Government as business premises. An assessment of their original design criteria is not available centrally.

The Government make a contribution in lieu of rates on their CUE properties. The figures for payments of CILOR made by Property Holdings on its vacant space, leased and owned, are as follows:

1991–92: £16.0 million

1992–93: £18.0 million

1993–94: £17.2 million

1994–95: £15.0 million

1995–96: £24.6 million (estimate)

Sewage Outfalls (Solent)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was the length of the sewage outfall pipe at Norton for which the National Rivers Authority gave its discharge consent; and what is the actual length of the pipe as it now exists; [14335]

(2) if he will list those outfall pipes that *(a)* have been and *(b)* have not been measured for length by the National Rivers Authority for which it has discharge consent; [14323]

(3) when the National Rivers Authority measured the outfall pipes for which it has given consents. [14341]

Mr. Clappison: I understand that the National Rivers Authority does not usually measure the length of outfalls, but does verify locations of the discharge positions. The consent for the discharge at Norton, which pre-dates the establishment of the NRA, does not specify a pipe length but does specify the discharge location by national grid reference.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what assessment the National Rivers Authority has made of the advantages of introducing a computer model of the tidal flow off the Norton outfall; [14339]

(2) when the National Rivers Authority expects to have a model for the flow of dispersal off the Norton outfall. [14340]

Mr. Clappison: I understand that the National Rivers Authority already has a model which can be applied to any discharge to the Solent.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the National Rivers Authority gave permission for the discharge of sewage on the flood tide at Norton. [14337]

Mr. Clappison: I understand that, since its establishment in 1989, the National Rivers Authority has not altered the discharge consent for the Norton outfall.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what enforcement action the National Rivers Authority intends to take for non-compliance with its consents at the Norton outfall. [14336]

Mr. Clappison: I understand that the National Rivers Authority is not aware of any current breaches of the consent for the Norton outfall.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the National Rivers Authority's response to the imposition of tertiary treatment plants for Solent outfalls. [14324]

Mr. Clappison: There is no requirement for tertiary treatment in the Solent.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies the NRA has made of the closure of the Totland outfall and the consequential effects on outflow at Norton; and what studies were made by the NRA of increasing the volume of discharge inside the Solent as opposed to outside it. [14408]

Mr. Clappison: I understand that the National Rivers Authority has carried out monitoring at Totland for bathing water directive and other purposes. Bacteriological quality at Norton foreshore has also been monitored by the NRA and has shown an improvement since 1993.

Detailed studies of the dispersion characteristics of the Solent for the purposes of the urban waste water treatment directive have resulted in a requirement for full secondary biological treatment for all significant sewage discharges into these waters.

Solent Shellfish Beds

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to designate the Solent's

native oyster beds under the biodiversity plan; and what other bi-valve oyster beds and eco-systems in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the EU are of similar ecological importance. [14409]

Mr. Clappison: "Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report", published on 13 December 1995, contains no plans to designate the Solent's native oyster beds. The report does recommend that the native or European oyster, *Ostrea edulis*, be among 1,253 species whose conservation status should be monitored. The Government expect to publish their response to the report in spring of 1996.

Important native oyster beds are found in the Fal and Helford estuaries, River Tamar, River Lynher, the Crouch, Blackwater, Roach and West Mersea estuaries in England; Loch Ryan in Scotland and Milford Haven and Swansea bay in Wales. In the European Union important native oyster beds include Oosterscheldte in the Netherlands and the north Brittany coast around St. Malo in France.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment the National Rivers Authority has made of the advantages of monitoring the Solent under the shellfish waters directive. [14334]

Mr. Clappison: The National Rivers Authority is the competent authority for reporting compliance with and enforcing the shellfish waters directive. It is required to monitor all the areas of the Solent designated under the directive.

Areas of Special Scientific Interests

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on *(a)* restoration orders for areas of special scientific interest and *(b)* the consultations he has had about extending his powers under section 31 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. [14591]

Mr. Clappison: We have agreed in principle to consult on the extension of the powers of the court to make an order requiring restoration when the special interest of such a site is damaged.

Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the level of finance for the Joint Nature Conservation Committee for each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [14606]

Mr. Clappison: The budget allocated to the Joint Nature Conservation Committee by English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Council for Wales over the past five years has been:

1991–92: £3.955 million

1992–93: £5.050 million

1993–94: £4.900 million

1994–95: £5.008 million

1995–96: £4.735 million

This funding has enabled the country agencies to carry out those special functions relating to nature conservation in Great Britain as a whole and beyond Great Britain which are exercised through the joint committee.

River Humber

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what account he takes of topography and salinity when deciding the outer estuarine boundary of the River Humber; [14955]

(2) if he will now receive the outer estuarine limit of the Humber under the urban waste water directive taking account only of objective criteria. [14956]

Mr. Clappison: The National Rivers Authority has been asked to review the basis for establishing estuary boundaries for the purposes of the urban waste water treatment directive, including the relevance of salinity and topography, and to advise my Department accordingly.

Global Temperature Increases

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department is taking to monitor global temperature rises. [14928]

Mr. Clappison: The Department receives regular reports from the Meterological Office about global temperatures.

EU Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on which occasions in the last three years officials have vetoed draft EU legislation on the grounds that a fiche d'impact had not been correctly prepared. [13654]

Sir Paul Beresford: Since the implementation of the Maastricht treaty all EC environmental legislation has been adopted under qualified majority voting and a veto cannot apply. The correct preparation of fiches d'impact is a very important part of our consideration of proposals for EC legislation. It is one of the factors taken into account when Ministers consider the UK's negotiating position on a particular proposal.

Supplementary Credit Approval, Hull

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce his response to the revised bid of the City of Hull for SCA 1996–97. [14965]

Sir Paul Beresford: An announcement will be made in the near future.

Local Government Reorganisation

Sir Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what he intends to be the implementation date of the reorganisation of local government in areas for which orders have not yet been made. [15380]

Mr. Gummer: As I said in my statement on 30 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns 1333–52, we envisage staging the implementation of reorganisation in England to take account of the resources available. We also needed to allow time to receive and consider representations on the Local Government Commission's final report which was submitted on 19 December, and, where we accept recommendations for change, to consult on draft orders. With these considerations in mind we have reluctantly concluded that implementation of reorganisation in the remaining areas for which we have

not already laid orders cannot take place in 1997. I intend to make a further announcement setting out our decisions on the recommendations in the commission's final report, and the timing of the remaining orders, as soon as possible.

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he has made in conducting the market test of the management of the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre. [15381]

Mr. Gummer: I have now decided to award a five-year service level agreement to the in-house team, based on the existing executive agency for the conference centre. It will take effect from 1 April 1996. Having considered the advice of a steering group and of consultants, KPMG, I am satisfied that the bid submitted by this team offers better value for money than those received from elsewhere. It also satisfies the quality and security requirements set for the test.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Duchy Benevolent Fund

Mr. Pike: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the grants distributed from the Duchy benevolent fund in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995. [14945]

Mr. Freeman: Lists of grants distributed from the Duchy of Lancaster benevolent fund for the last three years would run to several hundred items. A list of donations made to charitable causes in the County Palatine in 1993, before the fund became a registered charity, was placed in the Library on 2 February 1994.

I am not a trustee of the fund. As a properly constituted charity, the trustees produce an annual report and accounts to the Charity Commissioners which is open to public scrutiny. The accounts show all donations except the many grants below £1,000 which are made on behalf of the trustees by the lords lieutenants of Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside who are all trustees of the fund.

If the hon. Member would like details of donations made to organisations or individuals in his local area, I shall arrange for the secretary of the fund to provide the information.

Parliamentary Commissioner

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals he has to change the 1995–96 cash limit for the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner and health service commissioners. [15285]

Mr. Freeman: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner and health service commissioners—class XIX vote 4—will be increased by £702,000 from £9,000,000 to £9,702,000. The increase is in response to growth in the work load of the office and to prepare for the work which will be generated by the Health Service Commissioners (Amendment) Bill, which was debated in another place last night.

EU Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he is taking to support the President of the European Commission's policy of less but better legislation and to improve the operation of the fiche d'impact procedures. [13656]

Mr. Freeman: Through my contacts with the Commission and with Ministers in other member states I have been pressing for improved regulatory systems at the European level, a rolling programme of regulatory reviews and action on a number of specific burdensome directives. At the informal meeting of the Internal Market Council to be held later this month, I shall share our experience of compliance cost assessment as a contribution to the current review of the Commission's impact assessment systems.

TRANSPORT

Swapbody Freight Containers

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total amount of investment *(a)* estimated to be required to make lines suitable for the passage of European swapbody freight containers and *(b)* which has already taken place for such conversion, indicating the location, in respect of each main rail route and for Great Britain; and if he will make a statement. [14234]

Mr. Watts: BR has upgraded existing railway infrastructure at a cost of some £26 million to facilitate the carriage of standard European swapbodies and containers between the channel tunnel and terminal sites at Glasgow Mossend, Liverpool Seaforth, Manchester Trafford Park, Wakefield Normanton, Birmingham Landor Street and London Willesden. It will be for Railtrack to consider the commercial case for undertaking further loading gauge clearance work in the light of demand for freight services.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance he has issued to personnel management staff within the Driving Standards Agency concerning retraining following a formal complaint under chapter 17 of his Department's staff handbook. [14440]

Mr. Norris: The Driving Standards Agency is producing a revised course on new desk instructions.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each agency within his Department his plans for changes to annual staff reporting and promotion procedures. [14432]

Mr. Norris: I have none. However, where the chief executives of my Department's agencies have such plans, these are shown:

DRIVER AND VEHICLE LICENSING AGENCY

Promotion

Planning to introduce changes to the internal job application and promotion procedures. A new application form covering both procedures will support more objective assessments of the skills required for the advertised post and the applicant's suitability for it.

DRIVING STANDARDS AGENCY

Planning to review the current staff reporting and promotion procedures.

HIGHWAYS AGENCY

Annual staff reporting

Will pilot a new staff appraisal system in 1996–97 with a view to introducing it in 1997–98. The new system aims to improve the accuracy and consistency of reporting standards, provide a more effective means for staff and their managers to identify development needs and to encourage a frequent and constructive dialogue on performance.

THE COASTGUARD AGENCY

Annual staff reporting

Aiming to introduce changes from November 1996.

VEHICLE CERTIFICATION AGENCY

Annual staff reporting

Planning to introduce new appraisal and reporting procedures in 1997–98.

VEHICLE INSPECTORATE

Promotion

Developing arrangements for selecting the most suitable applicants for posts by means of assessment centres.

Disciplinary Procedures

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice he has issued to staff in the personnel management section of the Driving Standards Agency on the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service guidance on disciplinary procedures. [14444]

Mr. Norris: The Driving Standards Agency follows the Department of Transport's disciplinary procedures. They are aware of the ACAS guidance and the Department of Transport is reviewing its disciplinary procedures.

Railway Contracts

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what contracts have been awarded by Railtrack to Hall and Tawse; and what work under these contracts has been subcontracted to British Rail maintenance departments. [14486]

Mr. Watts: I understand that Railtrack plc has awarded contracts to Hall and Tawse for rapid response and planned maintenance work. Hall and Tawse have subcontracted two small specialised work packages (about 1 per cent. of total contract value) covering professional inspection and track possession management advice to BR infrastructure maintenance companies.

Chingford-Liverpool Street Train Crash

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the causes of the Chingford-Liverpool Street train crash on 19 September 1995 and the remedial action that has been taken. [14301]

Mr. Watts: The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate has conducted its investigation into this accident and is now considering what further action to take. It would be inappropriate to comment on the cause pending that decision.

Staff Clothing

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) which offices of his Department have dress codes for administrative staff; [14413]

(2) if male staff in his Department are allowed to wear earrings; [142395]

(3) if he will make a statement on the factors which led to the decision not to include staff at grade 7 and above in the dress guidelines issued to staff of the north eastern traffic area office on 29 January; [14400]

(4) what are the requirements on female staff in the dress guidelines issued to staff of the north eastern traffic area office on 29 January; [14396]

(5) what representations he has received in the last 12 months from members of the public with regard to the dress and appearance of staff of the north eastern traffic area office; [14443]

(6) what plans his Department has to introduce a dress code for the administrative staff employed in the north eastern traffic area office; [14414]

(7) if female staff of the north eastern traffic area office are allowed to wear leggings; and if he will make a statement; [14398]

(8) which traffic area officers were visited by the clerk of the north eastern traffic area office in his assessment of the dress guidelines issued on 29 January; [14399]

(9) what instructions he has given to the clerk of the north eastern traffic area office on the matter of a dress code for staff below grade 7 in that office; [14442]

(10) what financial assistance he plans to make available to staff of the north eastern traffic area office to meet the costs of appropriate clothing set out in the dress guidelines issued on 29 January. [14397]

Mr. Norris: The Department's position on dress code is that staff who are required to wear a uniform while on official duty are provided with such uniforms. For other staff, there is no formal dress code nor instructions as to male earrings or leggings for females. This is left as a matter for discussion between local management and the individuals concerned.

The dress guidelines for clerical staff in the North Eastern traffic area office have been suspended pending discussions with the trade union side. There are separate guidelines for staff in the management grades, which include the grade 7 clerk, agreed with the Public Services, Tax and Commerce Union locally.

The dress guidelines had been prepared to give staff an indication of what is considered suitable in the light of the TAO's wish to improve the image and service that it presents to the public. There are no plans to provide additional financial support.

Rail Services, Greater Manchester

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of state for Transport how much will be paid by the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising to the British Railways Board for the operation and marketing of passenger rail services in Greater Manchester in 1996–97; and how much in 1996–97 prices was paid by Greater Manchester passenger transport executive in 1995–96. [14614]

Mr. Watts: The Office of Passenger Rail Franchising is currently negotiating a contract with the British Railways Board for the provision of passenger rail services including those currently supported by Greater Manchester PTE for 1996–97. When this is completed it will be possible to indicate only the amount of support paid for each train operating company, not the amounts paid for specific areas. The amount paid by Greater Manchester PTE is a matter for it or for the British Railways Board.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which organisation will become responsible from 1 April for the services for the *(a)* marketing, *(b)* promotion and *(c)* provision of information about passenger rail services currently provided by Greater Manchester passenger transport executive; and what sums will be allocated for these purposes in 1996–97. [14615]

Mr. Watts: From 1 April 1996, the train operating company, North West Regional Railways, will be responsible for these activities, and for funding them.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which organisations will be responsible for the compilation of timetable information for Greater Manchester passenger rail services after 1 April. [14613]

Mr. Watts: From 1 April 1996, North West Regional Railways and Railtrack will become responsible for the compilation of timetable information on local rail services formerly supported by Greater Manchester passenger transport executive.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes in the responsibilities of the British Railways Board and North West Regional Railways for the provision of passenger rail services in Greater Manchester are planned to be introduced from 1 April. [14612]

Mr. Watts: From 1 April 1996 the franchising director will assume responsibility for the financial support of local rail services in the Greater Manchester area. The franchising director will also become responsible for determining the future level of services formerly secured by the Greater Manchester PTE.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what powers the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising has to enforce the contract held by North West Regional Railways, for providing Greater Manchester passenger rail services from 1 April. [14616]

Mr. Watts: The Office of Passenger Rail Franchising will have a legally enforceable contract with the British Railways Board for 1996–97 which will include the timetable for Greater Manchester services to be operated by North West Regional Railways.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made on the introduction of the piggyback principle for freight to the west coast main line. [14742]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack is examining costs and technical feasibility.

Great Central Railway

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the re-opening of the Great Central Railway; and how many were opposed to it. [14740]

Mr. Watts: Up to Friday 9 February, we have received 465 letters from Members of Parliament, local authorities, other outside organisations and the general public about the project being promoted by Central Railway plc, including letters about the recent waiver applications. All but five of these letters expressed opposition to, or reservations about, the scheme in whole or in part, or opposition to waivers.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what surveys his Department has undertaken into the number of homes and businesses that would be affected by the resurrection of the Great Central Railway. [14743]

Mr. Watts: None. The promoters of the project, Central Railway plc, are required under the Transport and Works Act procedures to survey all land that would be compulsorily acquired, for the purpose of listing all affected owners and occupiers in a book of reference. The book of reference must be provided with the application.

Rail Freight Facilities

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many rail facilities which received freight facilities grant since the inception of the grant are now no longer in operation. [15005]

Mr. Watts: More than 200 grants have been made since the scheme started in 1975. The Department undertakes monitoring of the tonnage moved through a grant-aided facility for a period equal to the commitment made by the grant applicant to move goods through that facility. This period is normally in the region of five to 10 years. Information on the current use of the relevant facilities is not held centrally.

Freight Costs

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the costs of transporting low value, high bulk goods over long distances *(a)* by road and *(b)* by rail. [14981]

Mr. Watts: My Department makes such estimates when assessing applications for the grants which are available to encourage freight to be moved by rail rather than road transport.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many pages of evidence were provided by his Department to the Scott inquiry. [14835]

Mr. Hanley: A total of 16,234.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department provided all documents requested by Lord Justice Scott in the furtherance of his inquiry. [14838]

Mr. Hanley: All documents requested by Sir Richard Scott and in our possession were provided to his inquiry.

Cyprus

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many official ministerial visits have been paid to the Republic of Cyprus in each of the last five years; and what further such visits are planned. [14764]

Mr. David Davis: Since 1991, there have been five such visits: two in 1992 and three in 1993. These visits all took place in a multilateral context. There are no present plans for further visits.

Mr. Townsend: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to support current proposals for the demilitarisation of the island of Cyprus. [14763]

Mr. Davis: Moves by both sides to reduce deployment of troops and levels of military equipment on the island can only help to improve the climate for a settlement. This is an issue that we discuss regularly with both communities in Cyprus.

Imia

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, column *321*, if he will set out the authority for his statement that the question of sovereignty over the island of Imia is not determined. [15083]

Mr. David Davis: The Minister of State , Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) observed in his oral answer on 7 February 1996, *Official Report*, columns 321–23, that the Greek and Turkish Governments take different positions on sovereignty over the island of Imia. We warmly welcome expressions by both sides of determination to deal with the issue by peaceful means. This must be right. It is important that it is done in accordance with international law.

Malaysia

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Malaysian Government regarding Lim Guan Eng; and if he will make a statement. [14545]

Mr. Hanley: We are following Mr. Lim Guan Eng's case, which is before the Malaysian courts. We have not made any representations.

South Africa

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his officials have made to the South African authorities in the case of Paul Grecian. [15104]

Mr. Hanley: We are in regular contact with the South African prison authorities in the course of giving Mr. Grecian full consular support.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the legal procedures which have been followed in the case of Paul Grecian, at present in prison in South Africa. [15103]

Mr. Hanley: Mr. Grecian has his own lawyer in South Africa who is able to advise on the legal procedures in his case.

EU Treaties

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to publish as a Command Paper the current provisions of the treaty on European Union and the treaty establishing the European Community. [15313]

Mr. David Davis: Such a Command Paper has now been published and has been deposited in the Libraries of the House.

DEFENCE

Aircrew Standards Evaluation

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel are employed in aircrew standards evaluation duties in the Royal Air Force; and what is the minimum frequency of standards evaluation reviews of flying units. [13210]

Mr. Soames: The RAF is committed to ensuring that its aircrews maintain the very highest standards in all aspects of military flying. In addition to the continuous process of maintaining standards within units, all aircrew are regularly subjected to formal standards evaluation reviews every 12 to 24 months, depending on units' roles and operational commitments. Currently, 115 service personnel directly support the standards evaluation process.

Low Flying

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints in respect of low flying have been received by his Department from addresses in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland in each month since September 1995. [14232]

Mr. Soames: The number of inquiries and complaints about military low flying received by my Department since September 1995 from addresses in England, Wales and Scotland are in the table.

Month	England	Wales	Scotland
1995			
October	375	52	116
November	364	80	69
December	150	61	87
1996			
January	141	44	87

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effect of the fine weather in the summer of 1995 on the rate of public complaints to his Department concerning low-flying aircraft. [14233]

Mr. Soames: It is our experience that the rate at which complaints about military low flying are received by my Department increases when the weather is fine, as people are more likely to be outdoors or to have windows open and noise of any sort is more intrusive. We believe that the prolonged period of fine weather in the summer of 1995 was a significant factor in the increase in complaints during that year, but we are not able to quantify the effect.

Empty Buildings

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many empty buildings his Department currently owns; what is the cost of insuring and securing these buildings; how many were designed as residential properties; and what was the total amount spent by his Department on empty property taxes in each of the last five years. [14575]

Mr. Soames: No central record is maintained of the number of buildings which may be empty at any given time and the information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Army Apprentices College, Harrogate

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps have been taken to find alternative uses for the Army apprentices college, Harrogate, *(a)* within his Department, *(b)* in conjunction with other Government Departments and *(c)* by selling the property on the open market. [14143]

Mr. Soames: Since the announcement in December 1992 of the decision to close the Army apprentices college, Harrogate, my Department has considered the property for a number of other defence uses, none of which was found to be suitable. While the scope for alternative defence use is still being explored, we have, in parallel, conducted a without commitment "Expressions of Interest" advertising campaign through consultants to identify possible commercial interest in the site. The results of this advertising campaign are being assessed. A regular dialogue is maintained with the Government office for Yorkshire and Humberside.

Commissioned Officers

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many commissioned officers *(a)* in the Royal Air Force under Queen's Regulation 2905(3), *(b)* in (i) the Royal Navy and (ii) the Army under the equivalent Queen's Regulations have been required to retire, relinquish or resign their commissions in each of the last 10 years. [14555]

Mr. Soames: The number of commissioned officers who have been required to retire, relinquish or resign their commissions under Queen's Regulation (RAF) 2905(3) or equivalent regulations in the Royal Navy and the Army over the past 10 years are:

Year	Royal Navy	Army	RAF
1986	3	1	[1]—
1987	5	3	[1]—
1988	10	3	[1]—
1989	8	1	[1]—
1990	7	7	5
1991	5	2	2
1992	7	3	6
1993	3	1	6
1994	6	6	0
1995	10	6	8

[1] Figures are not available for these years.

Nuclear Test Simulation

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department has taken to ensure that the United Kingdom has the super-computing capability for nuclear test simulation. [14393]

Mr. Arbuthnot: A number of techniques and facilities, including super-computers, which will help to maintain the capabilities and expertise necessary for the stewardship of our nuclear weapons in the absence of underground testing are being developed. As regards the acquisition of super-computing equipment, I have nothing to add to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) on 26 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *466*.

Empty Dwellings, North Yorkshire

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many empty Ministry of Defence domestic dwellings there are in North Yorkshire; and how many are for sale. [14196]

Mr. Soames: There are 491 empty MOD domestic dwellings in North Yorkshire, of which eight are currently being sold under the joint services discount scheme. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced on 30 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns 810–11, we intend to transfer ownership of the married quarters estate in England and Wales to the private sector.

RAF Valley

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement for the contract to operate maintenance services at RAF Valley; and what requirements for on-going training commitments have been written into the specification. [14762]

Mr. Soames: Tenders for the maintenance work at RAF Valley are currently being evaluated. I expect to be in a position to announce the award of the contract in April. The contract will specify the qualifications and experience levels required by personnel undertaking maintenance work rather than the training needed to achieve those qualifications which will be a matter for the contractor.

Buy American Act

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 December, *Official Report*, column *1176*, what was the response of the US Government when he raised the question of "Buy American" clauses. [14805]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence raised Her Majesty's Government's concerns over "Buy American" restrictions during his recent visit to Washington. The US Department of Defense has begun to remove such restrictions where they are not required for national security reasons or mandated by law, and is urging the US Congress to follow suit. Regrettably, Congress voted to retain several old restrictions and to introduce a number of new ones in this year's defence legislation. Her Majesty's Government will continue to press for the reversal of these damaging provisions.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions since 1 January 1995 *(a)* he, *(b)* Ministers in his Department and *(c)* offficials in his Department have had contact with Lord Howe concerning his correspondence with the Scott inquiry. [14820]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Ministers and officials from the Ministry of Defence have had no such contacts with Lord Howe.

Service Men, Bosnia

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to introduce a system of compensation or ex-gratia payments for service men injured in Bosnia, comparable to those available in Germany and Hong Kong; and if he will make a statement. [14921]

Mr. Soames: Where an injury resulting in the death or invaliding of a service man or woman is attributable to service in Bosnia, benefits are paid both from the armed forces pensions scheme and from the Department of Social Security war pensions scheme. My Department also operates a scheme for criminal injuries compensation for members of the armed forces and their dependants who are victims of crimes of violence while serving overseas. Such compensation, however, is not payable where the injury to, or death of, a service man or woman was a result of war operations or, as in Bosnia, military activity by warring factions.

A review of death and invaliding benefits for service personnel, and the criteria for their award, is currently being undertaken as part of the detailed study of the pensions recommendations made by Sir Michael Bett's independent review of the armed forces' manpower, career and remuneration structures.

Air Squadrons, Northern Ireland

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of university air squadrons and air experience flights in Northern Ireland. [15283]

Mr. Soames: The primary role of the university air squadrons is to attract new recruits of good quality and education into the Royal Air Force. The defence costs study "Front Line First" recognised the university air squadrons as a source of high calibre pilots for the RAF, but identified scope for rationalisation in the organisation as a whole. As part of rationalisation, it was proposed that the Queen's university air squadron—QUAS—being the least successful squadron in terms of providing pilot recruits for the RAF, should close. A consultative document covering this proposal was issued on 5 September 1995, recommending the closure of QUAS and, as a consequence, the closure of No. 13 Air Experience Flight based at Belfast.

My Department received a number of representations from Members of Parliament and other interested parties. The consultation included the trades unions and local authorities and full and careful consideration has been given to the representations received. Following this work, I am satisfied that no issues have been raised which call into question the viability of the proposals.

I have therefore decided with regret that QUAS and No. 13 Air Experience Flight should close at the end of this academic year. Air experience flying for air cadets will be provided by offering them places at summer camps on the mainland. We also propose to reactivate No. 664 Volunteer Gliding School at Belfast with immediate effect.

Munitions Exports (form F680)

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those officials in his Department who were authorised to sign F680 forms in the period June to December 1986. [14857]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* No.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Select Committee Reports

Mr. George: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many Government responses to Select Committee reports have been made more than six months after the publication of the Committee's report in each parliamentary session since 1990. [15086]

Mr. Newton: I shall write to the hon. Member with the information that he requests.

WALES

Health Trust Costs

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the management costs for each health trust in Wales in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95 expressed as an actual figure and as a percentage of the total budget. [14453]

Mr. Richards: The information requested is as follows:

NHS trust	[1]1993–94 Management costs £000	[1]1993–94 Per cent. of total income	[2]1994–95 Management costs £000	[2]1994–95 Per cent. of total income
NHS trust operational 1 April 1992:				
Pembrokeshire	2,053	4.95	1,873	4.46
NHS trusts operational with effect from 1 April 1993:				
Glan Clwyd General Hospital	1,865	3.37	1,702	2.94
Wrexham Maelor Hospital	1,664	3.39	1,881	3.50
Gofal Cymuned Clwydian Community Care	3,205	5.27	2,385	3.72
Powys Health Care	2,301	5.50	1,882	4.90
Glan Hafren	2,824	3.10	2,633	2.82
Gwent Community	2,567	4.57	2,699	4.70
Llandough Hospital	2,698	5.89	2,520	5.00
Bridgend and District	1,635	2.69	1,558	2.43
Swansea	1,426	2.73	1,233	2.27
Llanelli/Dinefwr	1,024	3.38	812	2.62
Carmarthen and District	1,133	3.06	1,207	3.19
Ceredigion and Mid Wales	790	3.48	831	3.59
South and East Wales Ambulance	661	4.11	1,054	6.00
NHS trusts operational with effect from 1 April 1994:				
North Wales Ambulance	—	—	516	420
Derwen	—	—	955	4.25
Nevil Hall	—	—	1,463	3.59
Gwynedd Hospitals	—	—	1,982	3.28
Gwynedd Community	—	—	1,636	3.42
Rhondda Healthcare	—	—	993	3.40
Mid Glamorgan Ambulance	—	—	1,002	12.86
Velindre Hospital	—	—	619	5.85
East Glamorgan	—	—	1,678	3.54
Morriston Hospital	—	—	1,609	2.59

Sources:
[1] Welsh Office Management Costs Savings exercise—Audited data provided by the service.
[2] NHS Trusts Annual Accounts—management costs data were not recorded in annual accounts prior to 1994–95.

Hospital Beds

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many beds there were in Welsh hospitals in each year since 1979. [14803]

Mr. Richards: The information is given in the table.

Almost 60 per cent. of the reduction in NHS hospital beds over the period is associated with better care for people with mental illnesses or learning disabilities away from the hospital environment. Reductions in the acute sector have been made possible through advances in medical technology and practice, including day case surgery. Since 1979, the total number of people treated as in-patients or day cases in Welsh hospitals has almost doubled.

Average daily available beds in Welsh NHS hospitals

	Number
1979	23,456
1980	23,203
1981	22,940
1982	22,441
1983–84	22,412
1984–85	22,295
1985–86	21,999
1986–87	21,565
1987–88	21,103
1988–89	20,504
1989–90	19,855
1990–91	19,414
1991–92	18,640
1992–93	18,078
1993–94	17,475
1994–95	16,834

Schools Inspections

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average cost of a school inspection per day for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in Wales. [14530]

Mr. Richards: This is a matter for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in Wales. I have asked Mr. Roy James to write to the hon. Member and will arrange for a copy of his reply to be placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Publications

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which of his Department's administrative manuals and internal guidance are now made public; and which remain private. [14026]

Mr. Hague: The Welsh Office issues guidance as appropriate to assist members of the public and others using Welsh Office services.

Empty Dwellings

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many empty dwellings owned by Government Departments there were in Wales for the latest available year; and if he will make a statement. [15105]

Mr. Hague: I refer to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister responsible for housing on 23 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *238*. Separate information is not available for other Government Departments in Wales.

Prescriptions

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the annual average cost of prescription items per patient prescribed by *(a)* general practitioner fundholders and *(b)* non-fundholding general practitioners for each year since the introduction of fundholding for which statistics are available for (i) Wales and (ii) each family health services authority. [14964]

Mr. Hague: The 1994–95 figures are as follows. We do not hold data for earlier years.

March 1994–April 1995	*Fundholding cost per person* £	*Non-funding cost per person* £
Clwyd	77.74	92.28
Dyfed	78.18	93.43
Gwent	68.19	86.86
Gwynedd	73.21	97.01
Mid Glamorgan	70.67	90.63
Powys	62.91	84.47
South Glamorgan	64.67	80.09
West Glamorgan	80.01	91.43
Wales	73.24	89.40

TREASURY

OECD Statistics

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the average unemployment rate over the period 1979 to 1994 for each OECD country; [13913]

(2) what was the average annual rate of export growth in real terms for each of the OECD countries over the period 1979 to 1994; [13921]

(3) what was the value of total investment per capita converted at current purchasing power parities for each OECD country in 1979 and 1994; [13912]

(4) what was the average annual rate of growth in real terms of gross domestic product for each OECD country over the period 1979 to 1994; [13920]

(5) what was the average annual rate of interest for each of the EU and G7 countries over the period 1979 to 1994; [13918]

(6) what was the percentage change in civilian employment excluding those on work-related Government training programmes over the period 1979 to 1994 for each OECD country. [13914]

(7) what was the average ratio over the period 1979 to 1994 in current prices of investment to gross domestic product for each OECD country; [13922]

(8) what was the value of gross domestic product per capita converted at current purchasing power parities for each OECD country in 1979 and 1994; [13916]

(9) what was the ratio of the balance of trade to gross domestic product for each OECD country in 1979 and 1994; [13911]

(10) what was the average annual rate of inflation for each of the EU and G7 countries over the period 1979 to 1994; [13919]

(11) what was the increase in the volume of manufacturing output over the period 1979 to 1994 for each OECD country; [13915]

(12) what was the average ratio over the period 1979 to 1994 in current prices of imports to gross domestic product for each OECD country; [13923]

(13) what was the average ratio over the period 1979 to 1994 in current prices of Government investment to gross domestic product for each OECD country. [13917]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The data requested can be found in the following OECD publications:

Economic Outlook

Labour Force Statistics

Quarterly National Accounts

National Accounts, Main Aggregates Volume 1.

OECD civilian employment figures excluding those on work-related Government schemes are not available.

These publications are all available in the House of Commons Library.

European Union Budget

Mr. Olner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy on United Kingdom Government contributions to European Union budget line B3-4004; and if he will make a statement. [13765]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The budgetary commentary to line B3-4004 of the general budget of the European Communities cites as its legal base the agreement on social policy annexed to the social policy protocol to the treaty on European union, and in particular the European works council directive adopted under that agreement. Article 2 of the social policy protocol states that for acts adopted by the Council under this agreement:

"any financial consequences other than administrative costs entailed for institutions shall not be applicable to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland".

Capital Gains Tax

Miss Hoey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many children currently make use of their annual capital gains tax allowance. [14259]

Mr. Jack: I regret that precise estimates are not possible for the number of individuals with net gains below the capital gains tax annual exempt amount. Details of gains are not required on tax returns where chargeable gains do not exceed the annual exempt amount and aggregate proceeds from disposals of all assets do not exceed twice the annual exempt amount.

Empty Buildings

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many empty buildings his Department currently owns; what is the cost of insuring and securing these buildings; how many were designed as residential properties; and what was the total amount spent by his Department on empty property taxes in each of the last five years. [14566]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury does not own any property. All buildings occupied by the Treasury form part of the Government common user estate. Information relating to the CUE was given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment on 30 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *648–49*.

European Communities (Unemployment)

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average rate of unemployment in the member states of the European Community in each of the years 1972, 1982 and 1992. [14527]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Comparisons between the UK and other EU countries of unemployment on the internationally standard international labour organisation basis are available only from 1984. The table shows the extent of the available information.

Unemployment rates in EU countries

	1984	*1992*
Belgium	11.9	6.7
Denmark	8.9	9.0
France	9.5	10.2
Germany[1]	6.7	6.3
Greece	8.1	7.8
Ireland	16.5	15.0
Italy	9.5	9.4
Luxembourg	2.7	2.0
Netherlands	12.4	5.6
Portugal[2]	—	4.0
Spain[2]	—	17.7
UK	10.9	9.7
EC average[3]	9.4	9.2

Notes:
[1] Rate relates to the former West Germany.
[2] Not available.
[3] Rates relate to EU10 in 1984 and EU12 in 1992.
Source:
Statistical Office of the European Community Labour Force Survey results. Figures refer to the results of the Spring Labour Force Survey in the listed countries for the specified years.

Offshore Single Pension Bonds

Miss Hoey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the tax forgone as a result of the use of offshore single pension bonds. [14262]

Mr. Jack: We are not able to identify an offshore single pensions bond and, as a consequence, regretfully are not able to answer the hon. Member's questions.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many pages of evidence were provided by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise to the Scott inquiry. [14837]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise have provided 15,381 pages of evidence to the Scott inquiry. This figure does not include correspondence between the Department and the inquiry or evidence supplied to the inquiry by individual witnesses.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many written parliamentary questions were passed for answer to executive agencies and non-governmental departments in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [14988]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Since October 1992, when arrangements were introduced for enabling agency chief executives to answer parliamentary questions, chief executives responsible to Treasury Ministers have replied to seven questions:

1992: 3
1993: —
1994: —
1995: 2
1996: 2

Griffin House VAT and Excise Office

Mr. Soley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he intends to pay off the lease on the VAT and Excise office at Griffin house, 161 Hammersmith road; [13600]

(2) what considerations led to the decision to close the VAT and Excise office in Hammersmith road; and what consideration has been given to the future of the lease on the property; [13601]

(3) what is the nearest alternative office to the VAT office at 161 Hammersmith road at which people can get advice on VAT and excise; [13602]

(4) what is the cost of closing the VAT and Excise office at 161 Hammersmith road; and what is the cost of buying the lease; [13603]

(5) if his plans for staff at the VAT and Excise office in Hammersmith road include compulsory redundancy; [13604]

(6) what is the annual rental on his Department's VAT and Excise office at Griffin house, 161 Hammersmith road; [13605]

(7) what consultation exercise his Department has initiated with customers of the VAT and Excise office at 161 Hammersmith road about its proposed closure. [13606]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise recently completed a fundamental expenditure review which has resulted in planned changes in working practices, with reductions in staff numbers and the need for accommodation. The regional collection responsible for the Hammersmith office, Thames Valley, decided to close the office as part of the consequential rationalisation of its operations, based on a detailed business case which took account of value for money for the taxpayer.

There are no plans to "buy out" of the existing lease. When the property is vacated it will be in the first instance offered to other Government Departments in the locality. If they do not take up the additional accommodation it will be let on the open market. The annual rent is £511,988 with rates of £134,534 and landlord's service charge of £110,580.

The cost of closing Griffin house will be some £400,000, which covers alterations to two nearby offices to house the additional staff who will be located there.

Set against this are the reductions in running costs, a significant portion of which will start to accrue from the moment the building is vacated.

There are no plans to make any of the existing staff at Griffin house compulsorily redundant.

It is not departmental policy to conduct formal consultation exercises about the location of offices. However, the needs of traders and the public are always taken into account before a decision about the closure of an office is taken. In the case of Hammersmith, as it covers a small geographical area coupled with satisfactory transport links, it was felt that the public and the trading community would not be unduly inconvenienced by visiting another local office. In addition, at our adjacent offices vehicle access is generally easier and there are better parking facilities.

The nearest offices are as follows:

To the north:
Wembley LVO
Valiant house
356 High road
Wembley
MIDDLESEX HP9 6AY

To the west:
Uxbridge business centre
1 Park road
Uxbridge
MIDDLESEX UB8 1RW

Staines business centre
14 Thames street
Staines
MIDDLESEX TW18 UD

To the east:
Westminster and west end
Dorset house
Stamford street
London SE1 9PY

Taxpayers

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 6 February, *Official Report*, column *118*, if the figures covering the Isle of Wight include taxpayers on the island whose tax affairs are handled by other districts. [15077]

Mr. Jack: The figures are derived from the survey of personal incomes where taxpayers are allocated to counties according to their place of residence or to their business address if self-employed, regardless of where their tax affairs are handled.

Employment Growth

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage rate of employment growth over the period 1979–95 in respect of *(a)* each EU state, *(b)* USA, *(c)* Japan, *(d)* Australia, *(e)* Canada and *(f)* New Zealand. [14972]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The latest available information showing the most up to date comparisons is provided in the table.

Civilian employment, change 1979 to 1994[1] (per cent.)

	Percentage
Austria	17
Belgium	2
Denmark	5
Finland	–10
France	2
Germany	7
Greece	12
Ireland	–1
Italy	6
Luxembourg	4
Netherlands	36
Portugal	9
Spain	–1
Sweden	–6
United Kingdom	1
United States	21
Japan	18
Australia	30
Canada	28
New Zealand	24

Note:

[1] Ireland, Luxembourg 1979 to 1991; Belgium, Italy 1979 to 1992; Austria, Denmark, Greece and USA 1979 to 1993; UK 1979 to 1995; Germany (West) 1979 to 1990, (unified Germany 1991 to 1994 = 0 per cent.).

Source:

OECD Labour Force Statistics 1979–1993, Quarterly Labour Force Statistics, No. 4, 1995 and CSO (UK).

Pension Schemes

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many taxpayers are in small self-administered pension schemes; and what is the annual cost to the Revenue of tax relief on contributions under such schemes. [14666]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* Information is not available concerning the actual number of taxpayers who are members of small self-administered pension schemes.

The estimated cost of tax relief for contributions to occupational pension schemes is published in table 7.10 of "Inland Revenue Statistics 1995", a copy of which is in the Library. It is not possible to separate these estimates between small self-administered schemes and other occupational pension schemes.

Small Firms (Loan Guarantees)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money has been committed each year since 1990–91, and by which banks, under the small firms loan guarantee scheme. [14644]

Mr. Page: I have been asked to reply.

The value of loans guaranteed under the small firms loan guarantee scheme since 1990–91, by lender, is as follows:

£ million

Lender	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*[1]
Barclays	14.389	13.790	12.825	42.198	61.916	29.185
National Westminster	38.169	32.916	12.704	26.775	50.731	27.824
Lloyds	4.161	2.417	2.155	25.865	51.113	24.668
Midland	15.517	8.744	13.495	24.639	42.260	27.303
Bank of Scotland	1.385	2.464	2.018	6.232	10.259	5.816
Royal Bank of Scotland	1.939	1.018	0.425	6.608	8.492	6.719
Clydesdale	0.490	0.559	0.897	2.439	2.217	1.281
3i	4.091	4.631	4.170	7.567	6.461	2.523
Co-operative	0.295	0.101	0.025	0.335	1.048	0.406
Hill Samuel[2]	0.190	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Yorkshire	0.069	0.110	0.000	1.741	2.318	1.284
Bank of Ireland	0.179	0.070	0.000	1.420	1.117	0.787
Northern	0.583	0.265	0.205	0.322	0.529	0.430
Ulster	0.288	0.046	0.219	0.214	0.412	0.230
First Trust	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.250	0.856	0.550
TSB	0.632	0.082	0.000	0.303	2.656	0.860
Bank of Wales[2]	0.000	0.030	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Northern Venture Managers	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.270	0.325	0.000
Yorkshire Enterprise	0.025	0.250	0.225	0.465	0.528	0.302
DonBAC	0.087	0.052	0.218	0.425	0.331	0.050
Lenta	0.000	0.035	0.013	0.005	0.010	0.000
Equatorial[2]	0.025	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Ulster Development Capital	0.057	0.105	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Total	82.571	67.685	49.594	148.073	243.579	130.218

[1] To 30 September.
[2] No longer a lender.

These figures may differ from ones quoted previously. They take account of loans guaranteed but subsequently withdrawn before the loan is taken out.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Common Fisheries Policy

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will describe the baseline between Skegness and Great Yarmouth for the purposes of the common fisheries policy. [14649]

Mr. Baldry: The territorial sea baseline is drawn in accordance with the Territorial Waters Order in Council 1964, as amended by the Territorial Waters Order (Amendment) Order 1979. The base points are held and maintained by the territorial waters officer of the UK Hydrographic Office, Taunton.

EU Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how he ensures that the negotiating brief for his officials discussing EU legislation takes fully into account the need to minimise the burdens on United Kingdom business. [13716]

Mr. Boswell: Guidance on how officials are to apply deregulatory principles when negotiating EC regulations is contained in the booklet, "Getting a Good Deal in Europe". This guidance has been supplemented by the recent publication of guidance on the preparation of compliance cost assessments, which stresses that the likely burdens on business highlighted by UK compliance cost assessments of EC proposals should be integral to the UK's negotiating strategy. Copies of both pieces of guidance are in the Library of the House.

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is *(a)* the highest and *(b)* the lowest hourly rate charged to abattoirs by the Meat Hygiene Service for the services of official veterinary surgeons. [15087]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 30 January to his previous question on the subject of official veterinary surgeons' hourly rates, *Official Report*, column *694*.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Public Record Office

Dr. Marek: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what plans he has for the future of the site and building of the Public Record Office, Chancery lane. [10891]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have been asked to reply.

The efficiency scrutiny of the Public Record Office concluded that operations should be transferred to new premises at Kew. This transfer should be completed by the end of 1996. Other Government Departments have been widely canvassed, but there is no serious interest in re-use of the existing premises at Chancery lane. They will become surplus to requirements and will be disposed of on the open market by Property Holdings.

Complex Fraud Cases

Mr. Amess: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make it his policy to introduce measures to allow complex fraud cases to be heard by expert juries. [13890]

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

Not at present. This is only one of a number of possible approaches which would require careful consideration before any alternative to the current jury system was adopted.

Anonymity Orders

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 31 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *749*, if the anonymity order by Mr. Justice Johnson continues indefinitely; and if he will make it Government policy that no dead person's identity can be kept secret. [14040]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: A judgment by the president of the family division on 8 December 1995 confirmed that the order made by Mr. Justice Johnson regarding the anonymity of patient C and other individuals connected with the proceedings should continue beyond patient C's death. The text of the president's two judgments and that of Mr. Justice Johnson in this case are available in the Library of the House.

Questions relating to the anonymity of those involved in proceedings are matters for the court. The court will make its decision based on all the circumstances of the case.

Departmental Publications

Dr. Wright: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which of his Department's administrative manuals and internal guidance are now made public; and which remain private. [14028]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Department produces a wide range of administrative manuals and internal guidance: 13 are in the public domain and a further 84 are available for public inspection or could be provided on request. A list of these will be made available in the Libraries of both Houses. Guidance on security matters is not available to the public.

Information on the full range of documents used for internal guidance could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

In accordance with the code of practice on access to Govnerment information a charge may be made to cover any additional costs of copies requested for retention.

PRIME MINISTER

Departmental Publications

Dr. Wright: To ask the Prime Minister which of his Department's administrative manuals and internal guidance are now made public; and which remain private. [14036]

The Prime Minister: For these purposes my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service, on 12 February 1996.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what was the final date on which *(a)* a Minister and *(b)* a civil servant delivered information to Lord Justice Scott for his inquiry. [14833]

The Prime Minister: The Government have been in correspondence with Sir Richard Scott's team throughout the period of the inquiry. The Cabinet Office was last asked to provide documents and information to the inquiry on 22 January.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what arrangements have been made for civil servants whose actions are discussed by Lord justice Scott to receive copies of his report before its official publications on 15 February. [14840]

The Prime Minister: The Government are in discussion with the inquiry about this.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Prime Minister how many pages of evidence were provided by his office to the Scott inquiry. [14836]

The Prime Minister: My office and the Cabinet Office have provided 6,197 pages of evidence to the Scott inquiry. This figure does not include correspondence between my office or the Cabinet Office and the inquiry or evidence supplied to the inquiry by individual witnesses.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Prime Minister if he *(a)* has discussed and *(b)* has authorised his Ministers to discuss media presentation of the Scott inquiry report with (i) newspaper proprietors, (ii) newspaper editors and (iii) governors of the BBC. [13993]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 6 February 1996]:* The arrangements agreed by the Government with Sir Richard Scott do not permit anyone outside Government to have access to the report before publication, nor to have the contents of the report disclosed to them. I have made it clear that those

arrangements must be adhered to. The only exception at present agreed is that the spokesmen of the leading Opposition parties should have access to the report some hours before publication in accordance with the precedents for weighty reports of this nature. The preparation of the Government's response to the report has been and will be conducted in accordance with those arrangements. Any changes would be made only after consultation with Sir Richard Scott.

Higher Education Institutions

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list each occasion on which he has visited *(a)* a British university, and *(b)* another institution of higher education in each of the last five years; and what was the purpose of the visit in each case. [14961]

The Prime Minister: I have visited a range of education establishments and discussed a variety of issues over the past five years.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 13 February. [13608]

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 13 February. [13609]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Munitions Dumping

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Prime Minister which Government Department has responsibility for responding to accidents caused by the dumping of munitions in the Beaufort's dyke area. [14920]

The Prime Minister: The response to any particular incident would, in the first instance, be a matter for the relevant emergency services. Any associated departmental responsibility would be determined by the circumstances of the particular incident.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Closed Circuit Television

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the cost effectiveness of municipal CCTV systems in fighting crime. [14224]

Mr. Maclean: The reports we have received from the police and closed circuit television—CCTV —operators confirm that there has been significant reductions in crime and the fear of crime in the areas where CCTV has been introduced. The reductions demonstrate the value of CCTV as a crime prevention measure. The evaluation of the cost effectiveness of individual CCTV schemes is a matter for the system operators.

Mrs. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his criteria for (i) accepting and (ii) rejecting applications from local authorities for matching funding for CCTV systems. [14142]

Mr. Maclean: Bids to the second Home Office closed circuit television—CCTV—challenge competition will be judged against the criteria set out in the bidding guidance which was issued on 22 November 1995. Copies of the bidding guidance have been placed in the Library.

Blackmail

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions cases of alleged blackmail serious enough to involve arrests by Serious Crime Squad detectives have not led to charges in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [14250]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not collected centrally.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the divisions of the Metropolitan police by borough with the number of officers per division and population per borough, in the same format as in his answer of 26 March 1993, *Official Report*, column *763*. [14565]

Mr. Maclean: The information in respect of the London boroughs is as follows:

London borough	*Number of police officers (full-time equivalent at 8 January 1996)*	*Population of borough (OPCS mid-1994 estimates)*
Barking and Dagenham		155,018
Dagenham	281.60	
Barnet and Hertsmere		308,192
Barnet and Hertsmere	280.70	
Golders Green	190.90	
West Hendon	225.35	
Bexley		220,414
Bexleyheath	270.50	
Brent		244,467
Kilburn	325.14	
Wembley	238.60	
Bromley		292,970
Bromley and Orpington	452.44	
Camden		182,484
Hampstead	195.00	
Holborn	187.90	
Kentish Town	251.86	
City of Westminster		190,147
Belgravia	308.15	
Charing Cross	398.10	
Marylebone	335.70	
Paddington	356.60	
West End Central	316.00	

London borough	Number of police officers (full-time equivalent at 8 January 1996)	Population of borough (OPCS mid-1994 estimates)
Croydon		326,757
Croydon	267.30	
South Norwood	317.58	
Ealing		289,783
Ealing	332.93	
Southall	270.96	
Enfield		259,765
Edmonton	237.38	
Enfield	255.50	
Greenwich		212,201
Greenwich	264.36	
Plumstead	311.95	
Hackney		192,479
Stoke Newington	305.94	
Shoreditch and Hackney	297.60	
Hammersmith and Fulham		156,550
Fulham	216.73	
Hammersmith	316.40	
Haringey		212,328
Hornsey	254.60	
Tottenham	244.00	
Harrow		210,266
Harrow	272.80	
Havering		231,693
Havering	335.79	
Hillingdon		242,968
Hillingdon	403.90	
Hounslow		202,723
Chiswick	187.50	
Hounslow	254.70	
Islington		175,194
Holloway	246.90	
Islington	264.10	
Kensington and Chelsea		151,476
Brompton	375.40	
Notting Hill	229.00	
Kingston upon Thames		138,486
Kingston	360.34	
Lambeth		260,677
Brixton	287.10	
Streatham	254.01	
Vauxhall	342.25	
Lewisham		242,411
Catford	269.80	
Lewisham	314.80	
Merton		177,246
Merton	306.85	
Newham		226,842
Forest Gate	288.00	
Plaistow	289.00	
Redbridge		225,090
Ilford	231.40	
Richmond upon Thames		172,011
Richmond upon Thames	294.40	
Southwark		228,762
Peckham	288.38	
Southwark	282.08	
Walworth	259.40	
Sutton		173,351
Epson and Sutton	402.38	
Tower Hamlets		170,523
Limehouse	259.00	
Whitechapel	307.70	
Waltham Forest		221,779
Chingford	213.30	
Leyton	208.00	
Wandsworth		266,554
Battersea	257.80	
Wandsworth	318.38	

Mary Druhan

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make a decision on Mary Druhan's appeal application. [14590]

Mr. Kirkhope: We are working urgently towards reaching a decision in this case.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received in the last three years from Justice on the case of Mary Druhan; and what response he has made. [14559]

Mr. Kirkhope: Representations from Justice were received in August 1993, and it has written occasionally with further points since then. In response, we commissioned inquiries by the Metropolitan police, whose report we are now considering.

Prisons

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what account is taken of the cost of Home Office controllers when cost comparisons are made between private and public managed prisons. [14448]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about what account is taken of the cost of Home Office controllers when cost comparisons are made between private and public managed prisons.

At each privately managed prison there is a controller, deputy controller and secretary. Their costs are included in the Prison Service annual report figures for cost per place and cost per prisoner at each private prison. They were not included in the analysis of comparative costs between private and public managed prisons carried out on 1993–94 figures. They are being included in the re-analysis being carried out in 1994–95 figures.

Smoke Detectors

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on smoke detectors in homes. [14317]

Mr. Sackville: Our policy is to ensure that people are aware of the potentially life saving benefits of smoke alarms and to encourage them to install smoke alarms in their homes and to maintain and test them regularly. Our efforts, and those of fire brigades, have been very successful. Ownership has increased from 9 per cent. in 1987 to its present figure of 74 per cent. of all households.

Police Officers (Bosnia)

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are being made to protect the position of police officers who volunteer for military duty in Bosnia through their membership of the Territorial Army, with particular reference to pensions, pay increments, annual leave, injury pensions and lump sum payments and death gratuities. [142394]

Mr. Maclean: It is for chief constables to decide whether to allow officers leave of absence to volunteer for military duty in Bosnia.

Police officers who are members of Her Majesty's reserve forces and who are compulsorily called up for military service would be able to count such military service towards pension, pay increments and annual leave. They would also be eligible to have any shortfall in their military pay relative to their police pay made up and, provided they are members of the police pensions scheme, they would be covered by the "service men" provision—part I—of the police pension regulations.

Police officers who are members of the reserve forces and who volunteer for military duty need first to obtain the permission of their chief constable and, depending on the terms under which any leave of absence is approved, may be able to count the military service towards pension, pay increments and annual leave. Officers who are given approval to volunteer for military service, like those who might be compulsorily called up, are covered by the "service men" provisions of the police pensions regulations.

London Fire Brigade

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the expected average additional time that will elapse prior to the arrival of an appliance of the London fire brigade at a fire if he accepts the proposals for reduced fire cover in London. [14332]

Mr. Sackville: No requests have been received by the Home Office from the London fire and civil defence authority to reduce levels of fire cover and therefore there is no basis on which to make such an estimate.

Overloaded Lorries

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the levels of fines applicable to lorry operators convicted of overloading their vehicles; and when the levels were last reviewed. [14447]

Mr. Maclean: The Government are satisfied that the penalties for offences relating to overloaded goods vehicles are adequate. Driving an overloaded goods vehicle carries a maximum sentence of a £5,000 fine. This level of fine was set in 1991 and has not been reviewed since because there is no evidence that the courts have found it too low.

Fire Service

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time fire appliances currently take to reach household fires in Hendon NW4. [14756]

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is not available centrally in the form requested.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many entry clearance applications by husbands, wives or fiancé(e)s were refused *(a)* partly and *(b)* wholly on primary purpose grounds in 1994. [14799]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information for the Indian sub-continent—ISC—is given in the table. Corresponding information for non-ISC posts is not collected centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Initial refusals of entry clearance on primary purpose grounds for spouses and fiance(e)s in the Indian sub-continent 1994

Numbers[1]

	Solely on primary purpose grounds	*Partly on primary purpose grounds*
Husbands	750	940
Wives	270	180
Male fiances	90	60
Female fiancees	60	20

Terrorist Groups

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy towards United Kingdom-based groups which issue statements of support for middle east terrorist organisations. [14650]

Mr. Howard: The Government deplore all statements of support for terrorist organisations. The police and the Security Service attach a high priority to countering any active support in the United Kingdom for terrorist groups.

Where there is evidence of involvement in terrorist, action will be taken against individuals, either under the criminal law, supported as necessary by the prevention of terrorism legislation, or under immigration Act powers.

Secure Training Centres

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the first secure training centres to be opened for young offenders; and if he will make a statement. [14651]

Mr. Maclean: Tender proposals for the provision of the first two secure training centres at Gringley, Nottinghamshire and Cookham wood, Kent, were received on 12 June 1995. Negotiations are continuing with the tenderers and as part of this process tenderers are being asked to revise certain aspects of their bids prior to the final assessment and selection of preferred bidders. Contracts will be signed as soon as possible once the terms of the contractual agreement have been finalised. The opening dates have not yet been settled: they will be specified in the signed contract.

Gaming Act 1968

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he is proposing to complete his review of the workings of the Gaming Act 1968; and if he will make a statement. [14932]

Mr. Kirkhope: I refer my hon. and learned Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) on 26 January, *Official Report*, column *470*.

Prisoners (Visits)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances a visit to a prisoner by a person whose name appears on a correct visiting order *(a)* may be disallowed and *(b)* may be considered a threat to security at the prison; and if he will make a statement. [14497]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 13 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the refusal of visits to prisoners.

In general, providing the prisoner is still in that prison and able and willing to receive visitors, bona fide visitors appearing during visiting hours on the day specified will only be denied access for the reasons set out in Standing Order 5A or section 40 and 69 of the Prison Service Manual on Security, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

A visitor would be considered a threat to security if it was thought they were planning to procure the escape of any prisoner or to supply weapons or equipment to assist in an escape. They would be considered a threat to good order and disciple if, for example, it was thought they were trying to smuggle drugs or other illicit items into the prison.

Prosecutions of Police Officers

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many private prosecutions against police officers have been brought in each year since 1970; how many of these cases each year the police officers *(a)* won and *(b)* lost; how many they settled out of court; and how much they paid out each year (i) in damages and (ii) in legal costs. [14962]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not collected centrally.

Private Security Industry

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to publish the response to the first report of the Home Affairs Committee of Session 1994–95, HC17, on the private security industry. [15134]

Mr. Maclean: We have responded to many of the recommendations made by the Select Committee; a copy of my right hon. and learned Friend's reply has been placed in the Library. We will answer the Committee's recommendations on regulation for part of the industry as soon as possible.

Immigration

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to extend to the Immigration Service decisions regarding the removal of illegal entrants. [15311]

Mr. Kirkhope: At present, designated senior officers in the immigration service may authorise the removal of certain categories of people who have entered the United Kingdom illegally while other cases are referred to Ministers for authority to remove. In future, designated senior officers will be responsible for authorising removal in all cases other than those in which special features, such as Parliamentary interest or a high level of public concern about a case, indicate that they should be referred to Ministers for decision.

The existing arrangements under which Ministers personally authorise and sign orders requiring a person's deportation from the United Kingdom are unaffected by these changes.

Pregnant Women Prisoners

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the professional bodies consulted by *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* officials in his Department and *(c)* officers of the Prison Service in respect of its rules and practices concerning use of chains and similar equipment for (i) pregnant women, (ii) those in or approaching labour and (iii) those giving birth that applied prior to his oral statement of 18 January; and if he will place a copy of those rules in the Library. [11543]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 23 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Nigel Spearing, dated 13 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about handcuffing of women.

The instructions which applied before the Home Secretary's announcement on 18 January are contained in sections 53 and 60 of the Manual on Security, copies of which are already held in the Library of the House. They were last amended in April 1995.

No formal external consultation took place prior to the drawing up of the April 1995 instructions. In the context of the changes made and announced on 18 January I had extensive consultation with the Royal College of Midwives.

On the basis of their advice, and after consultation with Ministers, I made the changes which were announced by the Home Secretary on 18 January.

Prisons (Staffing)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give staff figures for each prison establishment showing the number of *(a)* unified grade staff, *(b)* governor grade staff, *(c)* auxiliary grades and *(d)* civilian staff. [12767]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 13 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the grade breakdown of staff in each prison establishment.

The information requested, as at 26 January 1996 is shown in the attached table. Prison Service staff at privately managed prisons have been included. Unified grade totals include officers working within the various specialisms, for example healthcare. Auxiliary grades include night patrols, prison auxiliaries and temporary officers. Civilian grades include all other staff working in establishments.

Prison establishment staffing: grade breakdown

Establishment	*Officer grades*	*Governor grades*	*Auxiliary grades*	*Civilian grades*
Acklington	269	7	39	34
Albany	250	8	16	30
Aldington	57	2	4	16
Ashwell	119	6	23	48
Askham Grange	46	2	13	12
Aylesbury	175	7	22	56
Bedford	219	4	24	31
Belmarsh	650	9	75	81
Birmingham	503	12	44	60
Blakenhurst[1]	—	2	—	1
Blantyre House	43	3	9	8
Blundeston	218	7	23	26
Brinsford	228	7	29	66
Bristol	384	9	36	—
Brixton	553	11	58	—
Brockhill	68	3	6	23
Buckley Hall[1]	—	2	—	1
Bullingdon/Oxford	416	10	55	50
Bullwood Hall	86	4	6	515
Camp Hill	213	7	26	—
Canterbury	177	3	11	—
Cardiff	248	6	33	81
Castington	145	4	20	24
Channings Wood	202	10	23	32
Chelmsford	269	6	14	33
Coldingly	176	8	23	23
Cookham Wood	74	3	10	3
Dartmoor	314	8	21	36
Deerbolt	185	4	25	61
Doncaster[1]	—	2	1	2
Dorchester	123	3	4	19
Dover	141	4	18	47
Downview	153	4	18	25

Prison establishment staffing: grade breakdown

Establishment	*Officer grades*	*Governor grades*	*Auxiliary grades*	*Civilian grades*
Drake Hall	70	3	17	46
Durham	477	11	44	61
East Sutton Park	27	2	6	26
Eastwood Park	7	1	3	10
Elmley	362	9	45	42
Erlestoke House	151	3	20	23
Everthorpe	186	5	19	28
Exeter	229	7	17	74
Featherstone	268	4	25	39
Feltham	392	11	56	97
Ford	136	5	19	34
Frankland	523	13	50	35
Full Sutton	647	16	47	53
Garth	302	10	19	34
Gartree	229	10	26	29
Glen Parva	359	12	42	95
Gloucester	179	4	11	30
Grendon/Springhill	182	8	26	73
Guys Marsh	109	7	23	55
Haslar	64	2	7	11
Hatfield	57	4	13	54
Haverigg	205	6	25	32
Hewell Grange	68	6	12	55
High Down	367	11	35	44
Highpoint	295	7	31	49
Hindley	221	6	23	32
Hollesley Bay Colony	183	7	20	131
Holloway	405	14	36	42
Holme House	348	7	25	38
Hull	340	7	31	39
Huntercombe/Finnamore Wood	109	4	9	44
Kingston	99	1	4	16
Kirkham	153	6	18	36
Kirklevington	50	2	10	10
Lancaster	108	5	5	13
Lancaster Farms	160	6	24	75
Latchmere House	51	4	5	19
Leeds	560	18	42	72
Leicester	278	5	26	35
Lewes	257	5	22	30
Leyhill	130	5	14	27
Lincoln	300	9	26	41
Lindholme	298	9	48	42
Littlehey	219	7	22	38
Liverpool	647	22	42	70
Long Lartin	508	13	35	44
Low Newton	119	4	21	36
Maidstone	285	9	22	34
Manchester	562	12	79	64
Moorland	280	5	30	86
Morton Hall	32	3	9	34
Mount	177	8	25	48
New Hall	112	4	13	56
Northallerton	106	4	13	40
North Sea Camp	36	3	11	59
Norwich	221	5	35	134
Nottingham	139	7	14	47
Onley	206	6	20	57
Parkhurst	397	15	11	89
Pentonville	381	13	30	135
Portland	168	6	33	70
Preston	337	11	17	54
Pucklechurch	56	5	6	38
Ranby	176	5	32	65
Reading	142	3	5	41
Risley	352	15	37	126
Rochester	188	6	25	79
Send	51	3	5	22
Shepton Mallet	89	4	6	45
Shrewsbury	154	5	10	51
Stafford	249	6	32	72
Standford Hill	88	6	10	81
Stocken	134	6	19	67
Stoke Heath	147	5	29	58
Styal	135	3	8	70

Prison establishment staffing: grade breakdown

Establishment	*Officer grades*	*Governor grades*	*Auxiliary grades*	*Civilian grades*
Sudbury/Foston Hall	82	7	18	89
Swaleside	257	7	11	90
Swansea	145	5	11	61
Swinfen Hall	96	3	16	49
Thorn Cross	82	8	19	52
Usk/Prescoed	104	4	15	61
Verne	166	6	29	100
Wakefield	492	13	21	105
Wandsworth	511	15	55	158
Wayland	176	9	18	73
Wealstun	181	11	12	80
Wellingborough	134	7	25	48
Werrington	46	2	10	26
Wetherby	78	6	13	43
Whatton	78	4	11	35
Whitemoor	494	17	41	89
Winchester	345	7	22	78
Wolds[1]	—	2	—	1
Woodhill	333	10	49	96
Wormwood Scrubs	503	16	31	114
Wymott	223	8	36	78

[1] Privately managed prison/remand centre: Prison Service staff monitor the contract.

Fire Service College

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish his reasons to the report on the future of the Fire Service College. [14669]

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* The Fire Service College will continue as a next steps agency operating as a trading fund. A review of possible alternative options for the college's future status and financial structure was completed in June 1995. Since then, further work has been commissioned. An announcement will be made when this work has been completed and considered.

Secure Training Centres

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 6 February, *Official Report*, column *114*, how much money he has allocated to build the first two secure training centres. [14825]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* Secure training centres will be provided under the terms of the Government's private finance initiative. The capital costs of construction will be met by the private sector contractor. Contract payments made by the Home Office will allow private sector providers to meet the operating and maintenance costs and capital financing costs as well as provide a return on their investment. For each centre, contract payments will begin when all available places are ready for use. The precise level of payments will depend on the results of the competitive tendering exercise.

Addict Index

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current annual cost to his Department of the addict index; what other drug databases his Department operates; what plans he has to ensure the continuing viability of the addict index; and if he will make a statement. [14243]

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* The estimated cost of the addicts index for 1995–96 is approximately £282,000. The Home Office collates information on police and customs drug seizures and court proceedings for drug-related offences from the drugs self-report component of the British crime survey—being developed as a new indicator of the prevalence of drug misuse—and on companies licensed to trade in drugs controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

Crime Victims

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines his Department issues concerning police relations with victims of crime from vulnerable groups; and if he will make a statement. [14245]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* Guidance has been issued to the police on the treatment of a wide range of victims of crime, including victims of sexual offences, child abuse and domestic violence.

The victim's charter, published in 1990, sets some 17 standards for the police to aim for in their treatment of victims of crime. We aim to publish a new victim's charter in April, which will define more clearly the minimum standards of service victims can expect from the police and the other criminal justice agencies.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the initiatives taken by police forces in England and Wales to provide protection for vulnerable victims of crime; and if he will make a statement. [14249]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* The police give a high priority to the protection and safeguarding of victims, witnesses, and other vulnerable persons. The police research group published a report on witness intimidation in 1994, and the crime committee of the Association of Chief Police Officers has encouraged its members to have regard to the report's recommendations. National performance indicators for the police service require forces to develop strategies for reducing repeat victimisation.

Cleared-up Crime

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the definition of a cleared-up crime for official statistical purposes; and what changes have been made to the definition over the last five years. [14247]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* An offence can be recorded as cleared up if any of the conditions listed are met. There have been no changes in the last five years.

An offence is cleared up when:

1. a person has been charged or summonsed for the offence, irrespective of any subsequent acquittal;
2. the offence has been taken into consideration by the court or if the unequivocal consent of the offender is obtained by way of statement of admission and desire to have further offences taken into consideration;
3. the offender has been proceeded against in another police force area for the offence;
4. the offender dies before proceedings could be initiated or completed;

5. the offender has been cautioned by the police;

6. the offender is ill and is unlikely to recover or is too senile or too mentally disturbed for proceedings to be taken;

7. the complainant or an essential witness is dead and the proceedings cannot be pursued;

8. the guilt of the offender is clear but the victim refuses, or is permanently unable, or if a juvenile is not permitted, to give evidence;

9. the offender admits the offence but it is decided that no useful purpose would be served by proceeding with the charge;

10. it is ascertained that an offence has been committed by a child under the age of criminal responsibility;

11. an offence is admitted by a juvenile of the age of criminal responsibility and police take no action other than reporting the particulars to a local authority for action under the Children and Young Persons Act 1969;

12. There is sufficient evidence to charge the offender but

(a) The police prosecuting department, the Crown Prosecution Service or a senior police officer decides that no useful purpose would be served by proceeding with the charge; or

(b) for summary offences of unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle or criminal damage value over £20 the time limit of six months for commencing prosecution has been exceeded.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of recorded crime *(a)* resulted in a conviction and *(b)* was cleared-up in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [14248]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* Information on the percentage of offenders committed which result in a conviction is published on page 25 of "Digest 3—Information on the Criminal Justice System in England and Wales". Information for other years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Information on the percentage of recorded offences cleared up is published in table 2.8 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales 1994". Copies of both these publications are available in the Library.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the *(a)* the number of convictions and *(b)* the number of cleared-up crimes, for each category of offence, for each of the last five years;and if he will make a statement. [14276]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* Information on the number of notifiable offences cleared up by offence groups and on the number of offenders found guilty for all types of offence by main offence group is published in tables 2.8 and 5.8 respectively of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1994", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Immigration Officers

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the regulations relating to the scales for, and payment of, performance-related pay for immigration officers posted at United Kingdom ports; and if he will make a statement. [14493]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* Immigration Officers receive performance pay in accordance with the national 1992 pay agreements and subsequent pay settlements negotiated between the Treasury and the National Union of Civil and Public Servants. The placing of these papers in the Library is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Certain discretionary arrangements were negotiated within my Department and published in a departmental notice, a copy of which I have arranged to place in the Library.

Prison Population

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what proportion of the prison population in England and Wales is currently held in *(a)* secure prisons and *(b)* open prisons and related establishments; [14001]

(2) how many prisoners are currently held in open prisons and related establishments. [14003]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answers 12 February 1996]:* Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 13 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about how many prisoners are currently held in open prisons and related establishments; and what proportion of the prison population in England and Wales is currently held in (a) secure prisons and (b) open prisons and related establishments.

On 7 February 1996 the prison population in England and Wales was 52,437. On that date 48,630 prisoners, representing 92.7% of the total population, were held in closed establishments and 3,807, 7.3% of the population, in open establishments.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Family Planning

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 13 December, *Official Report*, columns 665–66, what were the criteria used for awarding grants to non-governmental organisations applying for funding for reproductive health projects in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995. [14801]

Mr. Hanley: Grants were awarded for activities which addressed reproductive health needs in the community. The criteria included (i) the innovative content of proposals and prospects for their replication, (ii) the capability and experience of the organisation seeking funds, (iii) the overall quality of the project design, (iv) relevance of the project to ODA's reproductive health aims, (v) the cost of the project in relation to anticipated achievement and (vi) availability of funds.

Expenditure Review

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recommendations contained in the fundamental expenditure review of the Overseas Development Administration. [15312]

Mr. Hanley: The fundamental expenditure review of the ODA was thorough and wide ranging. It involved

consultation with many of our principal partners. We deposited the report in the Libraries of the House in December and it is available also from the ODA.

The FER's conclusions were recommendations only. Many built on work already in progress. The Government have taken into account Members' views expressed in the debates on development on 30 January and 7 February. The Government's response to the key recommendations is as follows.

First and foremost, the FER confirmed the continuing need for the UK to provide substantial flows of concessional aid; and recommended that the ODA should retain responsibility for bilateral and multilateral aid. The Government strongly endorse both recommendations, which underpin our commitment to remain a major donor.

The review recommends clarification of the purpose of the aid programme by a better definition of its basic purpose and aims. The Government have agreed a revised mission statement which defines the ODA's overriding purpose, as well as the aims to be pursued.

The new mission statement is as follows:

> ODA's purpose is to improve the quality of life of people in poorer countries by contributing to sustainable development and reducing poverty and suffering.
>
> To this end ODA will aim:
>
> to encourage sound development policies, efficient markets and good government;
>
> to help people achieve better education and health and to widen opportunities—particularly for women;
>
> to enhance productive capacity and to conserve the environment; and
>
> to promote international policies for sustainable development and enhance the effectiveness of multilateral development institutions.

The FER recommended that ODA's country programme resources should be more concentrated in order to enhance impact. The Government agree with this principle. A larger proportion of our bilateral resources will be allocated to those countries which need it most, can use it effectively and where it will have a real impact. Account will also be taken of Britain's wider national interests. There will be no sudden change. Already the 20 largest recipients accounted for some 69 per cent. of planned country programme expenditure in the last financial year, and on current plans we expect this proportion to increase to some 73 per cent. by 1998–99. There is no specific target percentage nor will the list of the largest recipients necessarily be exactly the same from year to year—though concentration on the poorer countries in Africa and Asia will continue.

The Government will continue to assist a wide variety of other countries through bilateral country aid programmes. At the same time we will increase the number of countries where a direct aid relationship is sustained through heads of mission schemes rather than a traditional bilateral country aid programme. In addition, we shall maintain worthwhile aid relationship through multilateral channels and through other non-country bilateral programmes, including research, scholarships, volunteers' and our financial support for British non-governmental organisations.

At the same time, the ODA will sharpen its focus even further on activities which contribute directly to its aims. The FER made a number of sensible recommendations to enhance the strategic planning process within the ODA. Better corporate and business planning has begun, strengthening the important links in all cases between the objectives and the resources of all kinds used to achieve them.

The United Kingdom makes an increasing contribution through multilateral aid. The FER recommended strengthening our role in multilateral organisations; improving linkages to our bilateral aid; and securing better value. The Government accept these recommendations. The ODA will continue to have lead policy and financial responsibility for those multilateral programmes which are a charge to the aid budget. We will reinforce our efforts to improve the quality and focus of programmes managed by multilateral organisations. This will include reform in the UN agencies as well as continuing work in Brussels. The ODA will play a still greater role in promoting international policies for sustainable development and enhancing the effectiveness of multilateral development institutions.

The FER made a number of recommendations concerned essentially with internal management processes. All have a common purpose: to improve further the effectiveness of the ODA, to increase impact, and to obtain better value for money. The majority have been accepted and are now being implemented.

Very few recommendations were not accepted. Notwithstanding the recommendations in the FER, the geographical Minister of State in the Foreign Office will continue to have formal responsibility for the joint assistance units managing programmes in the former Soviet Union and east and central Europe; and the ODA will continue to make a grant in aid to the British Council.

The FER was followed and complemented by a senior management review. Changes recommended include a restructuring of responsibility at senior management level and the designation of a senior manager to promote each of the four aims.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Computer Networks

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list all *(a)* Internet and *(b)* other computer network sites or bulletin boards operated by his Department or containing information supplied by his Department, indicating for each site or bulletin board (i) the inaugural date, (ii) the timetable and policy in respect of updates, (iii) the Internet, or other network, address and (iv) to whom the site or board is currently made available and the criteria which must be fulfilled by applicants for access. [14228]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service makes press notices available to the public via the Internet using the Central Office of Information's service on the world wide web. The information requested is as follows:

(i) 19 April 1995.

(ii) Press notices from the Crown Prosecution Service remain on the Internet until the information becomes out of date.

(iii) http://www.coi.gov.uk/coi/depts/GCP/GCP.html.

(iv) All subscribers to the Internet have access to the press notices.

Spare Computer Capacity

Mr. Miller: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list all cases where spare computer capacity has been sold to other Departments since 1987, giving the Department and value of each contract. [14087]

The Solicitor-General: There have been no such sales by departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible.

Harassment

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Attorney-General how many people have been prosecuted for stalking under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 as it relates to crimes of intentional harassment. [14464]

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

Information on cautioning and court proceedings data for offences of "Causing intentional harassment, alarm or distress" under section 154 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 will not be available until autumn 1996.

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Attorney-General (1) on how many occasions, in each year since 1966, Ministers have signed public interest immunity certificates in criminal trials; [15099]

(2) on how many occasions, in each year since 1979, public interest has been claimed in the courts in criminal cases. [15100]

The Attorney-General: The information requested is not collected centrally either by Government or by individual prosecuting authorities. My answer is therefore confined to the three prosecuting authorities for which I have ministerial responsibility. On the basis of the best information currently available, the number of criminal cases in which public interest immunity certificates are known to have been used is as follows:

	CPS[1]	*SFO*[1]	*DPP(NI)*
1987	1	—	—
1988	—	—	—
1989	2	1	—
1990	1	1	—
1991	—	1	—
1992	2	—	1
1993	4	—	—
1994	3	1	—
1995	5	—	1

[1] The Crown Prosecution Service became operational in 1986 and the Serious Fraud Office in 1988.

The number of cases in which public interest immunity is claimed without ministerial certificate—for example, in relation to informants which is the regular practice—is not recorded centrally.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Ulster-Scots Language

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make representations to the Arts Council to *(a)* accord the Ulster-Scots language the same recognition in future publications as it did to the Irish language on its final strategy report and *(b)* develop a similar approach to Ulster-Scots as it has to Irish in its strategy for the arts in Northern Ireland. [12825]

Mr. Ancram: No. The Arts Council for Northern Ireland is aware that the Government expect it to accord recognition to Ulster-Scots arts, just as the Scottish Arts Council does for work in the Scots language.

Mitchell Commission

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total cost of the Mitchell Commission; and what percentage of this was paid by *(a)* Her Majesty's Government and *(b)* the Irish Government. [14000]

Sir John Wheeler: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) on 5 February 1996, *Official Report*, column 75.

Irish Language

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has made to the Irish Government or the European Commission to have the rules governing Irish language qualifications for teaching appointments rescinded. [14547]

Mr. Ancram: This has been the subject of occasional discussion between officials from each jurisdiction. I am pleased to note that Mrs. Bhreathnach recently announced new provisions which ease the requirement in certain circumstances.

School Transport (Belfast)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will create a special beneficial home-to-school free transport category for Belfast city centre grammar schools whose catchment area necessarily includes Greater Belfast and North Down; and if he will make a statement. [14548]

Mr. Ancram: No. Following consultation on proposals for revising the school transport arrangements, I have decided that there should be no change in the present arrangements in the school year beginning next September. My Department will, however, be writing to education and library boards about the arrangements for taking forward further detailed consideration of the options for reducing expenditure on home-to-school transport, including consultation with schools and other interests.

Student Grants

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applicants for student

awards for fees and maintenance payments have been recently turned down because parents do not meet the three-year residency rule; and if he will consider an alternative rule for United Kingdom citizens who have spent the majority of the previous two decades within the United Kingdom. [14549]

Mr. Ancram: In the 1995–96 academic year 36 applicants for mandatory and discretionary awards administered by the education and library boards were ineligible because of the residency rule. No applicants were ineligible on these grounds for the postgraduate awards made by the Department.

There are no plans to change the residence requirements, which are common throughout the United Kingdom.

Unemployment

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many and what percentage of unemployed persons are *(a)* Protestant, *(b)* Catholic and *(c)* other; what are the ratios between the categories; and what number and percentage of each were *(i)* male and *(ii)* female. [14550]

Sir John Wheeler: The 1991 census of population recorded information on the religion and employment status of individuals and results are available for the main denominations separately. Information is not presented on an amalgamated Protestant category as a specific question on this was not included in the census and the large number of small religions recorded make precise classification difficult. A comprehensive list of denominations included in the "other denominations" category is recorded on page xvi of the Northern Ireland census 1991 religion report. Requests for tables on amalgamations of individual religious denominations can be produced by the census office for Northern Ireland based on specifications supplied by users. Information on the main denominations and other groups approximating most closely that requested is provided in the table.

Table 1: Unemployed persons

Population by sex	*Total*	*Roman Catholic*	*Presbyterian Church of Ireland/ Methodist*	*Other denominations*	*None*	*not stated*
Males						
Number	77,326	40,647	23,068	3,827	3,376	6,408
Percentage	100	52.47	29.83	4.95	4.37	8.29
Females						
Number	29,744	13,863	10,086	1,857	1,337	2,601
Percentage	100	46.61	33.91	6.24	4.50	8.74
Persons						
Number	107,070	54,510	33,154	5,684	4,713	9,009
Percentage	100	50.91	30.96	5.31	4.40	8.41

Table 2: Ratios of Roman Catholic unemployment rates[1] to other groupings

Population by sex	*Presbyterian/ Church of Ireland/ Methodist*	*Other denominations*	*None*	*Not stated*
Males	2.2:1	2.5:1	1.8:1	1.3:1
Females	1.8:1	1.8:1	1.2:1	1,1:1
Persons	2.1:1	2.3:1	1.6:1	1.3:1

[1] The unemployment rates are calculated by expressing the number recorded as economically active out of employment as a percentage of the total economically active.

Burglary

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many police cautions for burglary have been given in the last five years. [14552]

Sir John Wheeler: I very much regret that the information is not at present available in the form requested. I am seeking to establish the means within the Royal Ulster Constabulary to ensure that it is available in future.

Training and Employment Agency

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the future of the Training and Employment Agency. [15310]

Mr. Ancram: A prior options review and an evaluation of the Training and Employment Agency have been completed. On the basis of these Ministers concluded that the agency should continue as a next steps agency with the same operation responsibilities for a further five years. In November 1995, Ministers agreed a new framework document for the agency which, among other things,

commits the agency to seeking further involvement of the private sector in the delivery of programmes and services. The new framework document has now been printed and copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

Sport (Young People)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide a replacement grant to the Northern Ireland Boys' Football Association in place of that withdrawn by the Sports Council; and if he will meet a delegation from the Sports Council to discuss its recent report on the organisational needs of ungranted non-school boys' football. [13803]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 8 February 1996]:* The provision of grant is a matter for the Sports Council.

The council has advised that it has not sought a meeting, nor has it produced a report.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the criteria used by Price Waterhouse to argue for the abolition of the team grant in its review of the junior sports club scheme. [13804]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 8 February 1996]:* Decisions in the light of the Price Waterhouse report were a matter for the Sports Council, and were taken on the basis that the promotion of sport for young people could be undertaken more effectively and efficiently by other means. Support for youth football is being maintained, but has been refocused to increase effectiveness and value for money.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Ethical Investment Criteria

Mr. Flynn: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, when the Church Commissioners decided that they would invest in companies producing armaments where armaments make up less than 30 per cent. of a company's portfolio; on what occasions in the last five years the cut-off point has been altered; and what it was previously. [14500]

Mr. Alison: The commissioners do not operate this policy through the application of percentages. Those companies in which we invest and which derive a significant proportion of business from armaments or any of the other banned categories—tobacco, newspapers, gambling, brewing and distilling—are automatically put on the agenda for review by the ethical working group.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what talks the Church Commissioners have held with the General Electric Company; what was the subject of the talks; and what conclusions were reached. [14499]

Mr. Alison: The commissioners met David Newlands, finance director of GEC, on 19 July 1995 to discuss the company's role in the defence industry and to gain a clearer understanding of its corporate strategy.

We were informed that GEC is a multi-product company employing 86,000 people and assured that all military equipment sales made by GEC were to the Her Majesty's Government or sponsored by Her Majesty's Government and that they were subject to rigorous controls. The equipment is used in the defence of our country, our NATO partners and allies. Its corporate governance standards were deemed to be high.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, which *(a)* armaments companies and *(b)* other companies the Church Commissioners have disinvested from, or decided not to invest in, because of their ethical policies in the last five years. [14498]

Mr. Alison: The commissioners refrain from investing in any company whose main business is in armaments, newspapers, gambling, brewing and distilling.

A number of companies with defence interests, such as Babcock International, British Aerospace, Cobham, Hunting, Racal Electronics, Rolls-Royce, Serco, Smiths Industries, Vickers, Vosper Thornycroft, are excluded from the portfolio for this reason. The commissioners have not disinvested over the last five years from any companies with defence interests held within the portfolio, and therefore are meeting the "main business" criterion, on ethical grounds.

In answer to *(b)*, the commissioners disinvested from British Sky Broadcasting in November 1995 following the company's decision to promote and broadcast the Playboy TV channel.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the total amount of Government funding currently provided to the TECs. [14277]

Mr. Paice: The total amount of funding provided to training and enterprise councils by the Department in 1995–96 is £1.216 billion. The Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of the Environment also provide TECs with additional Government funding.

The responsibility for TECs in Wales lies with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the total annual cost to the Exchequer of the running of the training and enterprise councils. [14466]

Mr. Paice: The Department does not collect this information. Training and enterprise councils are private companies. The Department makes a contribution to the council's administration costs. In 1995–96 the contribution is £126 million.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects to reach an agreement with training and enterprise councils about their operating agreement for 1996–97. [15081]

Mr. Paice: The published agreement will be with training and enterprise councils by the third week of February. Negotiations with TECs on budgets and targets for 1996–97 are progressing. Officials from the Department expect to sign agreements with TECs by 25 March 1996, the start of the new contract year.

School League Tables (Yorkshire)

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will set out the league tables of achievement for the schools in the Yorkshire counties. [14141]

Mr. Paice: The annual secondary school performance tables published by the Department list schools alphabetically rather than in order of achievement. Copies of the performance tables for the Yorkshire area are in the public domain and are available in the Library.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if new asylum seekers will qualify for the same concessionary fee status as asylum seekers in receipt of benefit under the new regulations; [14478]

(2) what estimate she has made of the financial impact on further education colleges required to cease claiming recurrent funding from the Further Education Funding Council for those asylum seekers with concessionary fees who are no longer eligible for income support after 5 February; [14479]

(3) how many asylum seekers are currently receiving concessionary fees and FEFC funding for part-time courses; and if these arrangements will continue when the new regulations come into force. [14477]

Mr. Paice: The FEFC has only recently begun to collect separate data on asylum seekers eligible for student fee remission, so it is not at present possible to give the number of those currently benefiting from fee remission.

It is estimated that the number of students likely to be affected by the change in regulations will be very small. However, I understand that the FEFC has decided that if any further education colleges are seriously affected by the loss of recurrent funding from this source it will consider their cases sympathetically.

Arrangements for fee remission for asylum seekers studying at FE colleges are a matter for the FEFC, and I am asking the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Further Education Funding Council

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how much each region has received from the FEFC each year since its formation; [14518]

(2) how many colleges are funded by the FEFC in each region. [14519]

Mr. Paice: Details of the allocation of funding to colleges, and the number of FEFC-funded colleges in each region are matters for the Further Education Funding Council. I am therefore asking the council's chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much it costs annually to run the Further Education Funding Council. [14517]

Mr. Paice: The amounts paid to the council to cover running costs in each financial year from 1992–93 to 1994–5 are as follows:

Financial Year

1992–93: £4.3 million

1993–94: £18.8 million

1994–95: £23.7 million.

In the current financial year there is provision of £24.2 million to cover the council's running costs.

The council's running costs are expected to be lower in subsequent years. Estimated totals for 1996–97 to 1998–99 are as follows:

Financial Year

1996–97: £23.6 million

1997–98: £23.0 million

1998–99: £23.0 million.

Pupils' Performance Tables

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to use value added criteria in her proposed performance tables for 11-year-olds. [14482]

Mr. Robin Squire: I have asked the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority to report on the potential of different models of value added at key stages 2 and 4. It expects to do so by December 1996. The possibility of including value added measures in primary school tables, at some point, will be addressed in the light of that report.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she will publish the performance tables for 11-year-olds in national assessment tests; in what format the information will be published; and if she will make a statement. [14481]

Mr. Squire: I intend to publish this summer's assessment results for 11-year-olds in school performance tables early in 1997. I shall consult in due course on the format of the tables.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many cases the Equal Opportunities Commission have brought before a tribunal where there has been no formal complaint in each of the last five years. [14411]

Mrs. Gillan: The Equal Opportunities Commission has no power to bring complaints to an industrial tribunal in its own name on behalf of an individual alleging sex discrimination.

The Equal Opportunities Commission has such power in respect of complaints about discriminatory advertising, instructions to discriminate and pressure to discriminate. The number of cases where proceedings in these categories have been instituted are shown in the following table:

Year	*Number of cases*
1991	4
1992	2
1993	0
1994	3
1995	6

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what guidelines have been issued to the Equal Opportunities Commission in respect of cases where job applicants have failed to comply with the jobseeker's scheme; [14412]

(2) what guidelines have been issued to the Equal Opportunities Commission in respect of pursuing cases in the absence of a complaint *(a)* in general and *(b)* in respect of small businesses. [14410]

Mrs. Gillan: The Equal Opportunities Commission is an independent body which decides what cases to pursue with reference to its statutory duties to work toward the elimination of discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity between men and women generally. The Government have not issued guidelines in respect of pursuing cases.

Access to Work

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what factors led her to reduce her Department's expenditure for disbursement via the access to work scheme for disabled employees; and what estimate she has made of the number of persons in employment on account of this scheme whose employment will be terminated by the planned reductions. [14761]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Nigel Spearing, dated 13 February 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the expenditure on Access to Work; and for an estimate of the number of people, in employment on account of the programme, whose employment will consequently be terminated.

The expenditure on Access to Work has not been reduced. The Secretary of State announced on 14 December that additional funds had been allocated to meet the demand made on the programme this year. You may know that by the end of December some 12,000 people had been helped—close to 2,000 more than for the whole of 1994/95.

We are continuing to support people in employment to whom we have an existing commitment and I would not expect there to be any change to their employment position.

I hope this is helpful.

Modern Apprenticeship Scheme

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people are now on the modern apprenticeship scheme. [15080]

Mr. Paice: The number of modern apprentices in England and Wales is currently well over 15,000. Because the numbers are growing rapidly, it is not possible to give a precise up-to-the-minute figure.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what have been the costs to date of the advertising campaign to promote the modern apprenticeship scheme; and what is the estimate of the total cost. [15079]

Mr. Paice: There have been two phases of advertising promotion modern apprenticeships in the year 1995–96. The first phase ran from September to December 1995 at a cost of £2.425 million.

The second phase runs throughout February this year. The estimated cost is £1.274 million.

The estimate of the total costs is £3.699 million.

Training for Work

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the cost incurred in carrying out the evaluation of training for work funding pilots. [15078]

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to him on 15 January 1996. *Official Report*, Column *475*.

Nursery Education

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each of the areas of local education authorities for *(a)* Wandsworth, *(b)* Westminster, *(c)* Kensington and Chelsea and *(d)* Norfolk, (i) the number of three and four year olds, (ii) the number receiving nursery education in nursery schools or classes maintained by the authority, (iii) the number in nursery schools or classes not maintained by the education authority and (iv) (ii) and (iii) as a percentage of (i). [15101]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is shown in the table:

Provision of education for under five's—January 1995[1]

	Wandsworth	*Westminster*	*Kensingtson and Chelsea*	*Norfolk*
Estimated population aged three and four as at 31 December 1994	6,800	4,000	3,300	18,300
Nursery schools				
Pupils	216	190	249	404
Percentage[3]	3	5	8	2
Primary schools				
Nursery classes				
Pupils	2,176	993	608	857
Percentage[3]	32	25	18	5
Infant classes[2]				
Pupils	1,624	574	385	5,646
Percentage[3]	24	14	12	31

Provision of education for under five's—January 1995[1]

	Wandsworth	Westminster	Kensington and Chelsea	Norfolk
Special schools				
Maintained				
Pupils	11	0	0	47
Percentage[3]	—	0	0	—
Non-maintained				
Pupils	0	0	0	0
Percentage[3]	0	0	0	0
Independent schools				
Pupils	897	486	836	635
Percentage[3]	13	12	25	3

— negligible (i.e. less than 0.5 per cent.)
[1] Excludes pupils who became 5 years of age by 1 January 1995.
[2] Inludes reception and other classes.
[3] Pupils aged 3 and 4 years old expressed as a percentage of the 3 and 4 year old population at 31 December 1994.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of Thursday 8 February, *Official Report*, column *321*, concerning responses to the advertised contract for administering the proposed voucher system, if she will place a list of the unsuccessful applicants in the Library. [15102]

Mr. Robin Squire: A list has been placed in the Library of the House.

Thefts

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that have been stolen or are otherwise unaccounted for from each region of the former Department of Employment in each of the past five years, listing by name such items valued at £5,000 or more. [13360]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 2 February 1996]:* The Employment Department group kept site records of each incident of loss, which were subject to audit; these records included details of the numbers of items lost in each incident, and the nature of the loss—that is, theft or other hostile action, or other causes. However, the large majority of these records are retained regionally or locally. It would be disproportionately costly and time consuming to search these records to provide the information on a regional basis.

Summary reports were made to the head offices of the former Employment Department and its agencies for central recording.

These reports included a valuation of the loss, which was based on either the cost of the item at purchase or the estimated value at the time of the loss or the replacement cost; the measure chosen in each case was the one giving the most accurate picture of the loss to the Department. It was not always appropriate for the summaries to show the number and details of items of equipment involved in an incident.

I am able to provide the following information about items of equipment stolen or unaccounted for in the last five financial years. One incident involving loss of furniture is recorded. No items of equipment valued individually at £5,000 or more are recorded as lost. The following table gives the information available:

Employment Department: Cost and number of items of equipment lost or incidents of loss of equipment

	Number of items (where recorded)	Number of incidents (number of items not recorded)	Total value (£)
1991–92:			
ES (total for all regions)	—	2	886
ACAS	0	0	—
ED	0	0	—
HSE (total for all regions)	34	—	51,405
DE group total 1991–92	34	2	52,291
1992–93:			
ES (total for all regions)	—	24	34,877
ACAS	0	0	—
ED	2	—	3,420
HSE (total for all regions)	86	—	197,362
DE group total 1992–93	88	24	235,659
1993–94:			
ES (total for all regions)	—	34	20,150
ACAS	3	—	14,400
ED	—	3	400
HSE (total for all regions)	275	—	507,518
DE group total 1993–94	278	37	542,468
1994–95:			
ES (total for all regions)	—	70	59,389
ACAS	21	—	16,200
ED	24	—	2,875
HSE (total for all regions)	22	—	25,760
DE group total 1994–95	67	70	104,224
1995–96 (part-year):			
ES (total for all regions)	—	48	84,928
ACAS	40	—	79,191
ED	517	—	285,570
HSE (total for all regions)	98	—	37,352
DE group total 1995–96 (part-year)	655	48	487,041

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Internet

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column *711*, if he will make a statement on his Department's current policy in respect of regulation of the Internet and encryption. [12610]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Internet represents a significant range of commercial opportunities and it is important for the competitiveness of the UK economy that business take full advantage of it. It is crucial that the regulatory framework should not discourage this.

Although child pornography and obscenity are covered by the same laws on the Internet as in any other media—recent prosecutions have been encouraging—the Government recognise that there are legitimate concerns about the distribution of unsuitable material over the Internet. The Government consider that a voluntary approach is now most likely to be effective in addressing these issues further. Constructive discussions have been held with service providers to establish how action by them can help control access to undesirable material and this will be pursued over the coming months.

On encryption, I described the consideration being given to the provision of encrypted services on public networks in the reply I gave my hon. Friend on 23 October 1995, *Official Report*, columns *421–22*. Discussions within Government and within Europe are continuing.

Mr. French: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 13 December, *Official Report*, column *639*, what further progress has been made in assessing the feasibility of regulating the content of material disseminated via the Internet; and if he will make a statement. [13402]

Mr. Taylor: DTI and Home Office officials have had a constructive meeting with Internet service providers to discuss concerns about the availability of pornographic material on the Internet, and ways of controlling access by children and young people to such material. The Government consider that a voluntary approach is most likely to be effective in addressing the problem and will be pursuing this with service providers over the coming months. There are service providers who will assist parents and schools in providing restricted access, but this is a matter for individuals to pursue.

Departmental Publications

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which of his Department's administrative manuals and internal guidance are now made public; and which remain private. [14024]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The administrative manuals and internal guidance that my Department has already made available to the public are as listed. Material that has not been made public can be identified only at disproportionate cost. In line with the code of practice on access to Government information, it is my intention to make available progressively any remaining administrative manuals and internal guidance relating to our dealings with the public.

Authorisation of insurers in the United Kingdom: a practical guide for assessing applications;

Business Links: Guidelines for Officials;

DTI Enquiry Unit guidelines;

DTI Guide to Market Testing;

DTI Procurement manual;

EJS (Engineers to Japan Scheme) details;

Export Control Compliance Unit: Compliance visit procedures;

Export Control Organisation (ECO) Staff Handbook;

Export Control Policy Unit procedures;

Guidance notes of the Shipbuilding Intervention Fund;

Iron and Steel Employees Re-adaptation Benefits Scheme;

Offshore Research and Development Programme (OSSCAR): Guidance notes for staff;

Open Government (Minute to DTI Information Officers);

Open government case file guidance, charging form, application form;

Open government office notice;

Open Government: dealings with the public (Laboratory of the Government Chemist);

OSTEMS (Overseas Science Technology Expert Missions Scheme) details;

OTIS (Overseas Technical Information Service) details;

Procurement Guide: EC Services Directive;

Procurement Guide: EC Supplies Directive and GATT GPA;

Rules and procedures for Use of Technology Programme.

Spare Computer Capacity

Mr. Miller: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list all cases where spare computer capacity has been sold to other Departments since 1987, giving the Department and value of each contract. [14077]

Mr. Lang: My Department has provided computer-related services to other Departments where they have represented best value for money for the Departments concerned. These arrangements are as follows: financial services for the Department of National Heritage, from 1993 to 1995, and to the Department of Energy, 1987 to 1992, of which computer support was one element. In addition, a number of other Departments and non-departmental public bodies continue to be provided with access to our specialist library systems. The latter services continue to be provided on a repayment basis at a current annual cost of £36,000.

Other users of my Department's computer systems, together with recoverable costs where figures are available, have included:

Year	*£*
Central Statistical Office	
1991–92	30,723
1992–93	27,244
1993–94	20,218
1994–95	10,070
National Audit Office	
1991–92	17,896
1992–93	8,223
1993–94	1,775
Scottish Office	
1991–92	13,910
1992–93	16,847
1993–94	8,037
1994–95	5,074

Sydney Olympics

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, column *866*, what remuneration and expenses are payable to members of the Sydney olympics United Kingdom business task force. [14446]

Mr. Nelson: No remuneration is payable to the members of the task force. Any expenses which the chairman would normally have received will be paid to the British Paralympic Association.

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the minimum levels of pay prescribed by each of the wages councils immediately before their abolition; and what were each of these levels of pay as a percentage of *(a)* average wages in the industry and *(b)* the national average wage at that time. [14320]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested is contained in the table:

	Minimum monthly rate	*Minimum rates as percentage of:*	
	£	*Average wages in industry*	*National average wage*
Aerated waters	3.05	—	39
Boot and shoe repairing	3.02	62.9	38.6
Button manufacturing	2.66	—	34
Clothing manufacturing	2.7166	65.6	34.7
Coffin furniture and cerement making	3.20	—	40.9
Cotton waste reclamation	2.78	—	35.5
Fur	2.85	—	36.4
General waste materials reclamation	2.675	56.8	34.2
Hairdressing undertaking	2.88	67	36.8
Hat, cap and millinery	2.76	59.9	35.3
Laundry	2.98	65.1	38.1
Licensed non-residential establishment	3.01	57.3	38.4
Licensed residential establishment and licensed restaurant	2.92	53.9	37.3
Linen and cotton handkerchief and household goods and linen piece goods	2.83	75.3	36.1
Made-up textiles	2.70	61.5	34.5
Ostrich and fancy feather and artificial flower	2.73	—	34.9
Perambulator and invalid carriage	3.13	—	40
Retail bespoke tailoring	3.20	61.3	40.9
Retail food and allied trades	3.175	59.7	40.6
Retail trades (non-food)	3.155	57.7	40.3
Rope twine and net	2.755	71.2	35.2
Sack and bag	2.745	—	35.1
Toy manufacturing	2.71	59.8	34.6
Unlicensed place of refreshment	2.99	61.9	38.2

Average earnings figures are not available for certain of the smaller councils.

Nuclear Accidents

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what account is taken of the level of commercial insurance in setting the nuclear industry's level of liability in respect of a nuclear accident; and what account is taken of inflation; [14560]

(2) at what intervals reviews are conducted on the level of nuclear industry liability in respect of a nuclear accident; and when the next review is planned to take place. [14561]

Mr. Eggar: My Department keeps the level of insurance required to be held by nuclear operators under review. There are no formal review intervals. The most recent increase was in April 1994. The key considerations were to meet the internationally agreed target limit for parties to the Paris convention and the level of commercial insurance then available. There has been no significant change in insurance capacity since that time.

Second-hand Furniture

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will take steps to ensure that second-hand furniture may be sold only if it bears a "Fire Resistant" label. [14316]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I do not believe it is necessary specifically to require second-hand furniture to bear labels indicating fire resistance. Since 1 March 1993, the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988, as amended, have prohibited in the UK sale, in the course of a business, of second-hand furniture that does not meet the full requirements of this legislation. Trading standards departments have all the necessary powers to take action against traders who sell non-compliant items.

The regulations also require permanent labels, indicating compliance, to be attached to all new furniture. Purchasers of second-hand furniture should look for these permanently affixed labels.

Electro-magnetic Fields

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he, his Ministers or his civil servants have had about indemnifying the National Grid Company against potential claims relating to electro-magnetic fields and their impact upon communities after privatisation; and if he will make a statement. [14511]

Mr. Page: No discussions have been held or are planned on the question of indemnifying the National Grid Company against potential claims relating to electro-magnetic fields.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what reports he has received on the representations made to the United Kingdom ambassador in Dublin by the Irish Minister for Energy, Transport and Communications during their meeting on 6 February to discuss Sellafield. [14844]

Mr. Eggar: The meeting was held at the ambassador's request. Mr. Stagg, the Irish Minister for Energy, Transport and Communications, expressed anxiety about the UK nuclear industry, including operations at Sellafield, following a minor incident there on 2 February. However, as Mr. Stagg recognised in his subsequent statement in the Dail on 8 February, the incident had no radiological or health implications for Ireland nor was there any release of radioactivity to the environment. Mr. Stagg and the ambassador agreed on the importance of

continued early notification to the Irish Government of incidents at UK nuclear installations which could affect the Irish environment.

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his timetable for the closure of the Magnox nuclear power stations; and if he will make a statement. [14758]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government are satisfied that it makes economic sense to continue to generate electricity from the Magnox stations. Decisions relating to closure of Magnox stations are a matter for the operator, subject to the views of the independent regulator, the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate—NII. The safety of all UK Magnox nuclear power stations has been considered in detail by the NII under the long-term safety review—LTSR—programme. Subject to continuing satisfactory results from the routine tests and inspections required under licensing arrangements, and the outcome of periodic safety reviews, the NII has given its agreement for those Magnox stations currently operating to continue to operate.

Medical Research Council

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what council funds have been earmarked for *(a)* "realising our potential" awards and *(b)* other schemes in each of the last 10 years (i) in cash terms and (ii) as a proportion of the Medical Research Council budget. [14721]

Mr. Ian Taylor: *(a)* The following additional allocations have been made to the Medical Research Council—MRC—for the first year costs of new realising our potential awards, ROPA, grants:

	Cash terms (£ million)	*Proportion of MRC budget (per cent.)*
1996–97	1.0	0.4
1995–96	2.6	0.9
1994–95	1.0	0.4

In 1996–97, the MRC's allocation includes £5.8 million for expenditure on new and on-going ROPA grants, 2.1 per cent. of its total allocation.

(b) Information is not available in the form requested. Over the past 10 years, the MRC was allocated additional funds for the first-year costs of the following specific programmes:

Year	*Programme*	*Cash terms (£ million)*	*Proportion of MRC budget (Per cent.)*
1996–97	Equipment	1.5	0.5
1995–96	Equipment	1.0	0.4
1994–95	Genome and Immunology	2.4	0.9
1993–94	Genome Mapping Programme	2.5	1.0
1992–93	Genetic basis of disease	4.2	1.9
	Neuroscience	1.4	0.6
	Clinical research	1.3	0.6
1991–92	None	—	—
1990–91	None	—	—
1989–90	Equipment at units and institutes	2.9	1.6
	LINK	0.7	0.4
	Human genome mapping	2.3	1.3
	AIDS strategic programme	2.6	1.5
	Macromolecular interaction	2.0	1.1
	Cell biology	3.6	2.0
	National Institute of Medical Research animal accommodation	2.0	1.1
1988–89	Interdisciplinary Research Centre in toxicology	0.3	0.2
	AIDS programme	6.0	4.1
1987–88	None	—	—

In most years, there have in addition been allocations for less specific programmes, such as the support of studentships and responsive mode grants, and allowances for the ongoing costs of new initiatives started in previous years.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much money the Medical Research Council has been allocated in each of the last 10 years. [14720]

Mr. Taylor: The allocations made to the Medical Research Council from the science budget over the last 10 years are as follows:

1996–97: £281.9 million
1995–96: £278.0 million
1994–95: £269.2 million
1993–94: £256.9 million
1992–93: £227.6 million
1991–92: £200.4 million
1990–91: £185.7 million
1989–90: £176.3 million
1988–89: £146.7 million
1987–88: £139.8 million.

Electricité de France

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much has been paid to Electricité de France under the fossil fuel levy from its introduction to date. [14757]

Mr. Page: Electricité de France does not receive payments from the fossil fuel levy.

Research Funding

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on core research funding for the public sector research establishments. [14643]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Public sector research establishments provide a wide variety of scientific and technical services for their customers within Government, the research councils, academia and industry. These are supported by a varying mixture of "core funding" for a range of facilities or services, and funds for specific activities, often awarded on a competitive basis.

The 1993 White Paper "Realising our Potential" made clear our intention that Government research contract should be awarded wherever possible by a competitive process, as a means to ensure an efficient and effective service is obtained. The progress of Departments and research councils in implementing this policy is reported annually in the statistical supplement to the "Forward Look".

Fireworks

Mr. Burden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to publish the firework injury statistics relating to November 1995. [14913]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The fireworks injury statistics are collected from all hospital accident and emergency departments in Great Britain. As soon as all this information has been received, collated and checked, which should be some time in March, the figures will be published.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many written parliamentary questions were passed for answer to executive agencies and non-governmental departments in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [14987]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested in respect of the DTI's executive agencies is set out in the list. The answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 15 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *357*, explains the basis on which this information has been prepared.

1991–92: 0

1992–93: 4

1993–94: 0

1994–95: 2

1995–96: 1 (Year to date).

No parliamentary questions have been passed to the non-departmental public bodies for which the DTI is responsible.

Electricity Industry

Mr. Pike: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what power stations have been closed by *(a)* National Power and *(b)* PowerGen since privatisation; and what proceeds have accrued to public funds as a result of each sale. [14937]

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Small Business, Industry and Energy to his similar question of 5 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *18*.

National Minimum Wage

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion the statutory minimum wage contributes to the average national wage in *(a)* each EU state, *(b)* USA, *(c)* Japan, *(d)* Australia, *(e)* Canada and *(f)* New Zealand. [14973]

Mr. John M. Taylor: This information can be provided only at disproportionate cost. Limited and somewhat dated evidence is available from the OECD jobs study, from which the table is taken.

Minimum wages relative to average wages by age, education, occupation and gender minimum wage/average wage of the respective groups

	Men	*Women*	*Both sexes*
Education			
Netherlands, 1989, lowest level, (adults)	0.627	0.777	—
Canada, 1988, 0–8 years of education	0.356	0.544	—
United States, 1987, 8–11 years of schooling	0.362	0.579	—
Occupation			
France, 1991:			
Blue-collar workers *(ouvriers)*	0.657	0.805	0.685
White-collar workers *(employee)*	0.603	0.667	0.639
Senior managers *(cadres)*	0.246	0.310	0.257
Age			
Netherlands, 1989:			
15–22, average youth MW	0.538	0.622	—
(15–22, adult minimum wage)	(1.021)	(1.182)	—
Canada, 1988:			
16–19	0.565	0.607	0.583
20–24	0.443	0.510	0.470
France, 1987:			
15–19	—	—	1.164
20–24	—	—	0.747
United States, 1987:			
16–24, workers paid hourly rates	0.682	0.794	—
16–19, full-time wage and salary earners	0.697	0.795	—
20–24, full-time wage and salary earners	0.496	0.564	—

Note:

1. The youth minimum is estimated as the simple average of the seven specific youth rates.

Sources:

Netherlands: 1989 Wage Survey (submission from the Statistical Central Bureau);

Canada: Market Activity Survey (submission from Statistics Canada);

United States: Bureau of Labor Statistics, *"Labour Force Statistics Derived From the Current Population Survey" 1948–87.* 1988 (for age) and tabulations from the CPS from Prof. L. Katz (for education).

France: 1987, Declarations annuelles de donnees sociales (DADS); 1991,

"L'Evolution des salaries", Dossiers statistiques du travail et de l'emploi.

No. 87, 1993.

Taken from OECD Jobs Study (1994), table 5.26, page 49. OECD, Paris.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the answer given on 15 January, *Official Report*, columns *476–77*, if he will list the figures for purchasing power parity on a common basis, indicating the figures per hour; and if he will give the equivalent figures for minimum wage levels and purchasing power parity exchange rates for *(a)* Australia, *(b)* Canada, *(c)* New Zealand and *(d)* those EU countries excluded from the answer. [14969]

Mr. Taylor: The table shows the minimum wage in a number of countries, calculated as an hourly rate, and translated into sterling using purchasing power parity exchange rates.

Country	*Minimum wage level (hourly rate) Own currency*	*At PPP[1] exchange rates Sterling*
Belgium	BF 249.9	£4.32
France	FF 36.98	£3.61
Greece	Dr 667.2	£2.20
Luxembourg	LF 252.37	£4.07
Netherlands	HfL 12.6	£3.83
Portugal	Esc 300	£1.64
Spain	Pts 374.54	£1.99
USA	US$ 4.25	£2.75
Japan[2]	Y 554	£1.98
Canada	C$ 6.25	£3.26
New Zealand	NZ$ 6.25	£2.68

All minimum wages converted to hourly rates, assuming a standard 40 hour week, 8 hour day.

[1] Wage Rates converted to UK equivalent using 1994 purchasing power parities from OECD National Accounts, 1996.

[2] The lowest regional rate.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of the work force is covered by the minimum wage in respect of *(a)* Australia, *(b)* Canada, *(c)* New Zealand, *(d)* all EU countries, *(e)* USA and *(f)* Japan. [14970]

Mr. Taylor: This information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Business Links (East Lancashire)

Mr. Pike: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects there to be a business link one stop shop in East Lancashire; and if he will make a statement. [15157]

Mr. Page: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on 22 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *4*.

Information Society

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the Government's plans for an information society initiative. [15282]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The information society initiative—ISI—was launched by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade today. The initiative is a partnership between industry and Government to help improve the competitiveness of British business in the emerging information-based economy. It represents a coherent and extensive response to the challenge of information and communication technologies which will have a major impact on the way we do business and the way we lead our lives.

The main aim of the ISI is to encourage British companies, particularly small and medium-sized companies, to take full advantage of information and communication technologies. It will help to explain how technology can solve problems for industry and help to win new business. Electronic networks, for example, can give smaller companies access to resources and markets previously only in the domain of large corporations.

UK industries are well placed to take advantage of the information society. We have significant strengths in communications and multimedia which put us ahead of most other European countries, but considerably more needs to be done to apply our skills, to build on our strengths and to sustain competitiveness in a tough global market-place. The ISI, in which the DTI is to invest up to £35 million over the next four years, will play a key role in achieving these objectives.

The ISI provides a comprehensive package of programmes and activities to help UK business into the information society—guidance, road shows, clubs, awards, local support centres, projects grants and technology programmes. It is based on close partnership between Government and industry, with many companies launching complementary programmes.

The campaigns will be integrated with existing DTI services, such as business links. Our specific objective will be to raise awareness and understanding of: multimedia, communications, creativity, technology transfer and technology development. Methods highlighted will include use of the Internet, E-mail, electronic data interchange—EDI—video-conferencing, simultaneous remote access to a computer, CD-ROMS for information storage and marketing, electronic commerce, home shopping and telebanking.

Further details are available at the ISI website, http://www.isis.gov.uk.

Coal Mining Subsidence

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to receive the Coal Authority's first report on the administration of the coal mining subsidence damage repair and compensation scheme. [15286]

Mr. Page: I have now received this report from the Coal Authority and have arranged for copies to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses today.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what account was taken of the costs relating to *(a)* their mainframe computer, *(b)* each separate on-line terminal, *(c)* the annual service fee for the mainframe computer and *(d)* the annual service charge for each on-line terminal in determining whether to allocate the contract to run the national lottery to Camelot; and what were the figures involved. [14255]

Mr. Sproat: This is an operational matter for Camelot Group plc. The Director General of the National Lottery has licensed Camelot to run the national lottery and he regulates their operations. I have therefore asked the director general to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

Library Services

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to extend compulsory competitive tendering into library services. [14514]

Mr. Sproat: I am currently considering a number of options for improving efficiency in public libraries, including the option of compulsory competitive tendering. My right hon. Friend will be making a more detailed statement in due course.

Broadcast Sports Rights

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will include the fourth report of the National Heritage Select Committee of Session 1993–94, HC 289, "Sports Sponsorship and Television Coverage", as part of the evidence to her consultation document "Broadcast Sports Rights: Informing the Debate." [14318]

Mr. Sproat: The Government are aware of the views expressed in the National Heritage Select Committee report and will take account of these and other views before making our position clear.

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage to which organisations had she sent copies of her document "Broadcast Sports Rights: Informing the Debate". [14313]

Mr. Sproat: In addition to copies deposited to both House Libraries, copies of the discussion paper have been sent directly to the following organisations:

BBC
ITVA
Channel 4
S4C
Channel 5 Broadcasting
BskyB
Cable Communications Association
Sports Councils for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland
Central Council for Physical Recreation
British Sports Forum
Institute of Sports Sponsorship
Test and County Cricket Board
Football Association
The Premier League
Scottish Football Association
English Rugby Football Union
Welsh Rugby Football Union
Professional Golf Association
Rugby League
Lawn Tennis Association
British Olympic Association
British Athletics Federation
British Paralympic Association
Independent Television Commission
Radio Authority
Office of Fair Trading
Patent Office
Consumers' Association
National Consumers' Council
Voice of the Listener and Viewer.

The paper has also been widely publicised in the media and copies have been sent to any organisation requesting them. A record of these organisations has not been kept.

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what is the closing date for the submission of evidence on her consultation document "Broadcast Sports Rights: Informing the Debate"; [14311]

(2) when she plans to announce her conclusions on her consultation document "Broadcast Sports Rights: Informing the Debate". [14312]

Mr. Sproat: The paper is not a formal consultation document, but a discussion paper published to assist the public and parliamentary debate. There is, therefore, no formal end date to a consultation process. However, the Government will make their position clear on Report in the other place.

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what measures she will take to assess the opinions of viewers and listeners on her document "Broadcast Sports Rights: Informing the Debate". [14314]

Mr. Sproat: Representatives from the National Consumers Council, the Consumers Association and the Voice of the Listener and Viewer will meet my officials, to discuss both the document and the general issue of broadcast sports rights. My Department has also received a large number of representations from members of the public on this issue.

Concessionary Television Licences

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) of 18 January, *Official Report*, column *726*, what are the qualifying criteria that sheltered accommodation must meet to be eligible for a concessionary television licence.. [14592]

Mr. Sproat: In order for residents to qualify for concessionary television licences, sheltered accommodation must be provided or run by a local authority or housing association and must consist of a group of at least four dwellings:

(a) which are provided for occupation by disabled persons, mentally disordered persons or retired persons of pensionable age;

(b) which have been erected or converted for the purposes of such occupation;

(c) for which there is a person whose function is to care for the needs of the persons referred to in paragraph (a) above and who either lives in one of the dwellings within the group or works in that group for at least 30 hours per week; and

(d) which fall within a common and exclusive boundary.

Windsor Castle

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *625*, in which council tax band is

the accommodation occupied by the military knights of Windsor. [14538]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 9 February 1996]:* The governor's residence is in band G, and the remaining residences are all in band E.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *693*, what accommodation is occupied by each of the 13 military knights at Windsor. [14415]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 9 February 1996]:* The accommodation occupied by the military knights is as follows:

One has five bedrooms, two bathrooms, a kitchen, dining room, sitting room and study.

Eleven have three bedrooms, one bathroom, a kitchen, dining room, sitting room and study.

One has two bedrooms, one bathroom, a kitchen with dining area, a sitting room and study.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *625*, if the £1,287 paid in water charges by the 13 military knights of Windsor is a collective charge. [14416]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 9 February 1996]:* The water charge of £1,287 is a collective figure; each military knight pays approximately £99.

Royal Residences

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *626*, which members of the royal family occupy each of the royal residences listed. [14891]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* Members of the royal family have apartments or residences at each palace as follows:

Buckingham Palace
Her Majesty the Queen

Kensington Palace
The Princess of Wales

The Princess Margaret

The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester

The Prince and Princess Michael of Kent

St James's Palace
The Prince of Wales

The Duke and Duchess of Kent

Princess Alexandra

Clarence House
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother

Windsor Castle
Her Majesty the Queen.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *105*, if he will list the latest new earnings survey figure for the number of people working up to 29 hours a week earning less than each of the family credit ceilings for households of different composition working between 16 and 29 hours per week; and if he will present similar data for those people working about 30 hours per week using the eligibility level for family credit which were applicable for the year during which the earnings survey was carried out. [12735]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

The "New Earnings Survey" contains no information on family composition and does not provide reliable estimates of the number of employees. The table shows the proportion of all employees in the "New Earnings Survey" who are working 16 to 29 hours and 30 hours or more and have earnings below the family credit thresholds indicated. Entitlement to family credit depends on household income as well as family size and it should therefore be noted that the information provided gives no indication of the proportion of employees who qualify for this benefit. Employees in the categories shown will include members of two-earner couples whose household income will be above the appropriate family credit threshold. The sample will also include employees with no dependant children who would have no entitlement to family credit irrespective of the level of earnings.

Proportion of all employees with earnings below family credit thresholds

	Working 19–29 hours		*Working 30 hours or more*	
Family type	*Family credit ceiling (£s per week gross)*	*Percentage with earnings below threshold*	*Family credit ceiling (£s per week gross)*	*Percentage with earnings below threshold*
Family with one child under 5	190.00	79.4	212.00	27.7
Family with two children under 11	215.00	82.4	237.00	36.1
Family with two children 11–15	248.00	84.5	270.00	43.9
Family with three children under 11	240.00	85.0	262.00	46.2
Family with three children 11–15	289.50	87.6	311.00	57.5
Family with two children under 11 and two 11–15	298.00	87.9	320.00	59.6

Notes:

1. Family credit ceilings are 1995–96 and are based on the highest amount of net earnings a family can have and still qualify for family credit at the minimum payment of 50p.

2. Net family credit ceilings have been converted to gross earnings to allow comparison with New Earnings Survey data. In this conversion it has been assumed that tax allowances are equal to those of a married person.

3. Percentages relate to all employees in the categories concerned, irrespective of household composition, whose pay for the survey period was unaffected by absence.

Source:
New Earnings Survey 1995 (GB).

Tribunals (Merthyr Tydfil)

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what estimate he has made of the number of cases dealt with by local tribunals sitting in Merthyr Tydfil in 1995; [13370]

(2) what estimate his Department has made of the travelling costs of staff and appellants to local tribunal hearings at Merthyr Tydfil in 1995; [13372]

(3) what estimate he has made of the number of cases heard at local tribunals in Merthyr Tydfil in 1995 which required the presence of a member of staff from the local social security office; and in how many cases appellants were represented by the Merthyr citizens advice bureau. [13371]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information required is set out in the table.

Cases heard 1995	*Average travelling costs for staff per session*[1] £	*Average travelling costs paid to appellants per session*[1] £	*Hearings attended by DSS staff*	*Appellants represented by Merthyr CAB*
293	31.00—ITS 6.02—DSS	14.48	293	49

Abbreviations:
ITS—Independent Tribunal Service.
DSS—Department of Social Security.
CAB—Citizens Advice Bureau.
Notes:
[1] An average of five appeals are heard at each session.

War Widows

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many war widows, widowed for a second time, divorced or legally separated *(a)* have had and *(b)* are waiting to have the pension restored to them; and what action he is taking to ensure that the restoration programme is being expeditiously implemented. [13578]

Mr. Heald: These are matters for Mr. Kevin Caldwell, the chief executive of the War Pensions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from K. C. Caldwell to Sir Dudley Smith, dated 13 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about restored War Widows Pensions.

As at 2 February 1996, 12,430 claims have been received of which 7,394 have been notified and had payment arranged. To date 85 have been rejected and 4,951 remain to be decided.

We have created a special section, and have recently allocated and trained an additional 12 staff (making a total of 57) to ensure that by the end of March we will have notified all those from whom we now have claims of the results of their claims and, where appropriate, made arrangements for payment.

I hope this is helpful.

Laryngectomy Patients

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for disability living and mobility allowance there have been from patients who have had laryngectomies; and what percentage of these applications have been successful. [14049]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The precise information requested is not available. Successful claims for disability living allowance are recorded by type of disability. Between March 1993 and November 1995, some 63,000 awards were recorded under the category of malignant diseases, some of which may have involved laryngectomies.

Child Support Agency

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *835*, on benefit savings due to parents with care ceasing to claim income support prior to 1993–94 what was the precise number of weeks used for the multiplier based on the average anticipated duration for benefit claims. [14268]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Twenty-one.

Income Support

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of income support are currently having money deducted from their benefit to pay back loans from the social fund; and what is the average weekly repayment per borrower. [14516]

Mr. Roger Evans: The latest available information is set out in the table.

Date	*Number of income support claimants who have Social Fund repayments deducted*	*Average weekly payment £*
February 1995	'675,000	6.43

Note:
[1] The figure provided has been rounded to the nearest 1,000.
Source:
Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry February 1995.

Disability (Access Groups)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the Minister for Disabled People or his predecessor last met *(a)* the Access Committee for England and *(b)* any of the 400 local access groups; what replies have been given to concerns raised at those meetings; and if he will make a statement on the committee's achievements. [14138]

Mr. Burt: My predecessor, now the Secretary of State for Wales, met the Access Committee for England on 14 June 1995.

I and my colleagues in the Departments of the Environment and Health are considering the report of the working group which has been looking at the committee's future role and functions.

We will announce our decisions in due course.

Personal Pensions

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what estimate he has made of the number of employees covered by group personal pension schemes; [14780]

(2) what is the average number of employees of companies which currently offer group personal pension schemes; and what proportion of those entitled to participate do so; [14781]

(3) what are the average earnings of members of group personal pension schemes; [14782]

(4) what assessment he has made of the number of employers who contribute to group personal pension schemes; and what is the average annual contribution per employee. [14784]

Mr. Heald: A group personal pension, GPP, scheme is a grouping of individual personal pensions usually involving a single employer. Official data do not distinguish between personal pensions within a group arrangement and other personal pensions.

Private sector research[1] suggests that around half a million people are covered by upwards of 50,000 GPP arrangements. Some, but not all, of these people will have personal pensions contracted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme, SERPS.

Preliminary results from the survey of employers' pensions provision[2] show that among private sector organisations making some form of pension provision, GPPs were the main arrangement—accounting for the largest percentage of the work force—in just under 20 per cent. of organisations with fewer than 100 employees, falling to just 2 per cent. of organisations with over 500 employees. The survey also shows that 90 per cent. of employers who have arranged a GPP make contributions to their employees' pension.

Information on the participation rates of employees who are offered a GPP arrangement, average earnings of GPP members and the average employer contribution is not available.

Notes:

[1] Income Data Services (IDS) Pensions Bulletin—May 1994.

[2] The survey of employers' pension provision is a Social and Community Planning Research (SCPR)/Policy Studies Institute (PSI) survey of over 1,000 private sector organisations in Great Britain. It is expected that a final report will be published in summer 1996.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the regulatory obstacles to the promotion of group personal pension schemes; and if he will make a statement. [14783]

Mr. Heald: Regulation of the sale and marketing of group personal pension schemes, like all investment products, is governed by the Financial Services Act 1986—FSA.

In response to concerns that employers would become liable under the FSA by offering group schemes, the Department of Social Security, in association with the Securities and Investments Board, produced leaflet PP4; "A guide to the Financial Services Act for employers", which makes it clear that provided they follow certain rules of thumb, employers should be able to offer a group scheme to their employees without infringing the FSA.

Pension Incomes

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, column *51*, on pension incomes, if he will give the same information for 1979. [14896]

Mr. Heald: The available information is in the tables.

Table 1: Single male pensioners

£ per week July 1993 prices

Age	*65 to 74*	*75+*
Mean	108.50	88.60
Median	81.80	72.20

Notes:

1. Income figures are gross income before housing costs and are rounded to the nearest 10p.
2. A pensioner unit is defined as a single person over state pension age (SPA) or a couple where the husband, or head is over SPA.
3. Due to insufficient sample sizes reliable estimates of further age breakdowns for single male pensioners and pensioner couples are not available at tables 1 and 3.

Source:

Family Expenditure Survey 1979.

Table 2: Single female pensioners

£ per week July 1993 prices

Age	*65 to 69*	*70 to 74*	*75 to 79*	*80+*
Mean	80.60	79.70	78.60	76.50
Median	70.00	70.40	71.10	67.20

Notes:

1. Income figures are gross income before housing costs and are rounded to the nearest 10p.
2. A pensioner unit is defined as a single person over state pension age (SPA) or a couple where the husband, or head, is over SPA.
3. Due to insufficient sample sizes reliable estimates of further age breakdowns for single male pensioners and pensioner couples are not available at tables 1 and 3.

Source:

Family Expenditure Survey 1979.

Table 3: Pensioner couples

£ per week July 1993 prices

Age	*65 to 69*	*70 to 74*	*75+*
Mean	187.70	160.00	138.30
Median	145.40	125.70	108.70

Notes:

1. Income figures are gross income before housing costs and are rounded to the nearest 10p.
2. A pensioner unit is defined as a single person over state pension age (SPA) or a couple where the husband, or head, is over SPA.
3. Due to insufficient sample sizes reliable estimates of further age breakdowns for single male pensioners and pensioner couples are not available at tables 1 and 3.

Source:

Family Expenditure Survey 1979.

Table 4: All pensioner units

£ per week July 1993 prices

Age	*60/65 to 74*	*75+*	*60/65 +*
Mean	124.80	93.20	113.40
Median	97.40	75.30	85.90

Notes:

1. Income figures are gross income before housing costs and rounded to the nearest 10p.
2. A pensioner unit is defined as a single person over state pension age (SPA) or a couple where the husband, or head, is over SPA.
3. Due to insufficient sample sizes reliable estimates of further age breakdowns for single male pensioners and pensioner couples are not available at tables 1 and 3.

Source:

Family Expendture Survey 1979.

Maxwell Pension Scheme

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *743*, what safeguards are in place to protect the interests of the Exchequer in relation to any merger of a closed Maxwell pension scheme with another pension scheme. [14895]

Mr. Heald: The Secretary of State has indicated to each of the Maxwell pension schemes trustees on a scheme-by-scheme basis, the circumstances under which he is prepared to exercise discretion to defer the collection of state scheme premiums that are payable by them. He will review the position in the light of any proposal from trustees for a merger of a closed Maxwell scheme.

There are detailed agreements with Maxwell pension scheme trustees setting out the conditions under which grants from the Government's £2.5 million emergency funding support package, made available in June 1992, are repayable.

HEALTH

Paediatric Intensive Care Beds

14. **Ms Janet Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring he is undertaking of the availability of paediatric intensive care beds. [13317]

Mr. Bowis: For the period until 31 March 1996 we have arranged for Sheffield children's hospital to undertake a daily survey of the availability and occupancy of paediatric intensive care beds in hospitals in England.

Accident and Emergency Provision, Liverpool

15. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received in respect of accident and emergency provision at hospitals in Liverpool. [13318]

Mr. Horam: I have received one letter in the last six months.

Public Appointments

16. **Mr. Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has for altering the procedures for appointments to health authorities and NHS trusts; and if he will make a statement. [13319]

Mr. Malone: We have no plans to alter the appointment procedures which fully meet the recommendations for public appointments set out by the committee on standards in public life under its chairman, Lord Nolan.

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many applications have been made for the position of chairmen of the new health authorities; and what percentage of those applicants are women. [14779]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available in the form requested.

Community Care

17. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring he has undertaken of community care provision. [13320]

Mr. Bowis: We monitor community care on a regular basis. This includes work by the social services inspectorate, the regular collection and publication of statistics and longer-term research to evaluate progress.

There is clear evidence both from our own monitoring and from independent reports that community care is a success.

Alternative and Complementary Medicine

18. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the total NHS budget is spent on research and other matters related to alternative and complementary medicine. [13321]

Mr. Horam: The information available centrally does not identify national health service research into alternative and complementary medicine, nor the expenditure by the NHS on the provision of alternative and complementary medicine services.

The Department is currently funding research on complementary therapies in primary care at the medical care research unit at the University of Sheffield, at a cost of around £100,000. This builds on their study published last November about access to complementary therapies through general practice.

Hepatitis C

19. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to report on the departmental study on hepatitis C and its treatment. [13322]

Mr. Horam: There is no single departmental study. The standing group on health technology is taking forward, with the Medical Research Council, work on the effectiveness of alpha-interferon in the early treatment of hepatitis C. The Department is working on establishing a confidential national registry of HCV infection, drawing on information on cases of transfusion infection obtained from its "look back" exercise. It will shortly be seeking research proposals on establishing the prevalence, transmission routes and natural history of HCV infection.

Private Sector Care

20. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of NHS funding is now used to buy care in the private sector. [13323]

Mr. Malone: In 1994–95 health care purchased by the national health service from non-NHS providers amounted to about 1.6 per cent. of total NHS expenditure.

Emergency Beds

21. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the Royal College of Nursing to discuss the staffing for emergency beds. [13324]

Mr. Malone: I met representatives of the medical and nursing professions, including the Royal College of Nursing, on 21 December 1995 to consider a range of issues relating to emergency care.

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the British Medical Association to discuss the availability of emergency beds. [13313]

Mr. Horam: My right hon. Friend has regular meetings with representatives of the BMA when a range of issues are discussed.

Private Finance Initiative

22. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on NHS capital projects to be funded through the private finance initiative. [13325]

Mr. Horam: Patients will benefit from private finance initiative projects which will bring improvements to national health service hospitals up and down the country. The NHS has so far seen schemes worth over £200 million approved. The momentum for PFI is increasing, pushing up the quality of patient care all the time.

27. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many projects for new community hospitals have succeeded in attracting private capital under the private finance initiative; and how many projects for such hospitals are currently being held up awaiting a determination as to whether any such private finance may be available. [13330]

Mr. Horam: I have previously given information on private finance initiative projects which have been approved by the National Health Service Executive for England, and I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 15 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *343*. If, under the PFI, the private sector can improve health care facilities for the benefit of NHS patients and make the NHS's procurement of facilities more cost-effective, then this possibility must be investigated. However, we do not hold centrally the information requested.

Multiple Sclerosis

23. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's policy concerning the future funding of beta-interferon for multiple sclerosis; and if he will make a statement. [13326]

Mr. Malone: Guidance issued recently EL(95)97 suggested that beta-interferon should be prescribed by hospital neurologists where clinically appropriate, and within local agreements between health authorities and hospitals. As with other hospital-prescribed drugs, the costs should be met from within health authority general allocations.

A copy of EL(95)97 is available in the Library.

NHS Building Projects

24. **Dr. Hampson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many major NHS building projects have been completed since 1979. [13327]

Mr. Horam: A total of 842 major national health service building projects are reported as having been completed since 1 January 1980.

GP Fundholders

25. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what impact the increase in the number of general practitioner fundholders from 1 April 1996 will have on health authority purchasing powers. [13328]

Mr. Malone: Health authorities will continue to have a significant role as purchasers of hospital and community health services from April 1996. The developing role of health authorities as general practitioner fundholding expands, has been set out in guidance EL(94)79, "Developing NHS Purchasing and GP Fundholding—Towards a Primary Care-Led NHS". A copy of this guidance is available in the Library.

26. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has recently received in connection with fundholding general practitioners. [13329]

Mr. Malone: I have regular meetings with the medical profession to discuss a range of issues, including general practitioner fundholding.

28. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of patients will be covered by general practitioner fundholding from April. [13331]

Mr. Malone: We expect that over 50 per cent. of the population will be served by a fundholding practitioner from April 1996.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors' practices in the Greater London area are fundholding; how many are not; what costs to public funds are involved in each case; and if he will make a statement. [13607]

Mr. Malone: A total of 325 general practitioner practices in Greater London are currently fundholders, serving more than a quarter of the population. A total of 1,438 general practitioner practices in Greater London are not currently fundholders. We expect the number of fundholders will rise to 578 practices serving 40 per cent. of the population of Greater London from next April.

General practitioner fundholders receive allocations to purchase healthcare on their patients' behalf. Similarly, health authorities receive funds to purchase health care on behalf of non-fundholders' patients and for non-fundholding services for fundholders' patients. General practitioner fundholders receive a management allowance to support them in directly managing resources and providing care on their patient behalf.

"The Health of the Nation"

29. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made towards achieving the targets set out in "The Health of the Nation". [13332]

Mr. Horam: Progress towards the targets set out in "The Health of the Nation" is described in "Fit for the Future", the second report on the strategy. This was published in July 1995 and copies are available in the Library.

Northumberland Health Authority

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the effect on public sector manpower in Northumberland health

authority of the implementation of the Health Authorities Act 1995. [13559]

Mr. Malone: I have made no such estimate.

Drugs (Side Effects)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people who have died as a result of side effects of drugs in each of the last five years. [14060]

Mr. Malone: The available information on deaths recorded by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys in England and Wales as a result of adverse effects of drugs, medicaments and biological substances is shown in the table.

Deaths in England and Wales due to drugs, medicaments and biological substances causing adverse effects in therapeutic use (ICD E930–E949) as underlying or secondary cause

Year	*Number of deaths*
1990	108
1991	84
1992	93

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new plans he has to reduce deaths and serious illnesses caused by medicines. [13303]

Mr. Malone: We already have in place well-established systems for licensing and monitoring the safety of all medicines available in the United Kingdom, which ensure that the benefits of medicines outweigh any risks and prevent users coming to unnecessary harm. These systems continue to be developed, in particular to take advantage of advancements in drug development and pharmacoepidemiology.

Private Patient Activity

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration he has given to the need to ensure that marginal cost contracts apply only to unplanned spare capacity in the internal market for the benefit of NHS patients and not to private activity. [14510]

Mr. Malone: National health service costing for contracting guidance already disallows marginal cost contracting other than where unplanned spare capacity arises. We see no reason, however, why in those circumstances a distinction should be drawn between NHS and private purchasers.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration has been given to external and internal auditors having a specific brief to audit private patient activity within the NHS and to set compliance with Treasury rules. [14502]

Mr. Malone: External auditors are independent and exercise their professional judgement about how they carry out their responsibilities. Internal auditors review areas on a cyclical basis with the frequency determined by taking account of risk and materiality. Private patient activity will be examined as part of this process.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department is taking to ensure that private patient activity in the NHS is not adversely affecting NHS patients and their healthcare. [14506]

Mr. Malone: This is primarily the responsibility of national health service trusts, which must comply with the provisions of section 5(9) and schedule 2, paragraph 14 of the NHS and Community Care Act 1990. These prevent private patient activity being undertaken to the detriment of NHS patients.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make statements on the *(a)* change in volume, *(b)* costing, *(c)* pricing and *(d)* auditing of private patient activity in the NHS. [14508]

Mr. Malone: Accommodation and services are made available to private patients in national health service hospitals only when criteria set out in legislation are met. NHS gross income from private patient activity in England rose from £176.3 million in 1993–94 to £193.5 million in 1994–95, the latest year for which figures are available. Guidance has been issued to the NHS on costing and pricing. The recent report by National Economic Research Associates concluded that NHS pay beds are managed in accordance with their statutory and financial obligations, and generate a sizeable profit for the NHS to use to improve services for all patients. The accounts of NHS bodies, including income and expenditure from private patient activity, are subject to statutory audit by auditors appointed by the Audit Commission. The National Audit Office also has access rights to audit the activities of NHS bodies.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration has been given to the need for NHS trusts to adhere to the six principles governing their pay bed and private patient activities. [14507]

Mr. Malone: The six principles were set out in the "Management of Private Practice in Health Service Hospitals in England and Wales", copies of which are available in the Library. This guidance remains in force.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of whether NHS trusts should produce audited accruals-based accounts according to generally accepted accounting practices for their private patient activity. [14505]

Mr. Malone: Guidance issued last year—FDL(95)01—reminds the national health service of the requirement to maintain memorandum trading accounts for income generation schemes. MTAs are accruals based, and available for scrutiny by internal and external auditors. The guidance does not explicitly refer to private patient activity, but it is accepted good practice to apply the guidance to these also.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on the use of public assets for the development of private patient activity. [14509]

Mr. Malone: Subject to the responsibilities set out in section 5(9) and schedule 2, paragraph 14 of the NHS and Community Care Act 1990, NHS trusts are free to undertake private patient activity and to capitalise it from any sources, with normal investment appraisal processes applying.

Surplus Land Sales

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the capital projects in the NHS funded by the sale of surplus land or buildings since 1992; and how much was realised by each sale. [14462]

Mr. Horam: The proceeds from the sale of surplus land and buildings are not assigned to fund specific developments. Receipts contribute to the overall national health service capital programme.

Management Staff

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* chief executives and *(b)* senior managers of (i) NHS trusts and (ii) health authorities have been dismissed in each of the last three years; and how many have retired for reasons other than the normal retirement age. [14474]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he issues to NHS trusts regarding the remuneration packages of senior managers and the annual improvements in their pay and conditions. [14476]

Mr. Malone: National health service trust boards are accountable for the proper appointment, appraisal and remuneration of their senior executives and, as in all their functions, boards must have regard to the public service values of accountability, probity and openness enshrined in the codes of conduct and accountability issued to NHS boards in April 1994. The code of accountability requires all NHS boards to establish a remuneration and terms of service committee to exercise proper control of executive board members' remuneration.

For those staff employed on the national terms and conditions for general and senior managers, guidance has been issued periodically on the changes in salary rates in a series of health service guidelines, health circulars and personnel memoranda, copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what powers he has to remove NHS trust and health authority senior managers proceeded against (i) in the courts and (ii) by the health service commissioner for maladministration; and how often he has used these powers since 1990; [14475]

(2) what measures he takes to ensure that NHS trust and health authority chief executives and senior managers who have been dismissed or have resigned after successful allegations of maladministration are not re-employed elsewhere in the NHS in a similar capacity. [14473]

Mr. Malone: Powers to dismiss senior national health service staff lie solely with individual NHS employers.

It is for NHS employers to ensure the suitability of staff appointed. They are expected to have in place formal systems of recruitment and selection, which would include the taking up of references from former employers and the giving of proper consideration to the previous career history of candidates for employment.

Nurses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the NHS executive annual planning guidance on nurses in training for each year since 1990. [14450]

Mr. Horam: In August 1995 the Department issued formal planning guidance for the first time: the non-medical education and training planning guidance for 1996–97 education commissioning, EL(95)96, copies of which are available in the Library.

NHS Trust Hospitals

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration his Department has given to directing all NHS trust hospitals to conform to Treasury rules concerning commercial activities and returns on capital employed. [14503]

Mr. Malone: Trusts are bound by a requirement to fix charges for planned commercial activity, including private patient work, so that cross subsidy with NHS activity is avoided and an appropriate rate of return on capital employed is achieved.

Measles, Mumps and Rubella Vaccination

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued to parents of children who have been advised not to have the MMR vaccination because of contra-indications in other members of the same family; and what implications this guidance has for general practitioners in rural areas achieving their immunisation targets. [14445]

Mr. Horam: There are very few true contra-indications to immunisation; these are listed in the Heath Education Authority's leaflet, "A Guide to Childhood Immunisations", which is available to all parents.

General practitioner immunisation target levels allow for the fact that immunisation is contra-indicated for some children.

Probity Pledge

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the probity pledge proposed to NHS trust and health authorities by the NHS executive. [14522]

Mr. Malone: No new pledge on probity has been proposed by the national health service executive. On 26 April 1994 my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Health, announced in the House the publication of codes of conduct and accountability. These codes, which keep public values at the heart of the operation and management of the NHS, were to be adopted by the boards of all NHS authorities and trusts. They require that all matters in the NHS be conducted with due regard to the very highest standards of probity, accountability and openness.

Royal Berkshire Ambulance Trust

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he proposes to take regarding executive managers from the Royal Berkshire Ambulance Trust

using an emergency ambulance to attend a coroners' court. [14639]

Mr. Horam: This is a matter for the Royal Berkshire Ambulance Service National Health Service trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mrs. Rosalie Monbiot OBE, chairman of the trust, for this information.

Practising Doctors (European Union)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* practising doctors and *(b)* practising doctors per capita there are in each European Union country. [14907]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally. However, the second—1995—report of the Medical Workforce Standing Advisory Committee, copies of which are in the Library, gives data on physicians per 1,000 population in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and United Kingdom.

Junior Doctors

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the average annual amount of study leave given to junior doctors in each of the last three years. [14851]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of junior doctors leaving the NHS each year. [14853]

Mr. Malone: Information is not available in the form requested. The Department supports studies by the medical careers research group the Oxford unit of healthcare epidemiology to examine wastage from the profession and other career patterns. Wastage rates appear to have declined recently. Of those who qualified in the mid-1970s, nearly 20 per cent. were not working in medicine in the United Kingdom 10 years later. Provisional data indicate that the comparable figure for those who qualified in the 1980s was around 15 per cent. Many of these doctors will be temporarily abroad, on a career break or in alternative medical employment and may well return to the NHS in the future.

Patients (Complaints)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints have been made by patients in each of the last six years. [14767]

Mr. Horam: For the number of complaints received in each of the last five years I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave her on 30 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *723*. For hospital and community health services, the number of complaints in 1989–90 was 36,181. For family health services, the figure for 1989 was 1,927.

Residential Care Homes

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he is likely to announce recommendations arising from the consultation document "Moving Forward" to strengthen the legislation on the running and inspection of residential and nursing homes to protect vulnerable people. [13396]

Mr. Bowis: We shall consider whether to bring forward legislative or other changes in the light of the report of the independent assessor for the review which we expect to receive later this year.

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the consultation on "Moving Forward" to be completed; and if he will place a copy of the responses to date in the Library. [14778]

Mr. Bowis: Written responses to "Moving Forward" have been asked for by the end of this month. It will be for the independent assessor to decide whether further consultation is required before he reports to Ministers.

We shall decide at that time what and in what form to publish. This might include the submissions of respondents if they are content for this to be done.

Skin Diseases

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to speed up treatment of dermatologically related diseases. [13451]

Mr. Horam: The organisation of health services and the manner in which they are delivered are matters for health authorities in their role as purchasers of services for their populations.

However, my Department is aware of a few commercial projects in their very early stages which use televisual means in an effort to help deal with the workload in dealing with skin conditions. I understand that the process involves the general practitioner sending an e-mail picture of the patient's skin condition to a consultant dermatologist along with clinical details. The consultant can review the pictures in his own time and either give advice to the GP on management with suitable protocols or suggest a live consultation.

Prescription Costs

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the annual average cost of prescriptions per patient prescribed by *(a)* general practitioner fundholders and *(b)* non-fundholding general practitioners for each year since the introduction of fundholding for which the figures are available for (i) England, (ii) each regional health authority and (iii) each family health service authority. [14967]

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the table.

Prescribing costs (£ NIC/PU)—England

	GP fundholders	*Non GP fundholders*
1991–92	9.23	9.71
1992–93	10.35	10.91
1993–94	11.47	12.05
1994–95	12.56	13.07
1995–96 (to Q2)	13.04	13.62

1. NIC/PU = net ingredient cost per prescribing unit.
2. NIC is essentially the cost of prescriptions before allowing for pharmacists' discounts and container costs.
3. PUs are a weighting used to adjust for the higher cost of drugs for older people. Each person counts as one PU for under 65-year-olds, three PUs for 65-year-olds and older.
4. The two groups (fundholding GPs/non-fundholding GPs) are not exclusive—during the period, some non fundholders will have become fundholding and vice versa.

Patient De-registration

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been removed from registration with their local general practitioner in each of the past five years. [13450]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) and to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 2 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *457*.

Oral Contraceptives

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reports have been received via the yellow card system regarding women who have been switched from combined oral contraceptives containing desogestrel or gestodene since 18 October 1995; and what assessment the licensing authority has made of such reports. [12978]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 8 February 1996]:* Ten reports of suspected adverse reactions have been received on yellow cards occurring in women who switched from oral contraceptives containing desogestrel or gestodene since 18 October 1995. These have been assessed by the Medicines Control Agency according to its normal procedures.

SCOTLAND

EU Funding

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the total expenditure allocated to date from European Union objective 1 funding for the highlands and islands; and if he will make a statement; [11587]

(2) if he will list the projects that have been approved for European Union objective 1 funding for the highlands and islands since January 1995 for *(a)* the European regional development fund and *(b)* the European social fund; what expenditure was approved for each project; and what was the total expenditure; [11585]

(3) which successful applications for European Union objective 1 funding for the highlands and islands are located in Argyll and Bute; and what was the expenditure approved for each project. [11586]

Mr. Kynoch: The total expenditure committed up to the end of January 1996 is £164 million. This is made up by £129 million, ERDF; £30.5 million, ESF; and £4.5 million, EAGGF—European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund—and FIFG—financial instrument of fisheries guidance. As the information requested is somewhat lengthy, I have arranged for the details to be placed in the House Library.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the projects which have been approved for objective 1 funding in the highlands and islands, stating the amount in each case. [11607]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 1 February 1996]:* The total expenditure committed up to the end of January 1996 is £164 million. This is made up by £129 million, ERDF; £30.5 million, ESF; and £4.5 million, EAGGF and FIFG. As the information requested is somewhat lengthy I have arranged for the details to be placed in the House Library.

Agriculture Department

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many full-time members of staff are currently employed at each of the Scottish Office Agriculture Department's divisional offices. [12305]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The number of full-time staff employed in the agricultural divisions of the Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department who are working at locations outwith Edinburgh is shown in the table, which reflects the position as at 1 January 1996.

Full-time staff employed in agricultural division of the Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department based outwith Edinburgh

Position as at 1 January 1996

Location	*Permanent*	*Casual*	*Total*
Ayr	40	2	42
Benbecula	8	—	8
Dumfries	35	2	37
Dundee	28	1	29
Elgin	4	—	4
Galashiels	31	3	34
Glasgow	12	—	12
Hamilton	6	2	8
Inverness	50	1	51
Kirkwall	17	—	17
Lairg	5	—	5
Lerwick	11	1	12
Oban	22	—	22
Perth	32	2	34
Portree	9	—	0
Stirling	12	3	15
Stornoway	14	3	17
Thainstone	56	3	59
Thurso	16	—	16
Totals	408	23	431

School Boards

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department has spent on the administration, promotion, support and establishment of school boards in Scotland in each academic year since their establishment. [12504]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: School boards were established for the first time during the financial year 1989–90. Departmental expenditure, by financial year, is as follows.

Financial year	*Expenditure £*
1989–90	1,737,000
1990–91	51,000
1991–92	308,000
1992–93	91,000
1993–94	157,000
1994–95	68,000
1995–96	[1]40,000

[1] Expenditure to 31 January 1996.

Child Day-care Facilities

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will conduct a survey of all child day-care facilities with a view to determining whether registration and inspection criteria are being carried out by local authorities in any way which encourages provision of places; [14225]

(2) if he will conduct a survey of child day-care facilities to ensure that local authorities are interpreting the registration and inspection duties laid on them in a reasonable way. [14226]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend does not have any plans for such surveys.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when he expects to revise the guidance issued to local authorities in 1991 on regulation and review of childminding and day-care services for children under the Children Act 1989; [14278]

(2) if he will update the bibliography referred to in section 3 of annex 4 in the guidance on child care issued to local authorities in 1991. [14279]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend intends to revise and update the guidance to take account of an amendment made to the Children Act 1989 by the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and further amendments planned to the 1989 Act which relate to supervised activities and holiday play schemes.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland to what extend parental consent to derogation from guideline standards for child care facilities will be taken into account in issuing local authority certificates of registration of day-care premises. [14227]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Under the Children Act 1989, local authorities are under duty to register suitable providers of day-care for young children. Registration provides a framework to protect children and to ensure that services meet acceptable standards. It also reassures parents who arrange day-care for their children by others. In deciding whether to register applicants, local authorities are responsible for setting appropriate and consistent standards, taking account of central guidance. It would not be practicable to consult individual parents who may use different facilities from time to time about whether lower standards should be set in their facilities.

Appeal Court

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases have been referred back to the Appeal Court by the Scottish Secretary since 1966; and in how many such cases conviction was quashed. [14528]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Since 1966, my right hon. Friend has referred nine cases to the High Court of Justiciary under section 263(1) of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1975. Of these cases, five convictions were quashed and in one case a verdict of culpable homicide was substituted for that of murder.

Spare Computer Capacity

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all cases where spare computer capacity has been sold to other Departments since 1987, giving the Department and value of each contract. [14079]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office has provided computer bureau and related services to a number of other Departments and public bodies. Charges for these services for the years since 1989–90 are as follows:

Department	*Amount* £
National Gallery of Scotland	39,6000
National Library of Scotland	55,500
National Museums of Scotland	27,600
HM Customs and Excise	11,800

Holyrood Palace

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the cost to his Department for the upkeep and maintenance of the palace of Holyrood house in each of the last three financial years. [14811]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend is responsible for the cost of the upkeep and maintenance of the fabric of the palace, for security and for the costs of utilities such as fuel and telephones. All other costs are met by the royal household.

The information for the last three financial years is:

	Programme expenditure	*Historic Scotland employee costs*	*Total* £
1992–93	696,600	338,530	1,035,130
1993–94	693,215	337,852	1,031,067
1994–95	809,153	345,124	1,154,277

These costs include all expenditure directly attributable to the palace but not professional and central administration.

Mobile Communications Network

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the mobile communication, network supported by the Scottish Office in the highlands and islands will be capable of handling both digital and analogue calls. [14919]

Mr. Kynoch: The £46 million mobile telecommunications investment programme in the highlands and islands will extend coverage to some 95 per cent. of the region's population, including covering almost all major arterial transport routes. The networks will use global system for mobile communications—GSM—technology, which is the European-led standard for digital cellular networks now operating in more than 40 countries worldwide. GSM gives users improved speech quality and greater security over the older analogue technology and access to a range of added value services similar to those available on the digital fixed network. The new GSM networks will complement the highlands and islands fixed network, which is already substantially digital as a result of upgrading by BT in the early 1990s.

The existing analogue networks offered by Cellnet and Vodaphone in the highlands and islands will be maintained, but will not be extended further.

GP Fundholding

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the annual average cost per patient of prescriptions prescribed by *(a)* general practitioner fundholders and *(b)* non-fundholding general practitioners for each year since the introduction of fundholding for which statistics are available for (i) Scotland and (ii) each health board. [14966]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information by health board and Scotland for the financial years 1992–93 to 1994–95 is set out in the table. The costs shown are the average cost per patient on GP lists and are based on the value of ingredients before the addition of dispensing fees or deduction of any discount or patient charges.

	1992–93		*1993–94*		*1994–95*	
Health board	*Fundholding practices*	*Non-fundholding practices*	*Fundholding practices*	*Non-fundholding practices*	*Fundholding practices*	*Non-fundholding practices*
Argyll and Clyde	61.70	71.66	68.79	79.20	73.19	87.07
Ayrshire and Arran	58.43	73.06	73.95	79.53	75.59	87.62
Borders	0.00	64.93	71.49	69.84	73.32	76.77
Dumfries and Galloway	0.00	68.98	0.00	76.23	81.83	84.72
Fife	51.92	62.66	55.17	70.22	67.39	78.23
Forth Valley	58.39	67.88	61.57	74.78	72.73	84.21
Grampian	58.68	55.37	54.50	70.39	63.27	73.54
Greater Glasgow	57.20	62.92	59.29	69.57	67.95	77.94
Highland	50.97	56.83	74.82	63.43	79.12	71.90
Lanarkshire	59.50	73.00	74.14	79.71	80.06	89.26
Lothian	59.25	56.67	60.32	62.93	68.78	70.21
Orkney	0.00	53.50	0.00	57.37	0.00	62.25
Shetland	0.00	47.13	0.00	55.07	0.00	60.33
Tayside	67.82	71.03	74.98	78.64	83.19	88.16
Western Isles	0.00	53.77	0.00	62.35	0.00	72.35
Scotland	58.39	62.63	66.27	69.95	73.87	77.64

Crofters

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what impact his initiative on crofting will have on the crofters of the Knoydart estate; and if he will make a statement. [15076]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The recently launched consultation paper is specifically concerned with the disposal of the crofting estates owned by my right hon. Friend. However, the issues it raises may be of interest to crofters and landlords elsewhere.

Court Service

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those courts that have been closed in each county in Scotland since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [14274]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* There have been no closures of district courts or sheriff courts during the period in question.

Absenteeism

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the absenteeism rates in days per annum for staff in his Department for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96. [11357]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* The average number of working days lost per staff year due to sickness in the Scottish Office is in the table.

Calender year	*The Scottish Office*	*Scottish Prison Service*
1992	8.9	12.6
1993	10.3	15.3
1994	8.2	12.9

Figures prior to 1992 are not available.

Drug Reduction Programmes

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prisoners were waiting for a place on the Edinburgh and Glenochil drug reduction programmes on *(a)* 1 February 1995 and *(b)* 1 February 1996. [14589]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Mr. James Wallace, dated 13 February 1996:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your question about the number of prisoners waiting for a place on the Edinburgh and Glenochil drug reduction programmes on (a) 1 February 1995 and (b) 1 February 1996.

As far as HMP Edinburgh is concerned there were no waiting lists in 1995 and 1996 and prisoners' needs are met by programmes provided by the prison authorities and/or community based agencies.

Glenochil have adopted a multi-disciplinary approach and have been evolving and developing phased addiction programmes over the past 2 years which cover both drugs and alcohol. Prisoners receive both group and one-to-one counselling. There is no waiting list as such but currently 71 prisoners are awaiting completion of their programme.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 14 February 1996

TREASURY

VAT (Disabled People)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will reconsider the VAT treatment of *(a)* emergency car telephones for the disabled and *(b)* off-road wheelchairs; and if he will make a statement. [15011]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No. General purpose equipment such as emergency car telephones remains standard-rated because many other people besides the disabled use it as well. Relief is available for equipment which is designed solely for disabled people, and also on the costs of adapting goods to make them usable by the disabled. Zero-rating also applies to invalid wheelchairs other than mechanically propelled vehicles intended or adapted for use on roads. If an off-road vehicle has been designed solely for use by disabled people, it too may qualify for relief.

Bills (Voluntary Bodies)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will institute a review of late payment of bills due to voluntary bodies by Government Departments. [15095]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Government Departments are required to pay all bills promptly, not only those due to voluntary bodies.

Beer Imports

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the proportion of off-licence beer sales now being lost to personal importation of beer from the continent. [14931]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Data relating solely to the impact on off-licence beer sales of personal importations of beer from the continent are not available. However, for the 12 months ending 30 June 1995, the overall loss to United Kingdom sales of beer, including off-licence sales due to legitimate personal importations from other member states, is estimated by HM Customs and Excise to be equivalent to approximately 0.5 per cent. of UK consumer expenditure on beer.

Low Pay

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the number and proportion of manual, non-manual and all full-time employees earning less than *(a)* £161.60, *(b)* £215.47 and *(c)* £288.68 per week excluding overtime payments for (i) men, (ii) women and (iii) both sexes for (1) England and (2) Great Britain in April 1995; [14346]

(2) if he will list the number and proportion of manual, non-manual and all part-time employees earning less than *(a)* £4.26 per hour, *(b)* £5.69 per hour and *(c)* £6.03 per hour excluding overtime payments for (i) men, (ii) women and (iii) both sexes for (1) England and (2) Great Britain in April 1995. [14347]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 13 February 1996]:* Available information from the "New Earnings Survey 1995" is provided in the following table.

New earnings survey—April 1995 (GB)
Full time employees on adult rates, whose pay for the survey period was unaffected by absence Average gross pay (excluding overtime)

	Weekly			Hourly		
Percentage earning less than:	*£161.60*	*£215.47*	*£228.68*	*£4.26*	*£5.69*	*£6.03*
MALES						
Manual						
England	12.8	39.9	46.9	16.5	44.8	51.7
Great Britain	13.0	40.4	47.5	16.8	45.2	52.1
Non-manual						
England	4.7	13.6	16.0	5.2	14.5	17.2
Great Britain	4.8	13.9	16.3	5.3	14.6	17.4
FEMALES						
Manual						
England	48.9	79.7	84.2	50.1	80.7	85.3
Great Britain	48.8	79.6	84.3	50.1	80.8	85.3
Non-manual						
England	12.5	35.6	40.6	11.4	32.5	38.0
Great Britain	12.9	36.7	41.8	11.7	33.4	39.0
ALL						
Manual						
England	19.5	47.3	53.8	22.7	51.4	57.9
Great Britain	19.8	47.8	54.5	23.1	51.8	58.3
Non-manual						
England	8.3	23.7	27.3	8.0	22.8	26.8
Great Britain	8.6	24.4	28.1	8.3	23.3	27.4

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the United Kingdom work force would be covered by a minimum wage set at *(a)* £3.50 per hour and *(b)* £4.15 per hour. [14971]

Mrs. Knight *[holding answer 13 February 1996:]* Information from the April 1995 "New Earnings Survey" shows that 9.1 per cent. of employees in Great Britain would be covered by a minimum wage set at £3.50 per hour and 18.9 per cent. would be covered by a minimum wage set at £4.15 per hour.

Sustainable Development

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the promotion of sustainable development will be reflected in the implementation of the proposals contained in the White Paper "Better Accounting for the Taxpayer's Money". [15108]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There will be no direct impact on the promotion of sustainable development in the implementation of the proposals contained in the White Paper "Better Accounting for the Taxpayer's Money".

Customs and Excise

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the review of the investigative functions and resources

of Customs and Excise has been completed; and what conclusions have been reached. [15183]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The final report of the fundamental expenditure review of Customs and Excise investigation and intelligence activity was completed in October 1995 and approved by Ministers in November 1995.

The main conclusions of the review were that organisational changes are required to help Customs and Excise tackle more effectively the growing sophistication of commercial drug smuggling and tax fraud. From the 1 April 1996 there will be a single Customs national investigation service, combining regional investigation units and the central division; and a unified national intelligence network, based on an expanded national intelligence division.

Although, in common with most other Government Departments, Customs overall resources are set to fall, the creation of the new organisation will mean the deployment of over 200 additional staff in the key areas of intelligence and investigation.

TRANSPORT

Legislation (Compliance Cost Assessments)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for primary and secondary legislation passed since 5 April 1995 which measures were subject to a compliance cost assessment; and what was the compliance cost in each instance. [13658]

Mr. Watts: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Environmental Appraisals

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many environmental appraisals were produced by his Department using the guidance contained in the Department of the Environment's "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" in 1995; and if he will place copies in the Library. [15121]

Mr. Norris: My Department does not keep a central record of environmental appraisals conducted before new or revised policies are adopted. We do, however, take environmental considerations into account in the policy development process using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment".

Barking to Gospel Oak Line

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the service on the Barking to Gospel Oak line; and if he will make a statement. [15184]

Mr. Norris: In 1995, the Department received five representations concerning the service on the Barking to Gospel Oak line. The representations expressed concern about performance staffing levels and the possibility of line closures. No representations have been received this year.

The operation of passenger services on the Barking to Gospel Oak line is a matter for North London Railways.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans exist to replace rolling stock on the Barking to Gospel Oak line; and if he will make a statement. [15186]

Mr. Norris: This is a matter for the British Railways Board. It is currently reviewing the rolling stock requirements for this line.

Rail Franchising

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the franchising process for the *(a)* south-west and *(b)* Great Western lines will be reopened in circumstances when a franchisee renegotiates the level of subsidy upwards. [15182]

Mr. Watts: The circumstances posed in the hon. Member's question have not arisen.

Derailment (Camden)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what investigations have so far been carried out into the derailment at Camden on 14 December 1995, and if he will make a statement. [15185]

Mr. Watts: The railway has carried out an internal investigation. In addition, the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate has conducted an independent investigation into this incident and is now considering whether further action is appropriate.

Derailments

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all reported derailments in 1994–95 and 1995–96 to the latest available date. [15187]

Mr. Watts: Statistics showing all derailments which operators are required to report under the Railways (Notice of Accidents) Order 1986 are shown in the railway inspectorate's annual report on the safety record of the railways in Great Britain which is published by the Health and Safety Executive. A copy is held in the House of Commons Library. The number of reported train derailments in 1994–95 was:

	Number
Passenger train derailments	28
Freight train derailments	121
Total	149

Figures for 1995–96 are not yet available.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the causes of derailments broken down to show *(a)* track quality, *(b)* signal failure and *(c)* operating staff error for (i) 1994–95 and (ii) 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [15189]

Mr. Watts: The causes of train derailments are shown in appendix 4 to the railway inspectorate's annual report on the safety record of the railways in Great Britain, published by the Health and Safety Executive. A copy is held in the House of Commons Library. The derailments due to track quality, signal failure and operating staff error in 1994–95 were:

	Number
(a) Track quality	53
(b) Signal failure	1
(c) Operating staff error	53

Other causes of derailments include locomotive and rolling stock defects, traction and braking shocks and malicious damage.

Figures for 1995–96 are not yet available.

Railway Development

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary for State for Transport what guidelines he has proposed for local authority involvement in socially necessary railway development; and if he will make a statement. [15188]

Mr. Norris: The Government recognise the contribution made by local authorities in supporting improvements to their local rail networks and wish to encourage their continued involvement in the role as specifiers and facilitators, rather than providers, of rail services. In addition, the objectives, instructions and guidance to the franchising director state that he should establish effective liaison with local authorities and other bodies involved in the restructured railway industry.

Coaches (Motorways)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 8 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *302*, if the assessment of the effect of banning coaches from the third lane of motorways will take account of evidence from before the imposition of the ban. [15129]

Mr. Norris: Transport Research Laboratory monitoring will include data from before the imposition of the ban.

A1-M1 Link

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is *(a)* the planned start date and *(b)* the planned construction period for the A1-M1 link road; which contractors have been retained for the project; and if he will make a statement. [15006]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. William O'Brien, dated 14 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about the M1-A1 Link Road.

The Highways Agency is conducting negotiations with the preferred bidder from the M1-A1 Link Road Scheme. Negotiations are drawing to a conclusion and the signing of the contract is expected to be announced shortly.

Once the contract has been signed the start of work on site is expected to follow approximately 4 months later. However, during that 4 months, mobilisation work will be carried out in preparation for the start of the main construction work. Construction is planned to be completed within 3 years (including the 4 month mobilisation period).

Railway Fraud

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with British Rail concerning the inquiry in the ticket fraud involving Enterprise Rail. [15159]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Cambourne (Mr. Coe) on 9 February, *Official Report*, columns *374–75*.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the procedures currently in place to identify *(a)* fraud and *(b)* potential fraud in the railway industry. [15160]

Mr. Watts: The ticketing and settlement agreement, a scheme which is contractually binding on all train operators, provides for extensive independent auditing and monitoring of compliance with its terms. Regular, routine checks are carried out by Rail Settlement Plan, a limited company established under the agreement. Passenger operators are required to allow RSP's representatives access to their premises, personnel and records for the purposes of compliance monitoring. It was through these independent auditing arrangements that recent ticketing irregularities involving LTS Rail were detected.

Single European Currency

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the impact of a single European currency on freight and passenger transport to and from the continent. [14949]

Mr. Watts: None.

British Rail (Heavy Maintenance Depots)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the conduct of the sale of BR's rolling stock heavy maintenance depots, including the Eastleigh depot. [15618]

Sir George Young: The British Railways Board sold its six British Rail maintenance depots—BRML—in June 1995. They were the largest sales at that date in the rail privatisation programme and BR prudently decided to commission a study to ensure their soundness. Price Waterhouse was therefore engaged by BR to review the sale of one of the depots, the Eastleigh works.

Price Waterhouse concluded that the sale process for Eastleigh was generally robust and that the net proceeds would not have been higher if it had been undertaken differently.

However, on reviewing the Price Waterhouse report, the Department of Transport concluded that, while its findings gave reassurance on proceeds, they were incomplete. The Department therefore commissioned Ernst and Young to carry out a further, detailed, investigation of all six BRML sales. Following consultation with the Department, the Ernst and Young

team has been accompanied in its investigation by an official from the National Audit Office, which carrying out its own independent and separate examination of the sale.

Ernst and Young has concluded that the sale process depended crucially on the fairness and transparency of the competition. The composition of the Eastleigh depot's assets would have been a subsidiary consideration to the strategic value of the business to the eventual purchaser. Having spoken to other bidders for the Eastleigh depot, Ernst and Young is confident that there was a strong and fair competition, and that all the necessary information, including details of the company's cash balances and its future trading prospects, was available to all bidders. Ernst and Young concluded that, whilst there were some procedural weaknesses, they did not affect the sale. Ernst and Young's inquiries also point to the fairness and transparency of all the subsequent BRML sales.

The National Audit Office has been kept fully informed throughout by the Department. The BRML sales, like all other sales in the railway privatisation programme, are subject to scrutiny by the NAO on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor-General.

SCOTLAND

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many sites of special scientific interest Scottish National Heritage reported as damaged in *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94 and *(c)* 1994–95; and what percentage of the total these represent. [14198]

Mr. Kynoch: The information requested is set out in the table:

Year	*Total number of SSSIs*	*Number of SSSIs damaged*	*Percentage of SSSIs damaged*
1992–93	1,355	17	1.3
1993–94	1,373	17	1.2
1994–95	1,382	23	1.7

North Lanarkshire Council

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total cost to public funds of the inquiry conducted by Mr. D. I. K. MacLeod WS into the appointment of officers to North Lanarkshire council. [14333]

Mr. Kynoch: Costs have yet to be finalised, but it is estimated that these will be in the region of £28,000.

Out-of-school Care Initiative

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, column *893*, if the £500,000 for the out-of-school care initiative in 1996–97 is additional to the budgets announced in December 1995 for Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. [14460]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Provision has been made within the budgets for Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Enterprise announced in December 1995 for the continuation of the out-of-school child care initiative.

Empty Buildings

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many empty buildings his Department currently owns; what is the cost of insuring and securing these buildings; how many were designed as residential properties; and what was the total amount spent by his Department on empty property taxes in each of the last five years. [14569]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Most of the office space provided for Government Departments is part of the Government's common user estate and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will provide details of empty buildings on the CUE and their respective costs.

The Scottish Office and its agencies currently own 60 empty Crown buildings, of which 39 were designed as residential properties. As a general rule, the Government carry their own insurance risk. The cost of securing these buildings cannot be readily quantified and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

The total amount known to have been spent on empty property taxes in each of the years was as follows:

1991–92: Nil

1992–93: £8,516

1993–94: £2,148

1994–95: £3,727

1995–96: £5,425.

Figures are not available centrally for the amount spent on property taxes by health boards.

Complaints against GPs

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received regarding proposed changes in the method of dealing with complaints against general practitioners in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [14624]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None. My officials have, however, had constructive discussions with the professions, management and consumer interests about the detail of the new NHS complaints procedures.

Ashfield House, Kirkintilloch

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received regarding Greater Glasgow health board's plan for a community care facility at Ashfield house in Kirkintilloch; and if he will make a statement. [14610]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Other than the representations dealt with by the office of the Scottish Office inquiry reporter the only representation I have received is the letter of 2 February 1996 from the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden.

Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he will take following the Scottish Special Standing Committee's consideration of the Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill; and if he will make a statement. [15646]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I welcome the opportunity to congratulate the Special Standing Committee on its work. The Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill has benefited greatly from the Committee's scrutiny.

The Special Standing Committee met on three occasions, in Stirling, Ayr and Inverness, and took evidence from representations of nine bodies, including the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland), the Health Education Board for Scotland, the Scottish Law Society and voluntary organisations involved in the prevention of drug misuse and the rehabilitation of drug addicts. It also took evidence from academics, doctors and Sheriff Neil Gow QC, who conducted the fatal accident inquiry into the deaths of three young men and found that their deaths resulted from the consumption of controlled drugs at dance events held at Hangar 13 in Ayr. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office also gave evidence.

The main purpose of the Bill, which is to give licensing boards greater power to regulate licensed premises on which dance events are held so that they are made safer for those attending, was generally supported by those who gave evidence. There was also support for the provisions in the Bill intended to ensure that licensing boards remain of manageable size following local government reorganisation in Scotland.

In responding to questions from Committee members, those giving evidence did, however, make a number of criticisms of the form of regulatory arrangements proposed by the Bill. We have given careful consideration to these comments and have decided to bring forward amendments at Commons Standing Committee, with the intention of responding to the suggestions made for improving the Bill. The effect of these amendments will ensure that licensing boards are obliged to attach conditions to liquor licences for premises which are to be used for dance events and to provide boards with as much flexibility as possible to make conditions which are appropriate to local circumstances.

The Special Standing Committee arrangements for examining Bills have therefore been valuable in preparing for the entry of the Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill into Commons Standing Committee. They have enabled the Government to identify possible difficulties in implementing legislative proposals and to prepare amendments for debate at the earliest possible opportunity. They will, I am sure, prove to have been of similar assistance also to all hon. Members involved in scrutinising the Bill at its various stages. I am therefore grateful to the Special Standing Committee for all the work that it has done and to those who took time to give evidence to it.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Deregulation

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what legislation enacted in the last parliamentary Session he proposes to repeal by way of deregulation orders. [14753]

Mr. Freeman: None of the proposals which have been put to the Deregulation Committee, or on which the Government have gone out to public consultation, affects legislation laid in the last parliamentary Session.

Legislation (Compliance Cost Assessments)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list for primary and secondary legislation passed since 5 April 1995 which measures were subject to a compliance cost assessment; and what was the compliance cost in each instance. [13661]

Mr. Freeman: Details of compliance cost assessments for primary and secondary legislation passed in the first half of 1995 are included in a Command Paper, Cm 3075, which was presented to Parliament on 25 January 1996. Copies of the compliance cost assessment listed are available in the House Libraries. Further Command Papers listing compliance cost assessments issued in the preceding six-month period will be published at six-monthly intervals.

Environmental Impact Assessments

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what criteria are used to define whether a proposal to Cabinet will have significant effects on the environment and therefore should be accompanied by a statement of the likely environmental implications. [15109]

The Deputy Prime Minister: "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" makes it clear that papers for Cabinet or Cabinet Committees should, where appropriate, cover any significant costs or benefits to the environment. The interpretation of this guidance is for the individual Minister preparing the paper. In this the Ministers can refer to the Department of the Environment publication "Policy Appraisal and the Environment", copies of which are widely available in Departments.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Domestic Violence

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many of the injunctions granted in domestic violence cases were subsequently breached in each of the last five years. [14097]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Paul Boateng, dated 14 February 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question about the numbers of injunctions in domestic violence cases that were subsequently breached in each of the last five years.

I regret that this information is not available and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many legal aid certificates were issued to take proceedings for domestic violence in each of the last five years; and what was the amount paid under those certificates in the same period. [14095]

Mr. Evans: The number of legal aid certificates issued to cover domestic violence proceedings in the last five years is as follows:

Certificates Issued

1990–91: 14,189

1991–92: 16,819

1992–93: 19,242

1993–94: 19,590

1994–95: 19,209.

It is not possible to identify the net costs of these cases. However, over the same period, the net cost of closed cases involving domestic violence matters is available.

	Number closed	*Net cost* £
1990–91	14,281	9,789,868
1991–92	16,480	13,722,255
1992–93	17,571	16,078,711
1993–94	20,083	19,592,542
1994–95	19,211	19,306,590

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many injunctions were granted in domestic violence cases in each of the last five years. [14096]

Mr. Evans: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Paul Boateng, dated 14 February 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question about the numbers of injunctions granted in domestic violence cases in each of the last five years.

The figures are:

1991: 26,236

1992: 30,971

1993: 32,781

1994: 28,512

1995: 25,609.

The 1995 total is a provisional one and is liable to revision to take account of late amendments.

Spare Computer Capacity

Mr. Miller: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list all cases where spare computer capacity has been sold to other Departments since 1987, giving the Department and value of each contract. [14086]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My Department has not sold any spare computer capacity to any other Departments since 1987 and has no current plans to do so.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Pesca Initiative

Mr. Cann: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how much finance has been made available to the United Kingdom to date from the Pesca initiative; and how much has been spent; [14608]

(2) what use of the Pesca funds has been made to assist fishery-dependent areas of the United Kingdom; [14607]

(3) what plans he has to use Pesca funding for the benefit of British fishermen. [14609]

Mr. Baldry: A total of 37.42 mecu—some £31 million—has been allocated to the United Kingdom for the period 1995 to 1999. Subject to final confirmation from the European Commission, further funding of 5.88 mecu—approximately £5 million—will also be available from the Community initiative reserve.

As indicated in the announcement which I made today, applications are now being invited for projects which meet the criteria in the UK's implementation programme, which was approved by the European Commission in June 1995. This places particular emphasis on diversification into non-fishing activities. But funds will also be available for the restructuring of the fisheries sector and for retraining in areas dependent on fishing.

No grants have yet been awarded, but I expect the first payments under Pesca to be made in the early part of this year.

Legislation (Compliance Cost Assessments)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for primary and secondary legislation passed since 5 April 1995 which measures were subject to a compliance cost assessment; and what was the compliance cost in each instance. [13648]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 9 February 1996]:* I refer to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster today.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many written parliamentary questions were passed for answer to executive agencies and non-governmental departments in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [14990]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The numbers of written questions for which I, or my predecessors, have asked executive agencies to reply to direct are as follows:

Parliamentary Session

1993–94: 6

1994–95: 35

1995–96: 15 (to date).

These figures include parliamentary answers where a partial answer has been given by me or my predecessors in respect of the core Department.

Figures are not readily available for earlier Sessions of Parliament.

Environmental Appraisals

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many environmental appraisals were produced by his Department using the guidance contained in the Department of the Environment's "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" in 1995; and if he will place copies in the Library. [15115]

Mr. Boswell: The Department does not keep a central record of environmental appraisals conducted before new or revised policies are adopted. However, officials have been instructed to take environmental considerations into account in the policy development process using the guidance contained in the Department of the Environment's booklet "Policy Appraisal and the Environment".

Varroa

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to change the statutory infected area for varroa; and if he will make a statement. [15424]

Mr. Boswell: The autumn varroa searched last year revealed a significant number of cases outside the statutory infected area. Having now considered the views of the national beekeeping organisations, and those of the many local associations and individual beekeepers who have written to me and to the Welsh Office, we have agreed from today to extend the boundary of the statutory infected area to include the four English counties of Cheshire, Cleveland, Durham and Merseyside and the whole of Wales.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Tax Discs

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers the police have to restrain persons from driving vehicles which do not bear a current tax disc; and if he will make a statement on the enforcement of this measure. [15062]

Mr. Maclean: The main responsibility for enforcement action against untaxed vehicles rests with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency. The police and traffic wardens assist by sending reports of suspected unlicensed vehicles to the agency. No powers exist for restraining persons from driving untaxed vehicles, but regulations will be introduced shortly which provide powers to wheelclamp and impound unlicensed vehicles parked on the public road. A pilot wheelclamping scheme, starting in London this month, will enable the agency to assess the effectiveness of these powers in combating vehicle excise duty evasion.

Young Prisoners

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* 15, *(b)* 16 and *(c)* 17-year-olds have been recorded as self-injuring in prison in each year since 1990, by prison. [15014]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 14 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number, by prison, of 15, 16 and 17 year olds who have been recorded as self-injuring in prison in each year since 1990.

The information you have requested is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Pregnant Prisoners

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the policy and training of prison officers in control and restraint techniques on pregnant prisoners. [15003]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 14 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the policy and training of prison officers in control and restraint techniques on pregnant prisoners.

The Prison Service has been revising the policy on the use of control and restraint methods in respect of pregnant women and prisoners with disabilities. The review group includes medical and nursing representatives as well as those who are experienced in the use of control and restraint techniques.

The review was set up by the Director of Security and Programmes at the time of the changes which were made in the use of restraints, which were subject to the Home Secretary's statement on 18 January. I expect to receive the results of the review very shortly.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the option of temporary release for women attending hospital to receive maternity care is available. [14998]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 14 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the temporary release of women prisoners attending hospital to receive maternity care.

On 25 April last year new arrangements for the temporary release of unescorted prisoners came into effect following changes to the Prison Rules. Under the new system eligible sentenced women prisoners, who satisfy the mandatory risk assessment, may be released on compassionate licence to attend hospital for maternity care and to give birth. Instructions to Governors governing the new

national policy of release on temporary licence are set out in Prison Service Instruction 36/1995, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Bulwood Hall Women's Prison

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason Bulwood Hall women's prison has stopped prisoners receiving incoming calls during the week beginning 15 January. [15015]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 14 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about Bullwood Hall prison.

The incoming phone lines at Bullwood Hall were unauthorised and undermined the national incentives and earned privileges scheme which was introduced in the summer of 1995. The telephone lines were consequently withdrawn on 17 January 1996 on the instructions of the area manager.

Fire Service

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from *(a)* organisations and *(b)* individuals on the ability of fire brigades to meet minimum legal standards for rescue and firefighting duties in 1996–97. [14593]

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. and learned Friend has received a number of such representations relating to different fire brigade areas. It is for each fire authority to set a budget which will allow it to comply with its statutory duties under the Fire Services Act 1947 and with the nationally recommended minimum standards of fire cover.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the adequacy of fire service funding for 1996–97 to permit fire brigades to comply with the statutory minimum standards for their *(a)* rescue, *(b)* firefighting and *(c)* emergency roles. [14794]

Mr. Sackville: It is for each fire authority, in the light of the proposed criteria for council tax capping, to set a budget which will allow it to comply with its statutory duties under the Fire Services Act 1947 and with the nationally recommended minimum standards of fire cover. In circumstances where an authority considers that it is necessary to set a budget above the proposed capping limit in order to fulfil its statutory duties, it is open to it to set a budget above the limit and make out a case to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment for redetermination of the cap.

Racial Hatred

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy in respect of groups which *(a)* incite racial hatred and *(b)* call for (i) homosexuals, (ii) Hindus and (iii) Jews to be killed. [14648]

Mr. Kirkhope: The Government find such views repugnant. We have sought to ensure that legal provisions are available to deal with members of such groups who incite violence and racial hatred under either the common law or public order legislation.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions *(a)* have been brought and *(b)* are currently in progress, on charges of racial hatred since the coming into force of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994; and how many have resulted in conviction. [14654]

Mr. Maclean: Section 155 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 made offences under section 19 of the Public Order Act 1986 arrestable under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 on 3 February 1995. Information on court proceedings data for the 1995 calendar year under this provision will not be available until autumn 1996.

Parish Precepts

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he issues to parishes in rural areas in respect of the cost of parish precepts for *(a)* neighbourhood watch schemes and *(b)* special parish constables. [14750]

Mr. Maclean: None.

Metropolitan Police (Complaints)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action is taken by the Metropolitan police to compensate members of the public whose complaint and finding against the police or a police constable has been sustained in respect of suffering serious embarrassment or inconvenience by an inquiry supervised by the Police Complaints Authority. [14659]

Mr. Maclean: It is for the individual complainant to decide whether to make a claim against the Metropolitan police.

Prison Staff

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the total staff establishment for the Prison Service in England and Wales by each grade; and how many from each grade were from an ethnic minority in *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1995; [13458]

(2) how many prison staff in England and Wales were from an ethnic minority in *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1995. [13457]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Janet Anderson, dated 14 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about Prison Service staff of ethnic minority origin.

The Prison Service began to monitor staff ethnic origins in May 1993. The attached returns, therefore, give comparative information for May 1993, the earliest available figures, and May 1995.

Equal opportunities return as at 14 May 1993

Grade	*Total*	*Women*	*Percentage*	*Ethnic minority*	*Percentage*	*Disability*	*Percentage*
Director General	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Director (Grade 3)	6	3	50	0	0	0	0
Grade 4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grade 5	13	4	31	0	0	0	0
Assistant Director	7	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grade 6	21	3	14	0	0	0	0
Grade 7	132	16	12	3	2	1	1
Governor 1	37	0	0	0	0	0	0
Governor 2	79	7	9	0	0	0	0
Governor 3	115	12	10	3	3	1	1
Governor 4[1]	310	38	12	2	1	1	0
Governor 5[1]	472	35	7	0	0	0	0
Principal Officer[1]	1,429	51	4	7	0	1	0
Senior Officer[1]	3,260	132	4	33	1	0	0
Officer[1]	19,325	1,816	9	354	2	9	0
Temporary Officer	9	9	100	0	0	0	0
Auxiliary Officer	1,439	280	19	27	2	4	0
Night Patrol	939	83	9	29	3	2	0
Chaplains	245	29	12	4	2	0	0
Nursing Grades	346	288	83	29	8	0	0
Psychologist Grades	152	103	68	1	1	0	0
Farm Manager Grades	77	1	1	0	0	0	0
F/T Medical Officer Grades	134	14	10	53	40	0	0
P/T Medical Officer Grades	109	6	6	24	22	0	0
Senior Prof and Tech Officer	101	2	2	1	1	0	0
Higher Prof and Tech Officer	118	2	2	3	3	0	0
Prof and Tech Officer	71	8	11	6	8	0	0
Senior Instruct Officer	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Higher Instruct Officer	27	2	7	0	0	0	0
Instructional Officer	1,049	143	14	13	1	7	1
Senior Executive Officer	81	20	25	2	2	1	1
Higher Executive Officer	287	110	38	9	3	1	0
Executive Officer	615	353	57	27	4	3	0
Administrative Officer	1,997	1,481	74	146	7	14	1
Administrative Assistant	688	542	79	71	10	7	1
Storeperson	583	26	4	4	1	0	0
Typing Grades (incl P.S.)	618	616	100	14	2	2	0
Pharmacy Grades	49	33	67	1	2	0	0
Support Bands 1 and 2	215	194	90	3	1	1	0
Chief Psy Meas Technician	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Librarian	1	1	100	0	0	0	0
Regional Catering Manager	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
	35,163	6,463	18	869	2	55	0

[1] Includes specialist grades (works, hospital, physical education etc.).

Equal opportunities return as at 1 May 1995

Grade	*Total*	*Women*	*Percentage*	*Ethnic minority*	*Percentage*	*Disability*	*Percentage*
Director General	1	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Director (Grade 3)	6	2	33.33	0	0.00	0	0.00
Grade 4 (including PMO)	11	2	18.18	0	0.00	0	0.00
Grade 5 (including SMO)	57	9	15.79	19	33.33	0	0.00
Assistant Director	7	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Grade 6	23	4	17.39	0	0.00	0	0.00
Grade 7	123	14	11.38	3	2.44	1	0.81
Governor 1	46	2	4.35	0	0.00	0	0.00
Governor 2	75	5	6.67	0	0.00	1	1.33
Governor 3	126	16	12.70	1	0.79	4	3.17
Governor 4[2]	309	37	11.97	2	0.65	2	0.65
Governor 5[2]	464	36	7.76	2	0.43	1	0.22
Principal Officer[1]	1,368	69	5.04	9	0.66	6	0.44
Senior Officer[1]	3,521	167	4.74	44	1.25	10	0.28
Officer[1]	19,278	2,003	10.39	467	2.42	17	0.09
Temporary Officer	4	4	100.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Auxiliary Officer	1,846	365	19.77	42	2.28	6	0.33
Night Patrol	983	87	8.85	31	3.15	2	0.20
Chaplains	255	33	12.94	6	2.35	0	0.00
Nursing Grades	599	457	76.29	59	9.85	1	0.17
Psychologist Grades	183	126	68.85	3	1.64	3	1.64
Farm Manager Grades	88	1	1.14	1	1.14	0	0.00

Equal opportunities return as at 1 May 1995

Grade	*Total*	*Women*	*Percentage*	*Ethnic minority*	*Percentage*	*Disability*	*Percentage*
Full-time Medical Officer G	83	8	9.64	41	49.40	0	0.00
Part-time Medical Officer G	103	4	3.88	32	31.07	0	0.00
Senior Prof and Tech Officer	95	0	0.00	2	2.11	0	0.00
Higher Prof and Tech Officer	117	4	3.42	4	3.42	3	2.56
Prof and Tech Officer	73	6	8.22	7	9.59	1	1.37
Senior Instruct Officer	1	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Higher Instruct Officer	24	2	8.33	0	0.00	0	0.00
Instructional Officer	1,087	158	14.54	13	1.20	7	0.64
Senior Executive Officer	88	26	29.55	2	2.27	3	3.41
Higher Executive Officer	289	114	39.45	7	2.42	5	1.73
Executive Officer	624	375	60.10	34	5.45	6	0.96
Administrative Office	2,003	1,515	75.64	136	6.79	23	1.15
Administrative Assistant	744	576	77.42	73	9.81	14	1.88
Storeperson	610	35	5.74	6	0.98	0	0.00
Typing Grades (including P. S.)	626	624	99.68	11	1.76	3	0.48
Pharmacy Grades	58	40	68.97	6	10.34	0	0.00
Support Bands 1 and 2	237	213	89.87	9	3.80	4	1.69
Librarian	1	1	100.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Regional Catering Manager	4	4	100.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Industrials	2,884	203	7.04	n/a	0.00	n/a	0.00
Ins-Asp1	1	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Information Officers	10	3	30.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	39,135	7,350	18.78	1,072	2.74	123	0.31

[1] Includes management classification.
[2] Includes specialist grades; works, hospital, physical education etc.

Bingo Clubs

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will amend the law to allow bingo clubs to advertise their prize money. [13523]

Mr. Kirkhope: The restrictions on the advertising of bingo and other forms of commercial gambling are currently under review as part of the Government's deregulation initiative. The review is well advanced and we hope to consult on our proposals shortly.

Fraud

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated figure for serious fraud in large businesses in the United Kingdom for 1995. [13521]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not collected centrally.

Disabled People (Safety)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of the work of the Home Office working party on the personal safety of disabled people. [14139]

Mr. Maclean: The Home Office working party set up in 1993 to help the Suzy Lamplugh Trust produce personal safety advice for disabled people completed its task in May 1995 when a consultative document, together with a leaflet entitled "Out and About"—which offers advice for disabled people when travelling around—was published.

I understand that the Suzy Lamplugh Trust has followed up this work with further initiatives, including the provision of training workshops for disabled people and carers.

Terrorist Prisoners

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners in Britain have requests for transfer to prisons in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* the Republic of Ireland currently under consideration. [14734]

Miss Widdecombe: As of 8 February, 24 requests for transfer to Northern Ireland and 65 requests for repatriation to the Republic of Ireland made by prisoners in England and Wales were under consideration. In addition, two requests for transfer to Northern Ireland made by prisoners in Scotland were under consideration. No requests for repatriation to the Republic of Ireland have been made by prisoners in Scotland.

Immigration (Indian Sub-continent)

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the numbers and proportions of arrivals in the United Kingdom in the last two years from the Indian sub-continent of overseas residents who subsequently left the United Kingdom. [15140]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not available.

Deportees

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many families were deported from the United Kingdom under the provisions of the Immigration Act 1971 in each year since 1985. [14922]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not available. Information on the total number of persons removed from the United Kingdom under the deportation process since 1985 is given in table 7.3 of "Control of Immigration: Statistics, United Kingdom, 1994", Cm 2935, a copy of which is in the Library.

Environmental Appraisals

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many environmental appraisals were produced by his Department using the guidance contained in the Department of the Environment's "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" in 1995; and if he will place copies in the Library. [15119]

Mr. Howard: There is currently no formal monitoring system for environmental appraisals carried out by my Department. However, I understand that the Department of the Environment proposes shortly to commission a project to evaluate the effect of its policy appraisal and the environment document on decision making by Government Departments. The project will seek to identify how far environmental impacts are taken into account in policy decisions.

Burglars

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 6 February, *Official Report*, column *107*, on the number of burglars convicted on a third or greater occasion, what number and percentage were juvenile offenders, what percentage of them were sentenced to immediate custody, and what was the average custodial sentence imposed on them; what number and percentage were young adults, what percentage of them were sentenced to immediate custody, and what was the average custodial sentence imposed on them; what number and percentage were adults, what percentage of them were sentenced to immediate custody, and what was the average custodial sentence imposed on them. [15190]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested, taken from a sample of those convicted of burglary in three weeks of 1993, is given in the table.

Sentencing of burglars convicted for the third or greater time: by age

Age of offender	*Number convicted on third or greater occasion*	*Percentage of those convicted on a third or greater occasion*	*Percentage sentenced to immediate custody*	*Average custodial sentence imposed (months)*
All ages	1,135	100	43	11
Under 18 years	142	13	33	5
18–20 years	233	21	52	10
21 years or over	760	67	42	12

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions since 1 January 1995 *(a)* he, *(b)* Ministers in his Department and *(c)* officials in his Department have had contact with Lord Howe concerning his correspondence with the Scott inquiry. [14819]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* Neither I nor my Ministers nor officials have had any such contacts with him.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Indonesia

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much aid has been given to Indonesia in each of the last 16 years. [14948]

Mr. Hanley: Bilateral aid to Indonesia over the last 16 years has been as follows (in £000) and in cash prices:

1980: 9,555
1981: 7,814
1982: 11,264
1983: 9,515
1984: 12,818
1985: 31,781
1986: 7,463
1987: 9,395
1987–88: 7,809
1988–89: 10,758
1989–90: 9,615
1990–91: 17,588
1991–92: 21,197
1992–93: 21,387
1993–94: 22,214
1994–95: 21,418.

Note:
From 1992, British Aid Statistics was published by financial year.

British Geological Survey

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the contracts or work done by the British Geological Survey paid for by the Overseas Development Administration, the nature of the work, and the cost in each case; what arrangements need to be made to continue these programmes if the survey is privatised; and if he will make a statement. [14113]

Mr. Hanley *[pursuant to his reply, 8 February 1996, c. 300]:* Listed is an update of the current contracts which the British Geological Survey has with ODA:

Contract	*Country*	*Value £*
Yaoba Oasis Environmental Project (hydrogeological consultants)	China	186,688
Establishment of a Coastal Geology Unit (IT training)	Albania	78,525
Water Resources Management, Lake Balkhash (environmental impact study)	Kazakhstan	26,046
Primoyre Mineral Waters (water sampling)	Russia	24,973
Environmental Thematic Mapping	Slovakia	36,500
Resource Centre scheme With ODA (call down contracts for ad hoc consultancy work)	Global	75,000

Contract	Country	Value £
Bapedal Groundwater Project (monitoring consultancy)	Indonesia	39,200
World Bank Mining and Environmental Project (geological information mapping programme)	Ecuador	2,319,282
Coal Bed Methane Pre-feasibility Study	Bangladesh	44,500
Land-Ocean Contaminant Study	Mexico/Africa/Indonesia	434,939
Mitigation of Mining Related Mercury Pollution Hazards	Philippines/Ecuador	[1]218,513
Protecting Groundwater Beneath Wastewater Recharge Sites	Mexico/Thailand	207,271
Groundwater Management in Drought Prone Areas of Africa	Africa	142,527
Development New Well Siting Techniques	Zimbabwe/Egypt	203,822
Groundwater Resources Degradation; Socio-Economic Impacts and their Mitigation	China/India/Thailand/ Mexico/Jersey/Palestinian Territories	[2]42,060
Mineral Information Databases in Developing Countries[3]	Guyana/Zimbabwe	112,240
Groundwater Development in Alluvial Aquifers[3]	Pakistan/Fiji	661,661
WHO: Groundwater Quality Assessment and Protection[3]	UK/various overseas especially Asia	79,699
Geoscience Database for Coastal Zone Management[3]	Various/East and South East Asia	82,210
Data Management Systems for Groundwater for Developing Countries[3]	Regional	57,720
Study of Pollution Risk to Deep Groundwater from Urban Wastewater[3]	Regional	222,230
African Workshop in Water Resources[3]	Regional	62,510
Minerals for Development Workshops[3]	Brazil/Egypt/Zambia/ Vietnam	79,538
Procedures for the Rapid Assessment of Limestone Resources[3]	Thailand/Egypt	154,778
Prediction and Remediation of Human Selenium Imbalances[3]	China/Sri Lanka	280,214
Cerium and Endomyocardial Fibrosis in Tropical Terrains[3]	Uganda	235,965
Geological Surveys in Developing Countries Strategies for Assistance[3]	United Kingdom	53,888
Potential for Aquaculture using Saline Groundwater[3]	Various	92,338
World Bank Paper on Urban Groundwater Management Strategies[3]	United Kingdom and overseas sites	53,153
Report Reproduction and Dissemination[3]	United Kingdom	10,001
Earthworks[3]	United Kingdom	37,745

[1] Indicates a change of figure.
[2] Joint research project with the Natural Resources Institute.
[3] Indicates an additional contract.

If the BGS is privatised, the arrangements for continuing these programmes would be reviewed at the time. One option would be to transfer the contracts to the new owner.

PRIME MINISTER

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his written answer of 6 November, *Official Report*, column *546*, if he will place in the Library copies of the 1,000 regulations identified for repeal; and which of these had been repealed by 1 December 1995. [13657]

The Prime Minister: The 1,000 regulations due for repeal or amendment are identified individually by the responsible Departments and no comprehensive central list is held. However, we achieved our target of repealing or amending over 500 regulations by the end of last year. Examples included the simplification of the food temperature control regulations which will save business about £40 million a year with no diminution in food safety; removal of restrictions on Sunday trading and allowing shops to stay open later in the evenings if they so wish; and reform of the Trustee Investments Act 1961 which will result in savings to charities of up to £450 million a year by giving them greater investment flexibility. New measures are under consideration.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions since 1 January 1995 *(a)* he and *(b)* officials in the Cabinet Office have had contact with Lord Howe concerning his correspondence with the Scott inquiry. [14824]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* Lord Howe, like other witnesses to the Scott inquiry, has had contacts with officials in the Cabinet Office from time to time. I have had no such contacts with him.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what arrangements have been made for civil servants whose actions are discussed by Lord Justice Scott to receive copies of his report before its official publication on 15 February. [14840]

The Prime Minister: Pursuant to my answer of Tuesday 13 February, *Official Report*, columns *506–7*, it has subsequently been agreed with the inquiry that all individuals who, from earlier drafts submitted to them,

have reason to believe they may be criticised in the report should have access to those sections of the report relevant to them shortly before publication, but only in controlled circumstances.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

School Buildings

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the capital amounts allowed to each education authority in England for school buildings in the financial year 1996–97 and the amounts of the authorities' original bids. [14768]

Mrs. Gillan: I refer my hon. Friend to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 18 December 1995 and to the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) on 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *978* and *1018* respectively.

Tatum Case

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total cost of taking Mr. Tatum before an industrial tribunal by the Equal Opportunities Commission. [14744]

Mrs. Gillan: The Equal Opportunities Commission estimates that the total costs associated with the Tatum case were approximately £750.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps the Equal Opportunities Commission is taking to assist employment by small businesses. [14745]

Mrs. Gillan: The Equal Opportunities Commission is well aware of the importance of small businesses to the country's economic success and wishes to ensure that they understand the positive benefits which result from equal opportunity policy and practice. The commission has established a working party which has held discussions with organisations representing small and medium-sized businesses. The commission contributed to the Department's publication "Equality Pays", which is targeted at such businesses.

Single European Currency

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment her Department has made of the impact of a single European currency on employment. [14951]

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 8 February, *Official Report*, column *363*.

Jobplan Workshops

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of participants in the jobplan workshops have found jobs. [14960]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Ted Rowlands, dated 14 February 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about Jobplan Workshops.

It may be helpful if I explain that Jobplan aims to help people who have been unemployed for a year or more to compete successfully for jobs and opportunities. About 80% of the people who become unemployed leave the unemployment register within a year. Those who remain can lose confidence and believe there are few options open to them. It is therefore important that at this stage people take a fresh look at their situation, have the chance to review their strengths and skills and set themselves new clear, achievable job goals, and take advantage of the range of help available.

Jobplan supports people in this by providing personal reviews, access to a computer assisted occupational guidance program, and the opportunity to work with others to identify areas where they need additional help. During the week participants draw up a comprehensive action plan which maps out the steps that they need to take to find work.

During the period April to December 1995, 5% of Jobplan participants found work within thirteen weeks of completing a workshop. In addition, a further 32% started on another employment, training or educational opportunity such as Training for Work, Jobclub or a college course.

I hope this is helpful.

Legislation (Compliance Cost Assessments)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for primary and secondary legislation passed since 5 April 1995 which measures were subject to a compliance cost assessment; and what was the compliance cost in each instance. [13660]

Mr. Forth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given today by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children resident in the constituency of South-East Staffordshire have a school place in the independent sector through the assisted places scheme. [14827]

Mrs. Gillan: The information is not collected in the form requested. Five independent schools in the Staffordshire local education authority area currently participate in the assisted places scheme, none of them situated in the South-East Staffordshire constituency. There are 595 assisted pupils at these schools in the current academic year 1995–96. The majority of these pupils are likely to be resident in Staffordshire but some may be drawn from a wider catchment area.

Environmental Education

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she will publish the Government's strategy for environmental education. [15123]

Mr. Robin Squire: Responsibility for this matter rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. The Government hope to publish a strategy for environmental education in England and Wales in spring.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column 729, if she will give a breakdown of the costs of *(a)* setting up and *(b)* running Oflot in (i) 1993–94 and (ii) 1994–95; and what was the source of these funds. [14212]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 8 February 1996]:* This is a matter for the Director General of the National Lottery. I have therefore asked the director general to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Marchioness Incident

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Attorney-General if he will now initiate further criminal proceedings in respect of the loss of the Marchioness. [14302]

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service has received in November and December 1995 from the coroner transcripts of the evidence given at the inquest. These are being studied. Once they have been considered, together with the pre-inquest evidence and the results of any additional inquiries which may be necessary, a decision will be made as to whether further criminal proceedings should be instituted.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Attorney-General on how many occasions since 1 January 1995 *(a)* he, *(b)* Ministers in his Department and *(c)* officials in his Department have had contact with Lord Howe concerning his correspondence with the Scott inquiry. [14823]

The Attorney-General *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* The requirements of the inquiry have been respected. Communications between me and others concerning correspondence with the Scott inquiry are private.

HEALTH

Powered Wheelchairs

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the basis of his Department's own compliance cost assessment for the provision of powered wheelchairs; and what recent revision has been made to this assessment; [12076]

(2) what assessment he has made of the report of the Batteries Not Included Consortium on the provision of powered wheelchairs, a copy of which has been sent to him. [12487]

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what consultations he has had with user groups concerning the funding of indoor-outdoor powered wheelchairs in the United Kingdom; [14596]

(2) what progress has been made in implementing the central recommendations of the 1986 McColl report; [14597]

(3) what assessment has been made of the benefit to disabled people of indoor-outdoor powered wheelchairs; [14598]

(4) what consultations or correspondence his Department has had with health authorities concerning the funding of indoor-outdoor powered wheelchairs; [14599]

(5) what plans he has to extend the funding of indoor-outdoor powered wheelchairs throughout the United Kingdom; [14600]

(6) when the most recent assessment was made of the level of demand for indoor-outdoor powered wheelchairs. [14601]

Mr. Bowis: We have already implemented the main recommendation of the McColl report on the organisation of the services providing artificial limbs, wheelchairs and appliances for disabled people which was, inter alia, to devolve responsibility for the wheelchair service to the national health service locally. In 1994 we set up a departmental working group to look at the feasibility of introducing a voucher scheme. The group also looked at the likely demand for, and the cost of providing, powered indoor-outdoor wheelchairs. In considering the findings of the working group we have taken into account the report of the Batteries Not Included Consortium and representations made to us by interested parties, including health authorities.

Responsibility for wheelchair provision in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland respectively.

Pensions

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the criteria used by his Department when assessing the medical submissions by employees who apply for payment of pension benefits because of ill health. [13566]

Mr. Malone: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the NHS Pensions Agency under its chief executive, Mr. A. F. Cowan. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from A. F. Cowan to Mr. William O'Brien, dated 14 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Health has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question as it falls within my area of responsibility.

The criterion for early payment of a NHS retirement pension on the grounds of ill-health is that the member must have a physical or mental infirmity that renders them permanently incapable of

efficiently discharging the duties of their employment. In this context permanent means that the member will not be able to resume their previous employment before the normal retirement age of 60.

Kidney Failure

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give a breakdown of the number of people who have died in each of the last five years as a result of kidney failure by *(a)* age group and *(b)* ethnic group; and what action he is taking to reduce the number of deaths from kidney failure. [14564]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available in the form requested. The numbers of people who die from various diseases are published annually in "Mortality Statistics series DH2: Cause: England and Wales", copies of which are available in the Library. It is for individual health authorities to allocate resources to renal services based on an assessment of the needs of their population and taking account of local priorities.

Tri-Star Ambulances

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost to the NHS of the purchase of Tri-Star ambulances; and what assessment he has made of their safety. [14452]

Mr. Horam: The current contract price for a Tri-Star ambulance is £39,875, plus approximately £10,000 per vehicle for providing specialist equipment and stretchers. I am aware of one traffic accident involving a Tri-Star vehicle, which led to 19 vehicles being withdrawn from service pending further investigations of their allowable loaded rating. Other Tri-Star vehicles use a different chassis and continue to perform satisfactorily.

Private Patient Activity

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to establish a policy of public accountability for private patient activity in the NHS. [14504]

Mr. Malone: The accountable officer's memoranda, issued by the chief executive of the national health service executive in March 1995, set out the responsibilities of chief executives for all income and expenditure incorporated in health bodys accounts.

Nurses' Pay

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the NHS trusts which have awarded an increase of less than 3 per cent. to nurses, indicating the percentage awarded; and if he will make a statement. [14484]

Mr. Malone: Over 90 per cent. of nurses have received pay increases of 3 per cent. or more in 1995, as a result of local negotiations. Final information on settlements for other trusts is not yet available.

Residential and Nursing Homes

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of places for *(a)* over 65-year-olds and *(b)* over 75-year-olds per 1,000 in residential and nursing homes funded by social services departments in each local authority. [14322]

Mr. Bowis: The number of residents supported in homes for the elderly by local authorities at 31 March 1995 per 1,000 population is shown in the table.

Supported residents in homes for elderly people: rate per 1,000 population[1] by type of care and age

Rates per 1,000 population

	Residential and nursing care		*Residential care*		*Nursing care*	
	65 or over	*75 or over*	*65 or over*	*75 or over*	*65 or over*	*75 or over*
England	18.0	34.0	13.0	25.0	4.9	9.3
Avon	17.0	32.0	10.0	19.0	6.8	13.0
Barking	23.0	48.0	19.0	40.0	3.9	8.0
Barnet	14.0	26.0	13.0	23.0	1.9	3.3
Barnsley	22.0	43.0	18.0	35.0	4.0	7.7
Bedfordshire	19.0	38.0	16.0	33.0	2.4	4.8
Berkshire	15.0	30.0	9.5	20.0	5.0	11.0
Bexley	12.0	23.0	9.0	18.0	2.5	5.0
Birmingham	19.0	37.0	13.0	25.0	6.2	12.0
Bolton	22.0	45.0	17.0	36.0	5.2	10.0
Bradford	20.0	37.0	14.0	26.0	6.2	11.0
Brent	9.1	17.0	7.3	14.0	1.9	3.3
Bromley	5.0	10.0	2.8	5.7	2.2	4.4
Buckinghamshire	14.0	29.0	11.0	23.0	3.1	6.3
Bury	24.0	46.0	17.0	34.0	6.8	12.0
Calderdale	26.0	50.0	19.0	35.0	7.5	15.0
Cambridgeshire	13.0	25.0	12.0	22.0	1.7	3.4
Camden	23.0	40.0	20.0	33.0	3.6	6.3
Cheshire	8.3	17.0	8.1	17.0	0.19	0.35
City of London	21.0	42.0	11.0	15.0	11.0	27.0
Cleveland	23.0	48.0	14.0	29.0	8.9	18.0
Cornwall	15.0	30.0	11.0	22.0	4.0	7.8
Coventry	18.0	28.0	14.0	23.0	3.8	5.7
Croydon	19.0	38.0	12.0	24.0	7.1	14.0
Cumbria	19.0	38.0	16.0	32.0	3.6	6.9
Derbyshire	19.0	38.0	13.0	26.0	5.9	12.0
Devon	5.5	10.0	5.5	10.0	0.0	0.0

Supported residents in homes for elderly people: rate per 1,000 population[1] by type of care and age

Rates per 1,000 population

	Residential and nursing care		*Residential care*		*Nursing care*	
	65 or over	*75 or over*	*65 or over*	*75 or over*	*65 or over*	*75 or over*
Doncaster	16.0	35.0	12.0	25.0	4.4	9.3
Dorset	27.0	50.0	20.0	37.0	7.1	13.0
Dudley	18.0	37.0	11.0	23.0	7.0	14.0
Durham	22.0	46.0	14.0	30.0	8.1	17.0
Ealing	16.0	30.0	11.0	21.0	4.5	8.2
East Sussex	17.0	29.0	11.0	19.0	5.8	10.0
Enfield	15.0	28.0	12.0	22.0	3.2	6.0
Essex	15.0	30.0	12.0	25.0	3.0	5.4
Gateshead	26.0	54.0	18.0	38.0	8.3	16.0
Gloucestershire	10.0	18.0	3.6	7.0	6.0	11.0
Greenwich	22.0	42.0	16.0	31.0	5.9	11.0
Hackney	30.0	58.0	25.0	47.0	5.7	11.0
Hammersmith	24.0	43.0	20.0	36.0	4.0	7.2
Hampshire	14.0	27.0	11.0	22.0	2.6	5.0
Haringey	15.0	28.0	13.0	24.0	2.1	4.0
Harrow	11.0	21.0	10.0	18.0	1.5	2.7
Havering	10.0	21.0	8.6	19.0	1.5	2.5
Hereford and Worcester	15.0	31.0	10.0	21.0	4.9	10
Hertfordshire	14.0	28.0	11.0	23.0	2.7	5.1
Hillingdon	18.0	34.0	14.0	26.0	4.1	8.2
Hounslow	13.0	26.0	12.0	25.0	0.8	1.6
Humberside	23.0	45.0	18.0	37.0	4.4	8.1
Isle of Wight	12.0	22.0	11.0	20.0	1.5	2.4
Isle of Scilly	22.0	46.0	22.0	46.0	0.0	0.0
Islington	26.0	51.0	21.0	43.0	4.6	8.7
Kensington	16.0	29.0	13.0	23.0	3.3	6.0
Kent	18.0	34.0	13.0	26.0	4.2	8.1
Kingston upon Thames	13.0	24.0	10.0	18.0	3.3	6.0
Kirklees	20.0	39.0	14.0	28.0	5.7	11.0
Knowsley	42.0	96.0	27.0	63.0	15.0	33.0
Lambeth	25.0	44.0	18.0	30.0	6.8	14.0
Lancashire	22.0	41.0	16.0	32.0	5.2	9.5
Leeds	22.0	43.0	14.0	27.0	8.0	16.0
Leicestershire	18.0	36.0	13.0	27.0	4.3	8.4
Lewisham	26.0	49.0	15.0	29.0	11.0	19.0
Lincolnshire	13.0	26.0	7.9	16.0	4.9	10.0
Liverpool	24.0	45.0	11.0	20.0	13.0	25.0
Manchester	26.0	47.0	15.0	28.0	11.0	20.0
Merton	12.0	22.0	8.6	16.0	3.6	6.1
Newcastle upon Tyne	20.0	40.0	15.0	30.0	5.2	10.0
Newham	25.0	51.0	22.0	44.0	3.7	6.9
Norfolk	15.0	30.0	12.0	23.0	3.2	6.2
North Tyneside	32.0	64.0	24.0	50.0	7.2	14.0
North Yorkshire	18.0	35.0	13.0	26.0	4.5	8.7
Northamptonshire	22.0	44.0	18.0	35.0	4.9	9.3
Northumberland	19.0	39.0	15.0	31.0	4.0	8.1
Nottinghamshire	22.0	46.0	12.0	25.0	10.0	21.0
Oldham	19.0	35.0	16.0	31.0	2.8	4.9
Oxfordshire	17.0	35.0	14.0	28.0	3.6	7.3
Redbridge	15.0	27.0	12.0	24.0	2.4	3.3
Richmond upon Thames	17.0	31.0	13.0	24.0	3.6	6.6
Rochdale	26.0	54.0	17.0	36.0	8.8	17.0
Rotherham	22.0	46.0	15.0	33.0	6.9	14.0
Salford	26.0	49.0	16.0	31.0	10.0	18.0
Sandwell	19.0	38.0	12.0	24.0	7.2	14.0
Sefton	15.0	29.0	10.0	18.0	5.8	11.0
Sheffield	21.0	39.0	16.0	29.0	5.6	10.0
Shropshire	18.0	34.0	11.0	22.0	6.2	12.0
Solihull	11.0	24.0	8.3	18.0	2.6	5.5
Somerset	15.0	30.0	10.0	20.0	5.2	10.0
South Tyneside	23.0	47.0	17.0	35.0	5.7	12.0
Southwark	21.0	40.0	12.0	23.0	10.0	17.0
St. Helens	20.0	42.0	12.0	25.0	8.3	16.0
Staffordshire	19.0	40.0	14.0	29.0	5.1	10.0
Stockport	20.0	40.0	12.0	25.0	7.8	15.0
Suffolk	19.0	37.0	16.0	32.0	3.0	5.6
Sunderland	22.0	44.0	14.0	27.0	7.9	16.0
Surrey	13.0	26.0	10.0	20.0	3.3	6.4
Sutton	19.0	34.0	16.0	29.0	3.0	5.5
Tameside	21.0	39.0	12.0	23.0	8.8	16.0

Supported residents in homes for elderly people: rate per 1,000 population[1] by type of care and age

Rates per 1,000 population

	Residential and nursing care		*Residential care*		*Nursing care*	
	65 or over	*75 or over*	*65 or over*	*75 or over*	*65 or over*	*75 or over*
Tower Hamlets	29.0	65.0	25.0	55.0	4.8	10.0
Trafford	19.0	36.0	13.0	26.0	5.6	10.0
Wakefield	15.0	32.0	12.0	26.0	2.7	5.5
Walsall	21.0	44.0	16.0	35.0	4.8	10.0
Waltham Forest	19.0	35.0	19.0	35.0	0.0	0.0
Wandsworth	23.0	41.0	17.0	31.0	5.4	9.3
Warwickshire	13.0	26.0	8.1	17.0	4.7	9.4
West Sussex	14.0	24.0	9.0	16.0	4.8	8.2
Westminster	17.0	31.0	14.0	26.0	3.1	5.3
Wigan	19.0	38.0	13.0	27.0	5.9	12.0
Wiltshire	19.0	38.0	14.0	28.0	4.7	9.1
Wirral	25.0	49.0	14.0	26.0	11.0	23.0
Wolverhampton	19.0	40.0	15.0	32.0	3.9	8.2

Note:

[1] Rate is, for example, residents aged 65 or over supported by an LA divided by the population aged 65 or over of that LA. LAs may support residents outside their boundaries. They appear as supported residents for the LA but population for a different LA. Where this is the case, the supported residents per head figures will be exaggerated.

Source:

DH annual return SR1.

Intensive Care Beds (Durham)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State of Health how many intensive care beds there have been in the City of Durham constituency, in each year since 1979. [14513]

Mr. Horam: Information for years prior to 1988 is not available centrally. In each year from 1988–89 to 1994–95, there has been an average of 33 intensive care beds in the Durham health authorities.

Doctors

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors worked in the NHS in each year since 1979. [14854]

Mr. Malone: The number of doctors working in the NHS has increased by 23 per cent. from 67,110 in 1979 to 82,680 in 1994, the most recent year for which figures are available. Figures for each year from 1979 to 1994 are shown in the table.

Doctors in the NHS in England

	Hospital medical		*Community medical*		*General medical practitioners*	
	Numbers	*WTE*	*Numbers*	*WTE*	*Numbers*	*Total numbers*
1979	39,860	32,130	5,890	2,790	21,360	67,110
1980	40,760	33,200	5,980	2,820	21,810	68,550
1981	41,620	33,940	6,040	2,880	22,300	69,960
1982	42,190	34,500	6,170	2,870	22,790	71,150
1983	42,760	35,160	6,330	2,910	23,250	72,340
1984	42,780	35,370	6,160	2,880	23,640	72,580
1985	43,550	35,970	6,150	2,930	24,040	73,740
1986	43,990	36,310	6,030	2,920	24,460	74,480
1987	43,960	36,250	6,300	2,760	24,920	75,180
1988	45,490	37,600	6,160	2,790	25,320	76,970
1989	46,970	38,910	6,110	2,770	25,610	78,690
1990	48,590	40,250	5,900	2,730	25,620	80,110
1991	49,900	41,430	5,320	2,780	25,690	80,910
1992	50,380	42,290	4,940	2,600	25,970	81,290
1993	51,550	43,800	4,710	2,590	26,290	82,550
1994	52,040	44,660	4,070	2,370	26,570	82,680

Figures have been rounded to the nearest "10". The Hospital Medical Staff include Hospital Practitioners and Clinical Assistants who may also be General Medical Practitioners.

Figures for hospital doctors are as at 30 September each year; General Practitioners are at 1 October.

WTE = Whole Time Equivalent.

Junior Doctors

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what actions can be taken against NHS trusts that require junior doctors to work more than 72 hours a week. [14852]

Mr. Malone: It is open to postgraduate deans to withdraw approval for posts, and consequently funding, if it becomes clear that continuing long hours are affecting the quality of training available in a post. A royal college may withdraw its approval for a post if the training offered falls below the required standards.

Children Act 1989

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many children have been *(a)* placed in the care of local authorities, *(b)* placed in the care of the other parent and *(c)* cared for by a step parent or partner

following the imprisonment of a parent with care in each year since 1991 as a result of contempt of court for non-compliance with a court order under section 8 of the Children Act 1989; [14849]

(2) how many incidents resulting in injuries to children *(a)* prior to, *(b)* during and *(c)* after contact between parents and children occurred involving individuals whose children were subject to contact orders made under section 8 of the Children Act 1989 in each year since 1991. [14847]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

GP Fundholding

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of general practitioner fundholding budget surpluses have been spent on practice premises in each of the last three years. [14765]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) on 4 April 1995, *Official Report*, column *1034*.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the advantages of general practitioner fundholding. [14809]

Mr. Malone: The advantage of general practice fundholding is that, being closest to patients, general practitioners are able to use resources directly to best meet the needs of their patients.

Private Medical Care

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what regulatory machinery covers private medical care. [14723]

Mr. Malone: Doctors providing private medical care remain subject to the provisions of the Medical Act 1983, as amended, and to the standards of professional conduct set down by the General Medical Council.

Subject to a number of exceptions, set out in the Act, facilities to be used for private medical care are required to register with the local health authority under the Registered Homes Act 1984 where it is intended that *(a)* patients will stay overnight, *(b)* pregnant women or women immediately after childbirth will be received, *(c)* surgical procedures will be carried out under anaesthesia, *(d)* termination of pregnancies will be conducted, *(e)* endoscopies will be carried out, *(f)* haemodialysis or peritoneal dialysis will be conducted, or *(g)* treatment by specially controlled techniques—currently treatment by class 3B and class 4 lasers—will take place.

Environmental Appraisals

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many environmental appraisals were produced by his Department using the guidance contained in the Department of the Environment's "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" in 1995; and if he will place copies in the Library. [15117]

Mr. Horam: None. In general my Department's policies, which are concerned with public health, do not impinge on the environment; environmental considerations are taken fully into account where appropriate, for example in the Department's purchasing policy.

Legislation (Compliance Cost Assessments)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for primary and secondary legislation passed since 5 April 1995 which measures were subject to a compliance cost assessment; and what was the compliance cost in each instance. [13644]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 8 February 1996]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster gave him today.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, column *24*, if he will list for each trust in each year since its inception the cost of staff travelling and subsistence, by region. [14887]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* The information will be placed in the Library.

The figures include expenditure on travelling and subsistence incurred in the delivery of direct patient care, for instance by community nurses. The total expenditure by NHS trusts on travelling and subsistence in 1994–95 was less than 1 per cent. of operating expenses.

WALES

Incomes (South Glamorgan)

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number and percentage of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in South Glamorgan who earn less than £228.70 per week. [13268]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information from the new earnings survey indicates that the estimated proportion of full-time employees in South Glamorgan who earned less than £228.70 per week in April 1995 was 22 per cent. for men and 49 per cent. for women.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many sites of special scientific interest the Countryside Council for Wales reported as damaged in *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94 and *(c)* 1994–95; and what percentage of the total these represent. [14199]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Such information is shown in the Countryside Council for Wales annual reports, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Speech and Language Therapists

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what investigation his Department has been conducting into recruitment difficulties related to appointments of speech and language therapists for children with special educational needs; if he will place a copy of his conclusions in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [14305]

Mr. Hague: My Department and the NHS are examining whether there are any difficulties recruiting speech and language therapists as part of the annual exercise in determining the number of student places for this and other professions. The information gathered will be available when decisions on numbers are taken next summer.

Empty Buildings

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many empty buildings his Department currently owns; what is the cost of insuring and securing these buildings; how many were designed as residential properties; and what was the total amount spent by his Department on empty property taxes in each of the last five years. [14570]

Mr. Hague: Excluding the NHS, the Department, including its agencies and non-departmental public bodies, does not own any empty buildings.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his statement of 31 January, *Official Report*, columns *814–15*, on allocations of resources to the new health authorities in Wales in1996–97, what proportion of the £11 million allocated for the operating costs of general practitioner fundholders' practices plus preparatory fees for aspirant fundholders, corresponds to the additional costs of operating fundholding practices relative to non-fundholding practices. [14327]

Mr. Hague: The £11 million has been provided to meet the additional costs that will be incurred by fundholding practices in directly managing NHS resources on behalf of their patients.

Health Centre Accommodation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his statement of 31 January, *Official Report*, columns *814–15*, on allocations of resources to the new health authorities in Wales in 1996–97, if he will make a statement on the transfer of responsibility for the payment of general practitioner accommodation in health centres. [14463]

Mr. Hague: Negotiations between health departments and the representative body of the profession are under way about the terms of proposed changes to the funding and management arrangements of GP accommodation. The aim is to implement the changes in 1996–97 and £870,000 has been reserved for that purpose. This is additional to the provisional general medical services allocation to health authorities for that year.

A477

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) on what date his Department decided to remove the newly laid surface on the A477 between Radberth and Sageston; [15151]

(2) what investigations were carried out by, or on behalf of, his Department into the quality of the surface laid in 1995 on the A477 between Radberth and Sageston; and when the decision was taken to carry out an investigation; [15152]

(3) how many personal injury accidents occurred on the A477 between Radberth and Sageston following *(a)* the resurfacing in 1995 and *(b)* its removal in 1996; and if he will list the dates of those accidents and the injuries sustained; [15153]

(4) what was the cost of resurfacing the A477 between Radberth and Sageston in 1995; and what is the estimated cost of the removal of that surface and its replacement in 1996. [15154]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Testing of the materials used in the resurfacing and testing of the new surface for skidding resistance and irregularity took place during the contract in April 1995, as is normal practice, and on three subsequent occasions. The resurfacing carried out in 1995 cost £57,000 and due to defects it was decided on 16 January to replace it. The estimated cost of removal and reinstatement, including the additional work now considered necessary, is £88,000. Discussions on the apportionment of costs are being fully pursued. Following

the resurfacing in 1995, there were two accidents—one on July 9 resulting in slight injury to one person, and one on October 24 resulting in the driver of a car receiving fatal injuries and a passenger receiving serious injuries. There have been no accidents since the surface was removed.

Local Government Ombudsman

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received from individual residents in Wales expressing dissatisfaction with reports produced by the local government ombudsman for Wales in each of the last five years. [15155]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office does not hold records before 1993. The number of complaints received by the Welsh Office expressing dissatisfaction with the ombudsman service in Wales in subsequent years is as follows:

Number of complaints

1995: six[1]

1994: three

1993: six

Note:

[1]One of which included representation from 18 individual members of the public.

DEFENCE

St. Christopher House

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of his Department's report into the fire at St. Christopher house, London. [14439]

Mr. Soames: The board of inquiry into this fire was an internal investigation designed to establish the facts and prevent a recurrence. For reasons of confidentiality we do not release detailed reports of such investigations, but I have placed a copy of the public synopsis of the board of inquiry report in the Library of the House.

Saudi Armed Forces Project Group

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's staff involved in the Al Yamamah project office have subsequently taken up business appointments with companies holding contracts processed through the Al Yamamah project office. [15175]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my predecessor on 20 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *1191*.

Defence Housing Executive

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many applications were submitted in response to the Defence Housing Executive's recruitment campaign 1995; how many have been successful; and how many of the successful candidates were ex-service personnel. [14658]

Mr. Soames: The Defence Housing Executive's 1995 recruitment campaign for regional controllers, area managers and housing services managers attracted some 602 applicants, of whom 37 were offered appointments. Of the 37 successful candidates, nine were ex-service personnel.

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria were applied in the selection of candidates for interview for the posts advertised in the Defence Housing Executive's recruitment campaign 1995. [14657]

Mr. Soames: The sift criteria applied in the selection of candidates for interview for the Defence Housing Executive regional controller, area manager and housing services manager posts were based on length and breadth of experience in private and public sector housing management.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to issue D notices in regard to matters addressed by the Scott inquiry report. [14845]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The defence advisory notices define a voluntary code between the media and the Departments responsible for national security. They provide general guidance to editors, programme makers and publishers and would not cover the reporting of the contents of the Scott report on publication.

BBC World Service

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the grant in aid in each of the last five financial years, and in 1995–96 to date, from his Department to the BBC World Service in constant prices; and from which subheads of which votes these funds are taken. [14978]

Mr. Soames: Payments by the Ministry of Defence towards the cost of BBC monitoring—class II, vote 3, subhead item A2 (1)—are made from class I, vote 1. The information sought is as follows:

Year	*£ thousand*[1]	*Subhead*[2]
1990–91	2,954	L1
1991–92	3,675	L1
1992–93	3,933	L1
1993–94	3,832	M1
1994–95	3,755	K1
1995–96	[3]3,646	J1

[1] Figures are at 1995–96 constant prices.
[2] The changes in subhead arise from vote restructuring.
[3] Latest estimate of expenditure.

Terrorism Arrests

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when was the last occasion an officer of the armed forces made an arrest in Northern Ireland for suspected terrorist activities. [14916]

Mr. Soames: The last occasion when a member of the armed forces made an arrest in Northern Ireland was 1 December 1994.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's budget for research into Gulf

war syndrome and from which subheads of which votes these funds will be taken. [15004]

Mr. Soames: The budget for future research into the health problems of Gulf veterans and their families, and the vote subhead on which it will be borne, has yet to be determined.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many written parliamentary questions were passed for answer to executive agencies and non-governmental departments in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [14992]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This information is a matter of public record, but could not be provided by my Department in the form requested without incurring disproportionate cost.

Plutonium Exports

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what permission was sought from the United States Government, under the provisions of the 1958 US-UK mutual defence agreement on atomic energy matters as amended, to release details on 6 February of the quantities of plutonium exported to the United States from the United Kingdom, the dates of the exports, the present locations of the materials and past uses of the materials. [14843]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The United States Government sought and obtained our permission to include in their announcement of 6 February the total quantity of plutonium that the United States received from the United Kingdom between 1960 and 1979 under the 1958 agreement.

Nuclear Tests (Compensation)

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much compensation has been paid since 1966 by Her Majesty's Government in respect of claims by or on behalf of persons who suffered death or injury as a consequence of the United Kingdom's atomic weapons test programme in Australasia in the 1950s. [14929]

Mr. Soames: The Government have paid no such claims. From the time of the atmospheric nuclear tests in the 1950s and early 1960s up to the end of 1990, there has been no overall excess of death or malignant disease among British nuclear test veterans.

Environmental Appraisals

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many environmental appraisals were produced by his Department using the guidance contained in the Department of the Environment's "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" in 1995; and if he will place copies in the Library. [15114]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on 11 July 1995, *Official Report*, column *530*. My Department has not operated a centralised reporting system for environmental appraisals and no figures are therefore available. I understand that the Department of the Environment is shortly to commission a project to evaluate the effect of the "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" document on decision making by Government Departments.

Ammunition

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *848;* which country and which company supplied 155 mm ammunition not provided by United Kingdom manufacturers; what was the average price per round; and what means were used for disposal of surplus or dated stock of ammunition from the stockpile in each year since 1990. [14879]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* Between 1990 and 1995 Eurometaal of the Netherlands and Simmel Difesa of Italy supplied the British Army with 155 mm ammunition. The prices paid remain confidential for commercial reasons. No 155 mm ammunition rounds have been sold or disposed of since 1990.

In addition, the Governments of Germany and the Netherlands provided 155 mm ammunition to the United Kingdom at the time of the Gulf conflict. Those rounds not used in the Gulf were returned.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *847*, if he will seek the assistance of British Aerospace in obtaining Royal Ordnance sales records for his Department's 155 mm stock between 1980 and 1987. [14886]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* My Department will seek the assistance of British Aerospace to establish what records remain and I will write separately to the hon. Member. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *848*, in which years since 1986 the Inspector General of Ordnance formally indicated his satisfaction that the United Kingdom reserve war stock of 155 mm ammunition met in full the reserve requirement; and if he will list the deficiencies reported in each year. [14871]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* Information about war stocks is classified.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *848*, how many 155 mm rounds became redundant in each year following the imposition of the 10-year service life rule; and if he will list for each method of disposal of the redundant rounds his estimate of the number of rounds involved. [14872]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* War reserves are regularly replenished, with new stock replacing old. Old stock is used for training purposes, so no rounds have been disposed of in recent years. Some batches of 155 mm ammunition have had their shelf life extended beyond 10 years following the satisfactory completion of life extension trials.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *847*, what was the estimated price per round of 155 mm ammunition of which his Department's annual purchasing budget is based. [14881]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* The Department's annual purchasing budget is not based on an average price per round because there are a number of different types of round of 155 mm ammunition. The basic component of each round, that is the shell, charge, fuze and primer, are often bought separately. During the period from 1991 to 1995, various types of shell were bought for prices from about £100 to £1,200. The shell is generally the most expensive element of the round.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list each local authority's level of grant for elderly residential finance, as contained within the personal social services support grant settlement for the current year; and if he will list the figures for each of the last five years, *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* as a percentage change from the previous year. [14203]

Sir Paul Beresford: Information on the elderly residential element of personal social services standard spending assessment—SSAs—is given in the table. SSAs do not, in fact, represent amounts of grant paid in respect of specific services. They are, instead, used in the calculation of authorities' entitlement to revenue support grant, which is an unhypothecated grant, allocated between services on the basis of local authorities' decisions.

Table showing the SSA for elderly residential personal social services at 1996–97 prices, and the percentage change, at 1996–97 prices, between years

Local authority	*1991–92 £ million*	*Change Per cent.*	*1992–93 £ million*	*Change Per cent.*	*1993–94 £ million*	*Change Per cent.*
Total England	1,068.7	15.8	1,100.6	3.0	996.515	–9.5
Total shire counties	585.243	16.4	599.670	2.5	562.611	–6.2
Total shire unitary authorities	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total metropolitan districts	284.292	14.1	292.341	2.8	259.549	–11.2
Total inner London boroughs including City	90.391	19.3	93.920	3.9	76.443	–18.6
Total outer London boroughs	108.749	14.0	114.682	5.5	97.889	–14.6
Total London boroughs	199.140	16.3	208.602	4.8	174.332	–16.4
Isles of Scilly	0.029	60.0	0.032	8.0	0.023	–26.2
Total shire areas	585.243	16.4	599.670	2.5	562.611	–6.2
Total metropolitan areas	284.292	14.1	292.341	2.8	259.549	–11.2
Total London	199.140	16.3	208.602	4.8	174.332	–16.4
Greater London						
City of London	0.131	10.3	0.146	11.6	0.140	–4.5
Camden	7.785	15.9	7.705	–1.0	7.404	–3.9
Greenwich	7.658	23.2	7.751	1.2	6.470	–16.5
Hackney	6.351	9.3	6.900	8.6	5.417	–21.5
Hammersmith and Fulham	6.392	13.2	6.514	1.9	5.039	–22.6
Islington	7.693	19.2	7.820	1.7	6.011	–23.1
Kensington and Chelsea	4.431	23.3	4.729	6.7	5.191	–9.8
Lambeth	8.680	19.3	8.641	–0.4	6.711	–22.3
Lewisham	7.415	18.3	7.882	6.3	6.438	–18.3
Southwark	8.409	30.9	9.317	10.8	6.759	–27.5
Tower Hamlets	7.046	22.6	7.167	1.7	5.159	–28.0
Wandsworth	8.868	21.2	9.701	9.4	8.325	–14.2
Westminster	9.532	16.3	9.647	1.2	7.380	–23.5
Barking and Dagenham	5.391	15.1	5.870	8.9	4.561	–22.3
Barnet	6.206	12.5	6.599	6.3	6.515	–1.3
Bexley	4.510	11.5	4.368	–3.2	4.131	–5.4
Brent	5.657	8.2	6.214	9.8	5.226	–15.9
Bromley	7.268	23.7	7.236	–0.4	6.146	–15.1
Croydon	6.319	16.8	6.500	2.9	5.997	–7.7
Ealing	6.824	14.5	7.278	6.7	6.013	–17.4
Enfield	7.139	15.2	7.425	4.0	6.207	–16.4
Haringey	4.554	8.3	5.607	23.1	4.600	–17.9
Harrow	3.200	5.4	3.506	9.6	3.299	–5.9
Havering	4.609	16.3	4.800	4.1	4.087	–14.8
Hillingdon	5.674	20.4	5.688	0.2	4.586	–19.4

Table showing the SSA for elderly residential personal social services at 1996–97 prices, and the percentage change, at 1996–97 prices, between years

Local authority	*1991–92 £ million*	*Change Per cent.*	*1992–93 £ million*	*Change Per cent.*	*1993–94 £ million*	*Change Per cent.*
Hounslow	4.684	10.5	5.190	10.8	4.511	–13.1
Kingston upon Thames	4.053	–3.0	4.011	–1.0	3.134	–21.9
Merton	4.889	8.2	5.435	11.2	4.468	–17.8
Newham	5.835	13.4	5.999	2.8	5.089	–15.2
Redbridge	5.794	28.2	6.253	7.9	5.319	–14.9
Richmond upon Thames	4.306	20.1	4.440	3.1	3.435	–22.6
Sutton	4.680	17.3	4.725	1.0	4.296	–9.1
Waltham Forest	7.156	11.8	7.542	5.4	6.270	–16.9
Greater Manchester						
Bolton	6.772	15.2	7.163	5.8	6.554	–8.5
Bury	3.713	8.2	4.173	12.4	3.794	–9.1
Manchester	12.292	8.2	13.905	13.1	11.597	–16.6
Oldham	5.303	14.7	5.463	3.0	4.820	–11.8
Rochdale	5.284	13.3	5.284	–	4.789	–9.4
Salford	7.424	11.3	8.088	9.0	6.898	–14.7
Stockport	7.084	23.1	7.187	1.5	6.629	–7.8
Tameside	5.891	22.2	4.919	–16.5	4.884	–0.7
Trafford	4.673	16.3	5.008	7.2	4.557	–9.0
Wigan	7.196	14.6	7.346	2.1	6.425	–12.5
Merseyside						
Knowsley	3.246	18.5	3.411	5.1	2.717	–20.4
Liverpool	14.215	14.7	15.263	7.4	12.288	–19.5
Sefton	4.317	0.6	4.507	4.4	4.845	7.5
St. Helens	4.305	14.5	4.428	2.9	3.772	–14.8
Wirral	8.293	17.3	8.352	0.7	7.713	–7.7
South Yorkshire						
Barnsley	4.948	15.3	5.007	1.2	4.627	–7.6
Doncaster	5.436	14.8	6.644	22.2	5.311	–20.1
Rotherham	5.903	16.5	6.117	3.6	5.592	–8.6
Sheffield	18.606	14.4	18.809	1.1	16.933	–10.0
Tyne and Wear						
Gateshead	6.313	13.2	6.059	–4.0	5.105	–15.8
Newcastle upon Tyne	9.356	16.9	9.044	–3.3	7.632	–15.6
North Tyneside	4.881	17.6	5.210	6.7	4.485	–13.9
South Tyneside	4.833	5.9	4.760	–1.5	3.917	–17.7
Sunderland	6.694	11.0	6.908	3.2	6.380	–7.6
West Midlands						
Birmingham	23.741	7.3	23.218	–2.2	22.093	–4.8
Coventry	6.537	12.9	6.056	–7.4	5.640	–6.9
Dudley	6.382	19.1	6.536	2.4	6.318	–3.3
Sandwell	9.107	17.0	9.072	–0.4	7.724	–14.9
Solihull	3.609	20.5	3.887	7.7	3.487	–10.3
Walsall	5.244	13.6	5.595	6.7	4.938	–11.7
Wolverhampton	6.417	23.0	6.562	2.3	5.690	–13.3
West Yorkshire						
Bradford	11.970	21.7	11.462	–4.2	10.542	–8.0
Calderdale	5.696	12.7	6.480	13.8	5.549	–14.4
Kirklees	9.832	12.7	10.472	6.5	9.612	–8.2
Leeds	21.647	14.5	22.491	3.9	19.254	–14.4
Wakefield	7.134	11.7	7.451	4.5	6.436	–13.6
Shire counties						
Bedfordshire	8.807	16.7	8.620	–2.1	8.055	–6.6
Berkshire	11.475	15.6	11.330	–1.3	11.052	–2.5
Buckinghamshire	9.007	18.1	9.298	3.2	8.872	–4.6
Cambridgeshire	12.025	15.1	12.184	1.3	11.573	–5.0
Cheshire	18.349	17.6	18.619	1.5	17.803	–4.4
Cornwall	7.641	14.4	8.081	5.8	8.124	0.5
Cumbria	11.567	21.5	11.525	–0.4	10.569	–8.3
Derbyshire	20.019	13.5	20.427	2.0	19.226	–5.9
Devon	15.736	16.4	16.049	2.0	15.303	–4.6
Dorset	15.370	14.5	15.431	0.4	12.973	–15.9
Durham	15.092	16.0	14.549	–3.6	13.727	–5.6
East Sussex	16.062	17.3	15.171	–5.5	15.610	2.9
Essex	31.407	20.5	32.537	3.6	30.210	–7.2

Table showing the SSA for elderly residential personal social services at 1996–97 prices, and the percentage change, at 1996–97 prices, between years

Local authority	*1991–92 £ million*	*Change Per cent.*	*1992–93 £ million*	*Change Per cent.*	*1993–94 £ million*	*Change Per cent.*
Gloucestershire	11.637	26.7	12.550	7.8	10.732	–14.5
Hampshire	25.148	10.9	25.076	–0.3	25.671	2.4
Hereford and Worcester	10.493	14.3	10.515	0.2	11.056	5.1
Hertfordshire	18.770	11.2	20.871	11.2	18.366	–12.0
Kent	29.872	17.9	30.544	2.2	28.467	–6.8
Lancashire	26.858	14.3	25.626	–4.6	24.556	–4.2
Leicestershire	18.511	16.6	19.921	7.6	17.737	–11.0
Lincolnshire	11.781	11.6	13.016	10.5	12.406	–4.7
Norfolk	16.531	23.7	16.184	–2.1	15.561	–3.9
Northamptonshire	11.345	15.8	11.717	3.3	11.110	–5.2
Northumberland	6.550	16.6	6.326	–3.4	5.953	–5.9
Notthinghamshire	24.006	25.2	24.886	3.7	22.376	–10.1
Oxfordshire	10.814	16.2	11.455	5.9	10.513	–8.2
Shropshire	6.409	12.0	7.122	11.1	6.687	–6.1
Somerset	10.018	16.9	10.143	1.2	9.110	–10.2
Staffordshire	18.763	13.8	19.531	4.1	18.272	–6.4
Suffolk	13.233	15.3	13.865	4.8	13.375	–3.5
Surrey	20.828	22.7	22.141	6.3	20.829	–5.9
Warwickshire	9.166	17.3	9.904	8.1	9.598	–3.1
West Sussex	14.948	19.2	15.708	5.1	15.133	–3.7
Wiltshire	9.858	17.9	10.362	5.1	9.426	–9.0
North Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
Isles of Scilly	0.029	60.0	0.32	8.0	0.023	–26.2
Isle of Wight Council	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bath and North-east	—	—	—	—	—	—
Somerset	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bristol	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Gloucestershire	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Somerset	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hartlepool	—	—	—	—	—	—
Middlesbrough	—	—	—	—	—	—
Redcar and Cleveland	—	—	—	—	—	—
Stockton on Tees	—	—	—	—	—	—
East Riding of Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kingston upon Hull	—	—	—	—	—	—
North East Lincolnshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Lincolnshire	—	—	—	—	—	—
York	—	—	—	—	—	—
Old Shire areas						
Avon (old)	21.548	13.2	22.320	3.6	19.737	11.6
Cleveland (old)	11.800	18.8	11.474	–2.8	10,530	–8.2
Humberside (old)	17.459	8.1	17.514	0.3	15.849	–9.5
Isle of Wight (old)	2.352	17.7	2.263	–3.8	2.119	–6.4
North Yorkshire (old)	13.989	11.6	14.817	5.9	14.347	–3.2

Table showing the SSA for elderly residential personal social services at 1996–97 prices, and the percentage change, at 1996–97 prices, between years

Local authority	*1994–95 £ million*	*Change Per cent.*	*1995–96 £ million*	*Change Per cent.*	*1996–97 £ million*	*Change Per cent.*
Total England	1,384.6	38.9	1,850.0	33.6	2.200.2	18.9
Total shire counties	791.380	40.7	1,064.4	34.5	1,161.8	9.2
Total shire unitary authorities	—	—	4.859	-	116.229	2.292
Total metropolitan districts	351.316	35.4	463.091	31.8	551.401	19.1
Total inner London boroughs including City	110.714	44.8	148.398	34.0	172.904	16.5
Total outer London boroughs	131.184	34.0	169.252	29.0	197.743	16.8
Total London boroughs	241.898	38.8	317.650	31.3	370.648	16.7
Isles of Scilly	0.042	81.0	0.060	41.4	0.073	22.7
Total shire areas	791.380	40.7	1,069.2	35.1	1,278.1	19.5
Total metropolitan areas	351.316	35.4	463.091	31.8	551.401	19.1
Total London	241.898	38.8	317.650	31.3	370.648	16.7

Table showing the SSA for elderly residential personal social services at 1996–97 prices, and the percentage change, at 1996–97 prices, between years

Local authority	*1994–95 £ million*	*Change Per cent.*	*1995–96 £ million*	*Change Per cent.*	*1996–97 £ million*	*Change Per cent.*
Greater London						
City of London	0.207	47.9	0.323	55.9	0.594	84.1
Camden	9.627	30.0	12.971	34.7	15.330	18.2
Greenwich	9.767	51.0	12.994	33.0	14.908	14.7
Hackney	9.266	71.0	12.281	32.5	14.286	16.3
Hammersmith and Fulham	7.104	41.0	9.388	32.1	10.985	17.0
Islington	8.459	40.7	11.368	34.4	12.980	14.2
Kensington and Chelsea	5.736	10.5	7.727	34.7	9.299	20.3
Lambeth	10.007	49.1	13.505	35.0	15.603	15.5
Lewisham	10.393	61.4	14.175	36.4	16.473	16.2
Southwark	10.861	60.7	14.350	32.1	16.612	15.8
Tower Hamlets	8.268	60.3	10.992	32.9	12.735	15.9
Wandsworth	11.718	40.8	15.507	32.3	18.053	16.4
Westminster	9.301	26.0	12.819	37.8	15.046	17.4
Barking and Dagenham	6.758	48.2	8.557	26.6	10.486	22.5
Barnet	9.554	46.7	12.062	26.3	14.079	16.7
Bexley	5.275	27.7	7.106	34.7	8.429	18.6
Brent	6.574	25.8	8.056	22.5	9.003	11.8
Bromley	7.830	27.4	10.142	29.5	11.896	17.3
Croydon	7.415	23.6	9.787	32.0	11.534	17.9
Ealing	7.905	31.5	10.050	27.1	11.823	17.6
Enfield	7.640	23.1	9.860	29.1	11.474	16.4
Haringey	6.665	44.9	8.467	27.0	9.963	17.7
Harrow	5.374	62.9	7.030	30.8	8.240	17.2
Havering	5.714	39.8	7.402	29.5	8.746	18.2
Hillingdon	6.196	35.1	8.065	30.2	9.546	18.4
Hounslow	6.284	39.3	8.231	31.0	9.489	15.3
Kingston upon Thames	3.460	10.4	4.634	33.9	5.407	16.7
Merton	5.570	24.7	7.103	27.5	8.193	15.3
Newham	7.561	48.6	9.709	28.4	11.155	14.9
Redbridge	6.450	21.3	8.278	28.3	9.406	13.6
Richmond upon Thames	4.741	38.0	6.608	39.4	7.871	19.1
Sutton	5.486	27.7	7.108	29.6	8.197	15.3
Waltham Forest	8.732	39.3	10.997	25.9	12.807	16.5
Greater Manchester						
Bolton	8.010	22.2	10.286	28.4	12.108	17.7
Bury	4.547	19.8	6.126	34.7	7.403	20.8
Manchester	6.405	41.5	21.317	29.9	25.139	17.9
Oldham	6.506	35.0	8.455	30.0	9.981	18.0
Rochdale	5.955	24.4	7.886	32.4	9.342	18.5
Salford	9.262	34.3	12.156	31.2	14.585	20.0
Stockport	7.155	7.9	9.420	31.7	11.276	19.7
Tameside	6.919	41.7	9.239	33.5	10.953	18.6
Trafford	5.635	23.7	7.530	33.6	8.915	18.4
Wigan	8.681	35.1	11.393	31.2	13.638	19.7
Merseyside						
Knowsley	3.786	39.3	5.047	33.3	5.934	17.6
Liverpool	6.631	35.3	21.759	30.8	25.739	18.3
Sefton	7.897	63.0	11.078	40.3	13.456	21.5
St. Helens	5.399	43.1	6.882	27.5	8.214	19.3
Wirral	8.987	16.5	12.495	39.0	15.093	20.8
South Yorkshire						
Barnsley	8.429	82.2	11.252	33.5	13.483	19.8
Doncaster	9.029	70.0	11.739	30.0	13.954	18.9
Rotherham	9.020	61.3	11.851	31.4	14.116	19.1
Sheffield	23.189	36.9	30.305	30.7	35.934	18.6

Table showing the SSA for elderly residential personal social services at 1996–97 prices, and the percentage change, at 1996–97 prices, between years

Local authority	*1994–95 £ million*	*Change Per cent.*	*1995–96 £ million*	*Change Per cent.*	*1996–97 £ million*	*Change Per cent.*
Tyne and Wear						
Gateshead	8.000	56.7	10.496	31.2	12.485	19.0
Newcastle upon Tyne	11.069	45.0	14.394	30.0	17.078	18.6
North Tyneside	7.272	62.1	9.596	32.0	11.518	20.0
South Tyneside	6.373	62.7	8.318	30.5	10.034	20.6
Sunderland	10.331	61.9	13.459	30.3	16.132	19.9
West Midlands						
Birmingham	28.166	27.5	37.613	33.5	44.822	19.2
Coventry	6.915	22.6	9.123	31.9	10.913	19.6
Dudley	8.593	36.0	11.424	32.9	13.723	20.1
Sandwell	10.743	39.1	14.083	31.1	16.798	19.3
Solihull	3.949	13.2	5.251	33.0	6.322	20.4
Walsall	7.664	55.2	10.122	32.1	12.070	19.2
Wolverhampton	7.800	37.1	10.082	29.3	11.904	18.1
West Yorkshire						
Bradford	11.254	6.7	15.542	38.1	18.542	19.3
Calderdale	6.051	9.1	7.640	26.3	8.928	16.9
Kirklees	10.790	12.3	14.193	31.5	16.860	18.8
Leeds	24.059	25.0	31.475	30.8	37.445	19.0
Wakefield	10.842	68.5	14.064	29.7	16.562	17.8
Shire Counties						
Bedfordshire	11.718	45.5	15.323	30.8	18.158	18.5
Berkshire	15.278	38.2	21.099	38.1	25.030	18.6
Buckinghamshire	13.460	51.7	18.513	37.5	21.955	18.6
Cambridgeshire	15.490	33.8	20.936	35.2	25.148	20.1
Cheshire	22.589	26.9	30.939	37.0	37.016	19.6
Cornwall	12.489	53.7	17.194	37.7	20.808	21.0
Cumbria	13.803	30.6	18.252	32.2	21.769	19.3
Derbyshire	27.210	41.5	36.106	32.7	43.121	19.4
Devon	27.048	76.8	37.809	39.8	46.143	22.0
Dorset	19.500	50.3	26.143	34.1	31.394	20.1
Durham	21.275	55.0	28.216	32.6	33.855	20.0
East Sussex	23.521	50.7	33.613	42.9	40.135	19.4
Essex	42.769	41.6	57.521	34.5	67.937	18.1
Gloucestershire	12.880	20.0	17.284	34.2	20.688	19.7
Hampshire	38.537	50.1	51.953	34.8	61.886	19.1
Hereford and Worcester	15.901	43.8	21.831	37.3	26.434	21.1
Hertfordshire	26.994	47.0	37.367	38.4	44.527	19.2
Kent	40.740	43.1	55.184	35.5	65.633	18.9
Lancashire	35.808	45.8	48.234	34.7	57.636	19.5
Leicestershire	20.783	17.2	27.761	33.6	33.090	19.2
Lincolnshire	16.179	30.4	22.061	36.4	26.683	21.0
Norfolk	22.678	45.7	30.430	34.2	36.742	20.7
Northamptonshire	14.245	28.2	18.627	30.8	22.350	20.0
Northumberland	10.270	72.5	13.548	31.9	16.275	20.1
Nottinghamshire	29.044	29.8	38.767	33.5	46.421	19.7
Oxfordshire	13.860	31.8	18.116	30.7	21.576	19.1
Shropshire	10.387	55.3	14.030	35.1	16.902	20.5
Somerset	12.033	32.1	17.061	41.8	20.574	20.6
Staffordshire	26.152	43.1	34.838	33.2	41.735	19.8
Suffolk	18.148	35.7	24.075	32.7	28.706	19.2
Surrey	27.088	30.0	36.526	34.8	43.146	18.1
Warwickshire	12.066	25.7	15.819	31.1	18.810	18.9
West Sussex	21.654	43.1	29.194	34.8	34.230	17.3
Wiltshire	13.429	42.5	17.925	33.5	21.466	19.8
North Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	23.872	—
All Purpose Authorities						
Isle of Scilly	0.042	81.0	0.060	41.4	0.073	22.7
Isle of Wight Council	—	—	4.859	—	5.758	18.5
Bath and North East	—	—	—	—	6.893	—
Somerset	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bristol	—	—	—	—	17.983	—
South Gloucestershire	—	—	—	—	6.396	—
North Somerset	—	—	—	—	7.719	—
Hartlepool	—	—	—	—	4.281	—
Middlesbrough	—	—	—	—	6.097	—
Redcar and Cleveland	—	—	—	—	6.215	—

Table showing the SSA for elderly residential personal social services at 1996–97 prices, and the percentage change, at 1996–97 prices, between years

Local authority	*1994–95 £ million*	*Change Per cent.*	*1995–96 £ million*	*Change Per cent.*	*1996–97 £ million*	*Change Per cent.*
Stockton on Tees	—	—	—	—	6.637	—
East Riding of Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	12.197	—
Kingston upon Hull	—	—	—	—	16.264	—
North East Lincolnshire	—	—	—	—	6.580	—
North Lincolnshire	—	—	—	—	6.232	—
York	—	—	—	—	6.977	—
Old Shire Areas						
Avon (old)	24.356	23.4	32.786	34.6	—	—
Cleveland (old)	14.466	37.4	19.312	33.5	—	—
Humberside (old)	25.025	57.9	34.167	36.5	—	—
Isle of Wight (old)	3.569	68.5	—	—	—	—
North Yorkshire (old)	18.941	32.0	25.803	36.2	—	—

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what factors he takes into account when deciding the level of the homelessness indicator in the revenue support grant settlement; [14202]

(2) what plans he has to remove the homelessness indicator from the revenue support grant settlement. [14201]

Sir Paul Beresford: The amounts allocated using the homelessness indicator SSAs are largely determined by statistical analyses which were carried out in 1993. The analyses took into account the extent to which particular indicators reflected variations between authorities in their need for net revenue expenditure.

The SSA sub-group of the settlement working group examined last year possible alternatives to the homelessness indicator. We were not convinced that any of the alternatives provided a clear improvement to the SSA formulae, but the indicator may need further consideration at some stage.

"Adults in Need Index"

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he *(a)* has taken and *(b)* will be taking, following the 1995 Association of Metropolitan Authorities paper entitled "Adults in Need Index". [14205]

Sir Paul Beresford: The AMA paper "Adults in Need Index" was presented to the standard spending assessments—SSA—sub-group in 1995. Two of the options which it included were exemplified in the report of the SSA sub-group. These possible changes were considered, when the changes proposed to SSAs for 1996–97 were being decided. We were not convinced that a strong enough case had been made for the introduction of such an index.

The local authority associations may wish to present further information on the "Adults in Need Index". During discussion in the SSA sub-group in 1996, we will consider whatever material is brought forward.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sites of special scientific interest, English Nature reported as damaged in *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94 and *(c)* 1994–95; and what percentage of the total these represent. [14200]

Mr. Gummer: Information on damage to SSSIs is contained in the annual reports of English Nature, copies of which are in the Library.

Sewerage Outfalls

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reports the National Rivers Authority has received in respect of the E coli count under the shellfish waters directive *(a)* before and *(b)* since the Norton outfall was commissioned. [14338]

Mr. Clappison: I understand that the Norton outfall was commissioned in 1979 before the shellfish waters directive came into force. I also understand that the National Rivers Authority has collected information about E coli but not received any reports in respect of the E coli count in relation to the shellfish waters directive for this locality.

Private Dwellings

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many private dwellings there are in each London borough. [14752]

Mr. Clappison: The numbers of private sector dwellings, excluding housing association dwellings, in each London borough on 1 April 1995, as reported by local authorities on their 1995 housing investment programme—HIP1—returns, were as follows:

London boroughs	*Number*
Barking and Dagenham	37,765
Barnet	105,116
Bexley	78,787
Brent	74,561
Bromley	103,637
Camden	52,491
City of London	2,702
Croydon	110,664
Ealing	93,856
Enfield	90,611
Greenwich	50,548
Hackney	31,410
Hammersmith and Fulham	48,062
Haringey	65,363
Harrow	71,877
Havering	78,432
Hillingdon	76,298
Hounslow	61,878
Islington	30,579
Kensington and Chelsea	59,021

London boroughs	Number
Kingston upon Thames	50,800
Lambeth	59,553
Lewisham	63,806
Merton	63,498
Newham	54,325
Redbridge	81,299
Richmond upon Thames	65,218
Southwark	44,153
Sutton	60,548
Tower Hamlets	26,666
Waltham Forest	74,163
Wandsworth	86,848
Westminster	79,538
London total	2,134,073

Environmental Services Association

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviornment what representations he has received from the Environmental Services Association concerning *(a)* the adequacy of landfill capacity and *(b)* difficulties in securing new facilities. [14793]

Mr. Clappison: The Environmental Services Association—ESA—issued its "Planning Guidelines for Waste Management Facilities" last month, which addresses both issues. My officials have held meetings with representatives of the ESA on these matters and in connection with my Department's preparation of a planning policy guidance note on waste.

Building Heights

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what restrictions are placed on the height of a single storey building by *(a)* planning legislation and *(b)* planning policy guidance. [14618]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 places a restriction of 4 m in the case of a building with a ridged roof and 3 m in any other case on the height of a building which can be erected within the curtilage of a dwelling house without the need for a planning application. The Department's booklet "Planning—A Guide for Householders" encourages good design and consideration for neighbours in the exercise of such residential permitted development rights.

Where planning permission is required for a single storey building, its appearance and relationship to its surroundings are material considerations. No specific guidance is given on the height of single storey buildings, but general guidance on design considerations is given in annexe A of planning policy guidance note 1 "General Policy and Principles".

Landfill Sites

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many registered landfill sites do not have weighbridges. [14791]

Mr. Clappison: My Department does not hold precise information about the number of landfill sites which do not have weighbridges. A sample survey conducted by the Environmental Services Association—the trade association representing 70 per cent. of the waste management industry by turnover—suggests that less than 10 per cent. of its members operate landfill sites which do not have weighbridges. The Environmental Services Association will conduct a further survey of its members later this year.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he estimates landfill demand will exceed capacity. [14792]

Mr. Clappison: My Department does not have precise information about when landfill demand might meet capacity, as this will depend largely on the availability of new void space from, for example, mineral workings. The White Paper "Making Waste Work" which was published in December explains that

> Over the country as a whole, there appears to be adequate rate of generation of new void space for now, though there are divergent views on this, and further work is necessary to confirm and to quantify trends. In the longer term it is likely that some regions may begin to encounter shortages of suitable void space that can be used for landfill purposes, and there is some evidence that such shortages are already becoming apparent in the south-east region, for example.

Planning authorities must aim to meet the requirement that there is an adequate network of waste disposal facilities, including landfill sites, when drawing up their development plans. Further guidance on this will be contained in the planning policy guidance note on waste which the Department intends to produce by the end of the year.

Sustainable Development

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the White Paper on sustainable development will be published; and what account it will take of the sustainability of soils. [14645]

Mr. Clappison: We intend to publish "This Common Inheritance: UK Annual report 1996" in March this year. The content of the report is still under discussion.

Quarrying

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what powers planning authorities have to restrict quarrying operations in order to protect the water table. [14619]

Sir Paul Beresford: When considering new applications for planning permissions for quarrying, mineral planning authorities can consider all aspects of the proposed development including its impact on the water table, and can impose appropriate conditions or refuse permission as necessary. Authorities are in a position to seek expert advice from the National Rivers Authority.

For existing permissions, mineral planning authorities have a range of order-making powers under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to revoke or modify planning permissions, discontinue a use of land, or to impose conditions on the continuance of that use, or to prohibit the resumption of mineral working in certain circumstances. In addition, the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 and the Environment Act 1995

introduced new requirements for the review and updating of old mineral permissions. Advice on applying the powers available has been published in minerals planning guidance notes 4,8,9 and 14.

Chewing Gum

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidelines his Department issues to local authorities in respect of cleaning chewing gum from pedestrian areas; and if he will have discussions with chewing gum manufacturers on this subject. [14755]

Mr. Clappison: We have issued no guidance on cleaning chewing gum from pedestrianised areas. However, the Tidy Britain Group, which is largely funded by my Department, is currently working with a major chewing gum manufacturer to establish both effective cleansing methods and ways of reducing the problem in the first place.

Standard Spending Assessment (Southwark)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what factors led to the reduction in the standard spending assessment of the London borough of Southwark in 1996–97. [14957]

Sir Paul Beresford: Southwark's standard spending assessment—SSA—in 1996–97 is lower than the comparable 1995–96 figure for a number of reasons: principally, the use of later data, such as those used to calculate the area cost adjustment, but also the changes made to the method of calculating the education and all other services elements of SSAs to take account of authorities' need to spend on special educational needs and rent allowances.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many written parliamentary questions were passed for answer to executive agencies and non-governmental departments in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [14996]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is as follows:

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Building Research Establishment	4	0	0	1	0
Planning Inspectorate	4	1	3	5	0
The Buying Agency	4	0	0	1	[1]—
Ordnance Survey	4	2	2	2	0
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	4	0	0	0	0
Security Facilities Executive	—	—	0	0	[1]—

[1] Responsibility for the Buying Agency and Security Facilities Executive as transferred on 1 January 1996 to the Office of Public Service.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations, and from whom, his Department has received on the subject of the reduction in the budget for the home energy efficiency scheme; what that reduction has been; what action his Department plans to take in response to the representations; and if he will make a statement. [15130]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have received some 200 representations from hon. Members, local authorities, voluntary bodies and the insulation industry about the reduction in the budget for the home energy efficiency scheme. In 1996–97, the allocation for this programme will be just over £73 million—some £30 million less than in 1995–96. We have recently reviewed the scheme, and hope shortly to publish proposals for its development in the form of a consultation paper.

Environmental Appraisals

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what progress has been made on the Government's commitment in the UK sustainable development strategy to review the effectiveness of "Policy Appraisal and the Environment"; [15136]

(2) how many environmental appraisals were produced by his Department using the guidance contained in the Department of the Environment's "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" in 1995; and if he will place copies in the Library. [15116]

Mr. Clappison: We shall shortly commission a project to evaluate the effect of the "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" document on decision making within government. A project specification has already been drawn up. The project should last for about six months.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the environmental appraisals produced for the policies used as examples and referred to in environmental appraisals in Government Departments. [15135]

Mr. Clappison: This work was carried out two to three years ago. To retrieve the information and prepare it for publication could, in my view, be accomplished only at disproportionate cost.

Green Ministers

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance has been provided to assist Green Ministers in scrutinising the environmental implications of their Departments' policies. [15138]

Mr. Clappison: Guidance is contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment: a guide for Government Departments" and its follow-up "Environmental Appraisal in Government Departments".

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was discussed at the last meeting of the Green Ministers; who attended; and what areas of future work were agreed. [15137]

Mr. Clappison: At their meeting on 29 January, Green Ministers discussed and agreed future work on the role of Green Ministers, green procurement and waste minimisation in Government Departments. They decided not to publish minutes of their meetings but agreed to the publication of a list of contact addresses in each Government Department where inquiries on green issues could be directed and I shall shortly deposit such a list in the Library. They agreed to publish a series of case studies which show what measures Departments have taken to ensure that environmental considerations are taken into account in policies and programmes. All Green Ministers attended or were represented at the meeting.

Environmental Policies

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is taking to provide added vigour to the integration of environmental concerns into other policy areas. [15139]

Mr. Clappison: The Government continue to emphasise the need for integrating economic and environmental policies. For the future, Green Ministers have agreed to publish further work on how environmental considerations are taken into account in policies and programmes.

Empty Dwellings

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many empty dwellings were owned by Government Departments in England in the latest year for which information is available; and if he will make a statement. [14974]

Mr. Clappison: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) on 23 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *238*.

Rental Accommodation

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the mean rise in registered fair rents for *(a)* housing associations and *(b)* private lettings by rent office district between 1990–91 and the latest available date. [15107]

Mr. Clappison: The information is given in the table:

Percentage changes in 1990–91 for unfurnished lettings

Rent office	*England Housing association (per cent.)*	*Private tenancies (per cent.)*
Barking and Dagenham	29	59
Barnet	44	48
Bexley	42	64
Brent	40	30
Bromley	46	55
City	—	—
Camden	45	44
Croydon	49	56
Ealing	44	44
Enfield	38	49
Greenwich	57	66
Hackney	42	46
Hammersmith and Fulham	40	50
Haringey	51	51
Harrow	40	49
Havering	41	51
Hillingdon	39	55
Hounslow	50	51
Islington	44	44
Kensington and Chelsea	43	45
Kingston upon Thames	70	62
Lambeth	53	50
Lewisham	40	44
Merton	54	58
Newham	47	48
Redbridge	49	44
Richmond upon Thames	54	60
Southwark	46	49
Sutton	45	46
Tower Hamlets	59	56
Waltham Forest	44	49
Wandsworth	53	53
Westminster	42	43
Avon	40	44
Bedfordshire	37	50
Berkshire	42	66
Buckinghamshire	51	49
Cambridgeshire	42	44
Cheshire	36	46
Cleveland	34	41
Cornwall	46	52
Cumbria	41	48
Derbyshire	32	43
Devon	34	44
Dorset	50	53
Durham	36	40
East Sussex	49	61
Essex	46	56
Gloucestershire	32	36
Greater Manchester	32	38
Hampshire	51	65
Hereford and Worcester	33	39
Hertfordshire	53	69
Humberside	32	40
Isle of Wight	37	64
Kent	38	44
Lancashire	31	38
Leicestershire	42	49
Lincolnshire	33	45
Merseyside	37	35
Norfolk	33	33
Northumberland	35	44
Northamptonshire	42	45
North Yorkshire	39	45
Nottinghamshire	39	41
Oxfordshire	65	85
Shropshire	[1]	[1]
Somerset	35	53
South Yorkshire	29	33
Staffordshire	32	36
Suffolk	38	37
Surrey	57	83
Tyne and Wear	37	44
Warwickshire	45	52
West Midlands	46	49
West Sussex	56	68
West Yorkshire	37	42
Wiltshire	34	59

[1] Indicates insufficient sample data to provide a reliable estimate.

Severe Weather Conditions

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will envoke the provisions of the Emergency Powers Act 1920 to assist communities in Cumbria and Copeland if there is a further deterioration in the weather in the immediate future; and if he will make a statement. [14814]

Mr. Curry *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* It is the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to invoke the provisions of the Emergency Powers Act 1920. It is not clear what authorities in Cumbria might gain if these powers were to be called upon and my right hon. Friend therefore has no plans to ask my right hon. and learned Friend to invoke them as a consequence of the weather conditions in Cumbria.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Information Technology

6. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what investment is being made in the United Kingdom into telecommunications and information super-highway infrastructures; and what proportion of this has been provided by new entrants to the market. [13508]

Mr. Lang: Annual investment in the telecommunications infrastructure in the United Kingdom is running at around £5.5 billion per year, with about half of this coming from operators other than BT. Much of this is in broadband networks which form the backbone to the information super-highways being built in this country.

35. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the availability to other Departments of spare information technology resources in his Department. [13540]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Spare IT equipment is disposed of in the most cost-effective manner. At present, the vast majority of such equipment is obsolescent and therefore of little long-term value to other Departments. Typically, such equipment is traded in against the provision of new equipment currently being installed as part of my Department's office automation infrastructure.

Electricity Supply

21. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next expects to meet officials of the National Grid to discuss electricity supply levels. [13526]

Mr. Eggar: I meet officials of the National Grid from time to time to discuss matters relating to electricity supply.

27. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last met the electricity generating industry leaders to discuss power generating output; and if he will make a statement. [13532]

Mr. Eggar: I meet representatives of the electricity generating industry from time to time to discuss matters relating to electricity supply.

Arms Exports

22. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will set out Government policy with regard to sales *(a)* lethal weapons, *(b)* non-lethal weapons and *(c)* dual-use technology and the definitions used to determine the respective categories. [13527]

Mr. Oppenheim: My Department has responsibility for the control of exports of weapons and dual-use goods and technology. The export of such equipment and technology is prohibited without an export licence and details are set out in the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 and the Dual-Use and Related Goods (Export Control) Regulations 1995.

It is the Government's policy to support the sale of British defence equipment overseas where this is compatible with our political, security and strategic interests.

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the proportion of defence exports to non-OECD countries as a total of capital goods exports to non-OECD countries over the last six years. [14867]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* Defence equipment is not included in the official definition of capital goods. The ratio of United Kingdom defence equipment exports to capital goods exports, to non-OECD countries, is given in the list.

Ratio:

1989: 0.57

1990: 0.49

1991: 0.43

1992: 0.32

1993: 0.26

1994: 0.23.

Note: Defence equipment is defined, in terms of the Standard International Trade Classification (Revision 3), as aircraft and associated equipment (all tariff headings in group 792 other than those identified as "civil", and excluding spacecraft and launch vehicles); warships (tariff heading 890600100) and arms and ammunitions for military purposes (division 98).

Source: Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom.

Manufacturing Output

23. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the average annual growth in manufacturing output since 1979. [13528]

Mr. Oppenheim: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) earlier today.

33. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the growth in manufacturing output in the past 12 months. [13538]

Mr. Lang: The year 1995 was a record year for manufacturing output which grew by 1.9 per cent.

Solent Ferries

24. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to reach a decision on the Monopolies and Mergers Commission second inquiry into Solent ferries. [13529]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I understand that completion of the Office of Fair Trading's review has been delayed to take account of late submissions from island residents. It is now expected to be complete by the end of March.

Balance of Trade

25. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade with which European countries the United Kingdom currently has a surplus in both visible and invisible trade. [13530]

Mr. Oppenheim: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase).

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for each year since 1985, the percentage change in *(a)* the volume of semi-manufactured exports and imports and *(b)* the volume of intermediate manufactured exports and imports. [14491]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 9 February 1996]:* The following is the information:

UK trade in semi- and intermediate manufactured goods
Percentage changes on previous year, in volume indices

	Semi-manufactures		*Intermediate manufactures*	
Year	*Export*	*Imports*	*Exports*	*Imports*
1986	5.2	8.2	1.2	8.6
1987	7.4	8.9	2.4	12.7
1988	5.7	11.6	1.1	19.7
1989	3.3	3.1	5.7	12.9
1990	5.3	1.0	7.5	4.2
1991	2.0	–1.0	1.0	–4.0
1992	3.9	6.1	5.0	5.2
1993	5.7	1.0	–4.7	–4.0
1994	8.9	10.4	12.9	9.3

Source:
Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics, CSO.

Mrs. Kennedy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list as a percentage of gross domestic product for each year since 1985 *(a)* exports and imports of semi-manufactured goods and *(b)* exports and imports of intermediate manufactured goods. [14541]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 9 February 1996]:* The following is the information:

UK trade in semi- and intermediate manufactured goods
Percentage of GDP, in current prices

	Semi-manufactures		*Intermediate manufactures*	
Year	*Exports*	*Imports*	*Exports*	*Imports*
1985	5.5	5.9	4.0	3.4
1986	5.3	5.9	3.7	3.4
1987	5.3	5.9	3.6	3.6
1988	5.1	6.1	3.4	3.8
1989	5.2	6.2	3.5	4.1
1990	5.3	5.9	3.7	4.0
1991	5.1	5.5	3.7	3.8
1992	5.1	5.4	3.8	4.0
1993	5.5	5.5	3.9	4.1
1994	5.8	5.9	4.1	4.4

Sources:
Economic Trends, CSO.
Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics, CSO.

Small Businesses

28. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he is making of the efficiency of his Department's help for small businesses. [13533]

Mr. Page: The Department is taking a number of steps to ensure that the needs of small businesses are met.

The current programme of "Your Business Matters" conferences being organised by the small firms representative organisations is enabling small businesses themselves to have a direct say in the development of future Government policy for the sector. The outcomes of the conferences will be considered in this year's competitiveness White Paper.

The recently established small business ministerial group aims to ensure that the needs of the small business sector are considered in the formulation of policy across Whitehall Departments.

The network of business links is now 80 per cent. complete and is already having a significant impact on the local business community; over 4,000 businesses a week are using business link. Every firm in England will have access to a business link by April this year when they will be the normal delivery route for DTI services.

The range of initiatives and schemes operated by this Department are all subject to careful monitoring and evaluation and are reviewed regularly to ensure they meet the needs of the business community.

Social Chapter

29. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations he has received on the effects on industry of the United Kingdom entering into the social chapter. [13534]

Mr. Lang: I continue to receive numerous representations about the European social chapter during my contacts with industry. The overwhelming view is that acceptance of the social chapter would seriously damage competitiveness and employment because it would allow the United Kingdom to be outvoted on measures imposing unnecessary burdens and costs on businesses.

Saudi Arabia

30. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the estimated level of exports to Saudi Arabia during the current year. [13535]

Mr. Nelson: It is too early to make a realistic estimate of what our exports to Saudi Arabia will be this year. Provisional figures for 1995 indicate that last year we exported goods and services worth £1.64 billion to the Kingdom, an increase of 8 per cent. on 1994. I very much hope this level can be maintained and even exceeded in the coming year.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what resources Her Majesty's Government provided for use as collateral to assist the bid by British Aerospace and Rolls-Royce to provide engines for Blackhawk helicopters being purchased by Saudi Arabia. [14207]

Mr. Oppenheim: No such purchase has been made.

Nuclear Industry Privatisation

31. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the cost to public funds of the privatisation of the nuclear industry. [13536]

Mr. Eggar: The Department has provision for expenditure of £25 million in 1995–96 on restructuring and privatisation of the nuclear power generation industry. Estimates for expenditure in 1996–97 will be published in the supply estimates in due course.

Innovation Incubators

32. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will set out his policy on the establishment of innovation incubators as an aid to industry. [13637]

Mr. Page: The Department of Trade and Industry is committed to encouraging and co-ordinating measures to support the development of high technology and innovative businesses with growth potential. These measures go wider than innovation incubators, and include, for example, services provided through business links and syndicates of "business angels".

Late Payment of Debts

34. **Ms Church:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the impact on British firms of late payment by Government Departments. [13539]

Mr. Page: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey).

Funeral Industry

36. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has had from the National Funerals College about improvements in the funeral industry. [13541]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have received one such representation and will be replying to it in due course.

Italian Paper Industry (Subsidies)

Mr. Dunn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action is being taken to prevent unfair subsidies being paid by the Italian Government to paper mills in that country. [14927]

Mr. Oppenheim: We recognise that all member states can provide state aid for legitimate purposes which is fully justified within the state aid rules, but we are concerned about aid which unfairly disadvantages unaided competitors.

My Department is not aware of unfair subsidies being paid to Italian paper mills, but would be happy to investigate if further details can be provided.

Medical Research Council

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the effect of staff levels at the Medical Research Council of increased earmarking of Medical Research Council funds. [14722]

Mr. Ian Taylor: On 1 October 1994 the Medical Research Council staff level was 3,094. The corresponding figure for 1 October 1995 was 3,057. The allocation of funds for specific priorities has no discernible effect on staff levels.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Janner: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are his plans for the funding of industrial tribunals during 1996. [14953]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The industrial tribunals' running cost budget for 1996–97 will be determinded as part of the Department's MINIS 96 exercise, which is currently still under way. The allocation of the Department's programme expenditure will be announced in the departmental expenditure plans report to be published in March.

Technology Statistics

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what statistical studies his Department has undertaken of the contribution to British export performance of *(a)* high technology, *(b)* medium technology and *(c)* low technology sectors of manufacturing industry. [14485]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Department has not recently undertaken any such studies. However, statistics relating to this issue are available in the 1995 issue of the "Industry and Technology Scoreboard of Indicators" published by the OECD. This can be obtained from the Library of the House.

Export Performance

26. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his latest assessment of United Kingdom export performance. [13531]

Mr. Nelson: The latest available export data make very encouraging reading. In the three months to November the United Kingdom's visible exports reached record levels and were 13 per cent. higher than for the same period last year. The UK is still the only G7 country with a significant invisibles trade surplus. These excellent results are confirmation that UK industry has retained, and even improved, its competitive position in world markets in recent years.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the statutory minimum wage, or collectively organised rate then statutorily made binding, in pounds sterling on a purchasing power parity basis in each year since 1979 in *(a)* each EU state, *(b)* the USA, *(c)* Japan, *(d)* Australia, *(e)* Canada and *(f)* New Zealand; and what percentage of the national average wage these levels represented. [14321]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I refer to my reply of 15 January, *Official Report,* columns *467–77.* In addition, the minimum wage rate in New Zealand is currently NZ$250 for a 40-hour week, which translates to £107.12 at purchasing power parity exchange rates.

The other information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, I refer the hon. Member to the OECD "Jobs Study" which carries a discussions of development in the minimum wage rates of some countries over time, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Inward Investment (Midlands)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what inward investment from outside the United Kingdom took place in the midlands region in each year since 1985; what percentage this constituted of total United Kingdom investment; what were the principal sources of the investment; what were the industries principally involved; and what estimate he has made of the number of jobs which resulted. [14253]

Mr. Oppenheim: The midlands remains a diverse region of the United Kingdom and continues to attract inward investment from many countries and sectors. Principal sources of investment are the United States, Germany and Japan, with automotive/automotive components, electronics, food processing, textiles, textile machinery, chemicals/chemical handling, plastics and general engineering forming the principal industries. The breakdown of project numbers and associated jobs over the period covering both the west and east midlands is as follows.

Year	Number of Mids projects	Number of UK projects	Mids per cent. of UK total	Associated jobs
1985–86	106	420	25	9,365
1986–87	77	356	21	8,613
1987–88	76	363	20	11,606
1988–89	96	348	21	12,052
1989–90	109	375	29	26,858
1990–91	88	356	24	13,617
1991–92	47	332	14	5,778
1992–93	43	303	14	4,062
1993–94	105	404	25	[1]49,797
1994–95	106	453	23	23,936

[1] Figures include safeguarded jobs associated with BMW acquisition of Rover.

All the figures given are based on numbers of projects notified to the Invest in Britain Bureau at the time of the decision to invest. Companies are under no obligation to notify their investment decision and the figures take no account of subsequent developments.

Structural Funds (Northamptonshire)

Mr. William Powell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much has been allocated to schemes in Northamptonshire under *(a)* the European regional development fund and *(b)* other structural funds in each of the last five years. [14310]

Mr. Oppenheim: No part of Northamptonshire has been designated under any of the regionally based European structural funds programmes. There have therefore been no offers of grant from such programmes from 1991 to 1995.

The county has been, and continues to be, eligible to receive grants from programmes which are not geographically restricted, namely from the European social fund—ESF—under objective 3 of the funds, and from the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund—EAGGF—under objective 5a, as well as grant from the European regional development fund—ERDF—and ESF under a number of Community initiatives applying to the whole of the United Kingdom.

No ERDF grant has been offered during the period 1991–1995 to applicants from Northamptonshire. Information on ESF and EAGGF payments could be provided only at disproportionate cost, since it is not held at county level for either fund.

Scott Inquiry

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to make available copies of the Scott report on 15 February. [15645]

Mr. Lang: In view of the exceptional size of, and interest in, Sir Richard Scott's report, the arrangements for the distribution of copies to hon. Members have been agreed by the Government, the Speaker and the House authorities. The following arrangements will apply: *(a)* copies will be available from the Reasons Room at the back of the Chair as well as from the Vote Office; *(b)* under the Speaker's authority, the sitting will be suspended at 3.30 pm for 10 minutes for facilitate the distribution of copies to hon. Members.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the cost of the first print run of the Scott inquiry report; how many copies have been printed; and what will be the availability of the report to interested parties abroad. [14832]

Mr. Lang: The printing costs result from competitive tendering undertaken by HMSO and are therefore commercially confidential.

Some 3,500 copies of the report will be delivered for publication; the position is being monitored and additional copies can be obtained at short notice.

HMSO mail order services operate for overseas customers. Orders will be accepted direct. HMSO also has a network of stockists and agents overseas, who will order publications on request.

Mr. Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will ensure that copies of the supporting information for Lord Justice Scott's inquiry report comprising selected material from documents submitted to the inquiry are published as soon after the publication of the report itself as possible; and if he will ensure that the information is available in paper copy as well as microfiche and CD-ROM versions. [14831]

Mr. Lang: As soon as possible after publication of the report, the inquiry will be publishing the supporting documents in an accessible form.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions since 1 January 1995 *(a)* he, *(b)* Ministers in his Department and *(c)* officials in his Department have had contact with Lord Howe concerning his correspondence with the Scott inquiry. [14822]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* As a former colleague, Lord Howe has kept me informed about these matters from time to time.

Trade (New Zealand)

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is (i), the value of *(a)* exports and *(b)* imports and (ii) the trade balance with New Zealand in each year since 1996. [14135]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is given in the table.

UK visible trade with New Zealand

£ million, current prices

	UK Exports	*UK Imports*	*Crude trade balance*
1966	128	187	–59
1967	100	186	–86
1968	10	197	–93
1969	122	216	–94
1970	129	203	–74
1971	146	228	–82
1972	147	252	–105
1973	167	276	–109
1974	259	243	16
1975	256	322	–66
1976	256	331	–75
1977	290	384	–94
1978	268	434	–166
1979	312	415	–103
1980	249	408	–159
1981	235	427	–192
1982	322	539	–217
1983	286	487	–201
1984	368	482	–114
1985	396	533	–137
1986	342	454	–112
1987	379	487	–108
1988	299	441	–142
1989	400	437	–37
1990	440	485	–45
1991	260	391	–131
1992	263	429	–166
1993	332	496	–164
1994	411	538	–127
1995	436	578	–142

Notes:

Exports valued free on board (fob).

Imports valued cost, insurance and freight (cif).

Crude trade balance = Exports (fob) *less* Imports (cif).

Source:

Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics.

Departmental Secondments

Mr. Caborn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the individuals, by name and company, who are on temporary secondment to his Department; and if he will list the type and nature of the secondment. [14674]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I list in table 1 the names and parent companies of those individuals currently on temporary secondment to the Department as part of the export promoter initiative. At table 2 is a list of the names and parent companies of those individuals who are on temporary secondment to the Department as part of our continuing programme of interchange of staff with the private sector.

Table 1: Secondees into the Department as part of the Export Promoter Initiative

Name	*Company*
Mr. David Gray	ABCC
Mr. Nigel Crowe	All Set Up Ltd.
Mr. Godfrey Linnett	Allied Domecq plc
Ms Danusia Bizon	AMW Associates
Mr. David Kemp	Balfour Beatty Ltd.
Mr. Graham Towler	Banque Paribas
Mr. Eric Clark	Barclays Bank plc
Mr. David Brown	BEAMA Ltd.
Dr. Robin Turrell	Biwater Ltd.
Mr. Dennis Owen	British Telecommunications plc
Mr. Stewart Thompson	British Marine Equipment Council
Mr. Jerry Stockbridge	British Telecommunications plc
Mr. Julian Manning	British American Tobacco Co. Ltd.
Mr. Gavin Trenchman	British Petroleum Company plc
Mr. Peter Cameron	British Gas plc
Mr. Duncan Robson	British Steel plc
Mr. Patrick Edworthy	British Aerospace Defence Ltd.
Mr. E. John Rogers	British Aerospace plc
Mr. Robert Mason	BT Business Communications
Dr. Peter Bailes	BT plc
Mr. Anthony Lunch	Business Link
Mr. Christopher Cox	Cable and Wireless plc
Mr. Kieran Hughes	Claridge Mills Ltd.
Mr. Paul Brown	Cotswold Estate Services Ltd.
Mr. John Sowels	CSO Valuations AG
Mr. David Marsh	David Marsh (Manchester) Ltd.
Mr. Rodney Allen	DeCTA
Mr. Peter Warren	Drinks Marketing Consortium
Mr. Keith Bullock	dusek design building
Mr. Grant Shannon	Easibind International Ltd.
Mr. Geoffrey Lincoln	East European Trade Council
Mr. Graham Hughes	Elliott Pearce Ltd.
Mr. Tim Gorin	Ferryfast Produce Ltd.
Mr. Ahmed Suleiman	General Traffic Ltd.
Mr. David N. Allen	Glaxo Holdings plc
Mr. Robin Waldon	Glengarnock Garments Ltd.
Mr. Paul Suchet	Glenmore (Glasgow) Ltd.
Mr. Ian Hendric	HSBC Holdings plc
Mr. Alan Twist	ICI plc
Mr. Leslie Stern	Institute of Export
Mr. John Anthony	Institute of Export
Mr. Michael Jump	International Distributor Centre
Mr. Wyndham Carver	International Distillers and Vintners Ltd.
Mr. Jonathan Moore	Jardine Matheson and Co., Ltd.
Mr. James Lawday	John Laing International Ltd.
Mr. Peter Nightingale	John Swires and Sons Ltd.
Mr. Alan Fullarton	Johnson Matthey plc
Mr. Elfan Jones	Lanimer Knitwear Ltd.
Mr. Robert Bruce	LATAG
Mr. Paul Eadie	LATAG
Mr. Julian Amey	LATAG
Mr. David Cleary	LATAG
Mr. Nick Williams	LATAG
Mr. Graffin Parke	Mackie International Ltd.
Mr. David Markham	Midland Bank plc
Mr. Ian MacIntyre	Morlands (Glastonbury) Ltd.
Mr. Robin Forrest	Morrison Construction Group Ltd.
Mr. Tony Ellam	Nat West Markets
Mr. Robert Smith	Nat West Markets
Mr. George Caravias	National Westminister Bank plc
Mr. David Chambers	Ocean Group plc
Mr. Nick Khosla	Ove Arup and Partners
Mr. David Walker	P and L Suswin Ltd.
Mr. Alan Palmer	Palmer Edwards and Partners Ltd.
Mr. Peter Bacon	Philips Electronics UK Ltd.
Mr. Michael George	Pirellie Cables Ltd.
Mr. Peter Smith	Reuters Ltd.
Mr. Tim Allpress	Rolls-Royce Power Engineering plc
Mr. Richard Morley	Rover Group Ltd.
Dr. Irena Edwards	RZB Austria
Mr. Paul Ridley	SmithKline Beecham
Mr. Peter Wood	Society of Motor Manufacturers
Mr. Frank McKenna	Standard Chartered Bank
Mr. John Ledger	Standard Chartered Bank
Mr. Alex Pratt	Sunalex Ltd.
Mr. Peter Hughes	Texaco Ltd.

Table 1: Secondees into the Department as part of the Export Promoter Initiative

Name	*Company*
Mr. David Cadwallader	The Boots Company plc
Mr. Anthony Burckhardt	The West India Committee
Mr. John Quinlan	Thorburn Colquhoun
Mr. Richard Wyn-Jones	Tom Youngs Knitwear Ltd.
Mr. John Fordyce	UBAF Bank Ltd.
Miss Jouce Irwin	Ulster Bank Ltd.
Mr. Andrew Wimshurst	Unilever Export International Ltd.
Mr. Michae. Blandford	Unilever International
Mr. Mark Hawthorn	Unipart International
Mr. Christopher Brooks	Vickers plc
Mr. Russ Taylor	Vickers plc
Mr. Christopher Kemp	Vickers plc
Mr. Ken Farnes	W S Atkins
Mr. Roger McGlynn	W S Atkins Consultants Ltd.
Mr. John Woodcock	Weybourne Financial Services Ltd.
Mr. John Phipps	York Synthetics Ltd.
Mr. Stuart Shields	Zeneca Agrochemicals
Dr. Linda Boize	Zeneca Agrochemicals

Table 2: Secondees into the Department as part of the continuing programme of interchange with the private sector

Name	*Company*
Mr. Arthur McQuillan	Amec Proces and Energy Ltd.
Mr. Paul Butcher	Amoco (UK) Exploration Company
Mr. Rodney Atkinson	Anglian Water Services Ltd.
Mr. Rupert Harris	Baker Tilly
Mr. Sean Higgins	Baker Tilly
Ms Rosy Telford	BDO Binder Hamlyn
Mr. David Watson	BP Exploration Operating Co. Ltd.
Mr. Geoff Livesley	British Nuclear Fuels plc
Mr. John Eldridge	British Nuclear Fuels plc
Ms Anne Harris	Chantrey Vellacott
Mr. Geoffrey Cook	Chesterton International plc
Mr. Ross Dyer	CIBA Agriculture
Mr. Robert Meens	Coopers and Lybrand
Mrs. Anne Rosen	Coopers and Lybrand
Mr. Robin Wormald	Coopers and Lybrand
Mr. Roger Leadbeater	Coopers and Lybrand
Mr. Michael Painter	CT Bowring and Company Ltd.
Miss Jean Quinney	Ernst and Young Services Ltd.
Ms Emma Cotton	Ernst and Young
Ms Anna Blackburn	Ernst and Young Services Ltd.
Mr. John Turner	Ford of Europe
Mr. George Berrie	General Accident Fire and Life Corp.
Mr. Brendan Barnes	Glaxo plc
Dr. Roger Newman	Glaxo Wellcome plc
Mrs. Phyllis Harvey	Grant Thornton
Ms Liesel Hemmingfield	Grant Thornton
Mr. Andrew Smith	Grant Thornton
Mr. Stuart Parfitt	Grant Thornton
Mr. Les Owen	Honda
Mr. Robert Simpson	Huntings Engineering Ltd.
Mr. Charles Hughes	ICL
Mr. Stan Melrose	IMI Refiners Ltd.
Mr. Stewart Wright	Kidsons Impey
Mr. Trevor Lacey	Lockstair Ltd.
Miss Caroline Lucey	Marks and Spencer plc
Mr. Christopher Lee	Matra Marconi Space UK Ltd.
Mr. Anthony Dunnett	Midland Bank plc
Mr. Michael Hodges	Morgan Grenfell and Co. Ltd.
Dr. Nick Veck	National Remote Sensing Centre Ltd.
Mr. Arthur David	Nissan
Mr. Stephen Upton	Nortel Ltd.
Mr. Simon Daniel	Pannell Kerr Forster
Miss Nanette Rigg	Polygram UK Ltd.
Mr. Richard Kent	Price Waterhouse
Ms Beth Rees	Price Waterhouse
Mr. Stephen Noon	Price Waterhouse
Miss Elaine Lydon	Robson Rhodes
Mr. Tom Girn	Robson Rhodes
Mr. Paul Davies	Rolls-Royce Commercial Aero Engines
Mr. Andrew Hooper	Rolls-Royce and Associates

Table 2: Secondees into the Department as part of the continuing programme of interchange with the private sector

Name	*Company*
Mr. Keith Jordan	Rover Group Ltd.
Ms Valerie Cumming	Royal Doulton
Mr. Bruce Coleman	Shell UK Exploration and Production Ltd
Mr. Ian Palmer-Lewis	Shell UK Ltd., Downstream Oil
Ms Frances Barr	Slaughter and May
Mr. David Wilson	The Prudential Assurance Co. Ltd.
Mr. Steve Goringe	Touche Ross and Co.
Mr. David Blackbrough	Toyota
Mr. Andrew R. Slessor	Trafalgar John Brown Oil and Gas
Dr. Peter Poulton	UKAEA
Mr. Richard Bartholomew	Unilever
Ms Louise Ruane	Wilson Silver Altman
Mr. Stephen Duncan	Wood Group Engineering Contractors

Technology Transfer

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the support his Department gives to assist with technology transfer to small firms. [13504]

Mr. Page: My Department supports a range of activities which aim to increase the demand for relevant technology and best practice techniques, assist firms' access to them and broaden the range of technology transfer services available.

Environmental Appraisals

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many environmental appraisals were produced by his Department using the guidance contained in the Department of the Environment's "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" in 1995; and if he will place copies in the Library. [15118]

Mr. Page: At the moment this information is not held centrally in the DTI. However, an interdepartmental project will shortly be set up to evaluate the effect of the "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" document on decision making across Whitehall.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the estimated annual saving to business from the Deregulation (Gun Barrel Proving) Order 1996. [13905]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The estimated annual saving to business from the Deregulation (Gun Barrel Proving) Order 1996 is £200.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Development Organisations

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which development organisations have received public funding in each of the four Belfast constituencies in the last year. [8005]

Mr. Ancram: A list of local community and economic development organisation in each of the four Belfast constituencies which have received public funding from

the Department of Economic Development and the Department of the Environment sources in the last year is given.

A separate list is also given which covers organisations whose activities under the Health and Personal Social Services (National Insurance) Order 1994, the community volunteering scheme, physical and social environment programme and the Children and Young Persons Act (National Insurance) 1968 are directly funded by the Department of Health and Social Services. Voluntary organisations funded by health and social services boards trusts could be identified by constituency only at disproportionate cost.

LOCAL COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATIONS FOUNDED IN THE LAST YEAR

North

Action Resource Centre Ltd.
Ashton Centre Development Ltd.
Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre.
Ben Madigan Environmental Society Ltd.
Brookfield Business Centre Ltd.
City of Belfast YMCA
Community Action North
Community Aid
Elim ACE Central
Ligoneil Community Enterprise Ltd.
Ligoneil Improvement Association
Lower Oldpark Community Association
Newington/Cavehill Community Services Association
North City Business Centre Ltd.
North Queen Street Community Centre
Northgate Enterprise Park
PHAB (National Insurance)
Presbyterian Church in Ireland Enterprises
Shalom House
Shankill and Oldpark Community Organisation
Shankill Road Mission
St. Patrick's Community Enterprise
St. Vincent de Paul
174 Trust

South

Age Concern (National Insurance)
Ballynafeigh Community Development
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
Bryson House
Chinese Welfare Association
Co-operation North
Crescent Arts Centre
Extern
Gay Pride Committee
Mornington Enterprises (National Insurance) Ltd.
NIACRO
NICAB
NICOD
NI Chest, Heart and Stroke Association
Orchardville Society for the Mentally Handicapped
Shelter (National Insurance)
Simon Community
South Belfast Economic Resource Centre
South City
St. George's YCD
St. George's Youth and Community Development Ltd.
Ulster People's College
Voluntary Service Belfast

East

ACE Ventures
Blind Centre for Northern Ireland
Bridge Trust
Christian Fellowship Community Care
Connswater River Conservation Committee
East Belfast Community Development Centre
East Belfast Development Agency
East Belfast Enterprise Park Ltd.
East Belfast Methodist Action on Unemployment
East Belfast Presbytery
Glenmachan Community Project
Greater East Belfast Partnership
Hilltop Environmental
Somme Association
Sydenham House

West

Ardoyne Community Centre
Argyle Business Centre Ltd.
Beechcraft Trust Ltd.
Brookfield Business Centre Ltd.
Carmen Trust
Clothing Development Centre (CDC)
Corpus Christi Services
Divis Joint Development Committee
Dunlewey Outreach Centre
Euro Children
Falls Community Council
Falls Womens Centre
Farset Enterprise Park Ltd.
Farset Youth and Community Development Ltd.
Feis Bheal Feirste Committee
Forthriver Regeneration Trust
Foundry Regeneration Trust
Glen Community Parent/Youth Group
Glencairn Community Projects
Glenwood Enterprise Agency
Glenwood Enterprises Ltd.
Glor na nGael
Greater Shankill Development Agency
Greater Shankill Partnership Board
Horn Drive Drop-In Centre
Newhill Youth and Community Centre Association
Oliver Plunkett Youth and Welfare Scheme
Ortus—the Enterprise Board for West Belfast
Springfield Charitable Association
St. Agnes Community Concern Association
St. Teresa's Community Project
St. Vincent de Paul, West Belfast
STEP Ltd.
Townsend Enterprise Park Ltd.
Turf Lodge Enterprise Scheme Ltd.
Upper Springvale Development Trust
We Care Third World Centre

Welcome Trust Ltd.
West Belfast Community Festival
West Belfast Development Trust Ltd.
Westlink Enterprise Ltd.
Workwest

VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS FUNDED BY DHSS IN THE BELFAST AREA SHOWING CONSTITUENCY AND FUNDING PROGRAMME

Belfast North

HPSS Order
Northern Ireland Hospice
St. Vincent de Paul
Threshold

Community Volunteering Scheme (CVS)
Flax Trust

PSKP—Community Infrastructure
Forum for Community Work Education

Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968
Away from Home and Safe
Play Resources Warehouse
Youthnet

Belfast South

HPSS Order
Action Cancer
Age Concern
Alzheimers Disease Society
Arthritis Care
British Epilepsy Association
British Red Cross Society
Bryson House
Carers National Association
Catholic Marriage Advisory Council
Charities Evaluation Services
Community Network
Cross Roads Care Attendants Scheme
Disability Action
Down's Syndrome Association
Family Planning Association
Gingerbread (Northern Ireland)
Law Centre (Northern Ireland)
Life Care (Northern Ireland)
Money and Relationship Counselling
Multiple Sclerosis Society
Nexus Institute
Northern Ireland Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux
Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health
Northern Ireland Council for Orthopaedic Development
Northern Ireland Council for Travelling People
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation
Praxis Mental Health
Relate—Northern Ireland Marriage Guidance
Remember our Child
Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme
Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children and Adults (MENCAP)
Voluntary Services Belfast
Women's Information Group
Workers Education Association

CVS
Belfast Managing Agency
Belfast Women's Aid
Bryson House
Bryson House (NI 2000)
Conservation Volunteers (Northern Ireland)
Gingerbread
Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation
Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders
Praxis Mental Health
Voluntary Services Belfast

PSEP—Community Infrastructure
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust
Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders
Women's Resource and Development Agency
The Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland
Ulster Peoples College
Association of Independent Advice Centres

Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968
Adopt
British Association of Social Workers
Catholic Family Care Society
Child Care (Northern Ireland)
Children and Young People Advocacy Group
Focus on Children
Homestart
International Year of the Family 1994
Northern Ireland Foster Care Association
NICVA
Parents Advice Centre
Voice of the Young Person in Care
Voluntary Services Belfast (Playbus)

Belfast East

Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972
Association for Dysphasic Adults
Princes Trust Volunteers

PSKP—Community Infrastructure
Business in the Community

Belfast West

HPSS Order
Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre
Blind Centre for Northern Ireland
Council for Advance of Communications with Deaf People
Energy Action
International Voluntary Service
National Schizophrenia Fellowship
Northern Ireland Volunteer Development Agency
Royal National Institute for the Deaf
Social Witness Board of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

CVS
Cathedral Community Services
Downtown Women's Centre
Extern
Physically Handicapped and Able Bodies (Northern Ireland)

PSKP—Community Infrastructure
Feile an Phobail
Downtown Women's Centre
Shankill Women Centre

Northern Ireland Pre-School Playgroups Association

Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968

Abuse of Trust Conference

Belfast Central Mission—Craigmore Children's home

Church of Ireland Board of Social Responsibility

NI Pre-School Playgroups Association

NI International Treatment Association

NSPCC

North/South Child Welfare Conference

Hydro-electricity

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list *(a)* the amount of public money which is being allocated to the development of hydro-electric power generation in Northern Ireland, *(b)* the site where the developments will take place and *(c)* the amount allocated to each locality. [13999]

Mr. Ancram: There are no public funds allocated to the development of hydro-electric power generation in Northern Ireland.

Departmental Publications

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which of his Department's administrative manuals and internal guidance are now made public; and which remain private. [14021]

Sir John Wheeler: The Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments have many hundreds of administrative manuals and internal guidance leaflets and could provide the information requested only at disproportionate cost.

However, the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments are all committed to the code of practice on access to government information and have agreed to make available on request as much information as possible except where release could prejudice any matters which should properly be kept confidential under annexe A, part II of the code.

LEDU Employees

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the religious affiliation of employees within LEDU—Local Enterprise Development Unit—at the *(a)* Belfast, *(b)* Newry, *(c)* Ballymena, *(d)* Omagh, *(e)* Londonderry and (f) Newtownards regional offices. [14051]

Mr. Ancram: Under article 14A of the Fair Employment (Monitoring) Regulations 1989, LEDU is unable to answer this question.

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the religious balance in respect of employees in LEDU. [14052]

Mr. Ancram: The religious composition of LEDU employees is as follows:

	Amount
Protestant employees	152
Roman Catholic employees	75
Employees whose community cannot be determined	2

LEDU Marketing Awareness Programme

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the marketing awareness programme contracts allocated to Capita, indicating the value of each. [14053]

Mr. Ancram: The contract to manage LEDU's pilot marketing awareness programme for 1990–93 was awarded to Capita Management Consultants following a competitive tendering process. Capita was also appointed to manage the programme on a Northern Ireland-wide basis from October 1993 to March 1996 as the result of a further competitive tender.

Capita is the managing agent for MAP, which is delivered by a number of consultants throughout Northern Ireland.

The total value of MAP contracts awarded to date is £1.15 million. This includes both fees to Capita directly and to the various consultants who actually delivered the programme.

It would not be appropriate to disclose the value of individual contracts as these are commercial in confidence.

Computer Networks

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all *(a)* Internet and *(b)* other computer network, sites or bulletin boards, operated by his Department or containing information supplied by his Department, indicating for each site or bulletin board *(a)* the inaugural date, *(b)* the timetable and policy in respect of updates, *(c)* the Internet, or other network, address of each site or board and *(d)* to whom the site or board is currently made available and the criteria which must be fulfilled by applicants for access. [14230]

Sir John Wheeler: The information is as follows:

(a) *Internet*

The business development service of the Department of Finance and Personnel operates an Internet service on behalf of Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office which also extends to their executive agencies and other associated bodies. The information requested on this is as follows:

(i) The NICS world wide web server was launched on 22 May 1995.

(ii) No formal timetable or policy for updates to existing information have yet been established, but inputting of new information and updates to existing entries on the NICS WWW pages are taking place continuously.

(iii) The site address is—

http://www.nics.gov.uk

The directorate of information systems, part of the Health and Personal Social Services Management Executive of the Department of Health and Social Services, established a web server on the Internet as part of an HPSS pilot project.

(i) The server went live in October 1995.

(ii) Updates are accepted on an ad-hoc basis from the management executives, HPSS boards and trusts.

(iii) The site address is—

http://wwwn.n-i.nhs.vk

Both sides are freely available to other Internet users using web browsers or file transfer software.

(b) *Other computer networks*

Training access points is a Great Britain initiative which was introduced into Northern Ireland in 1989. The database consists of more than 10,500 records of education and training opportunities which can be accessed by the general public via computer terminal.

There are 41 terminals throughout Northern Ireland, mainly in Training and Employment Agency offices and open learning centres, installed over a period of four years.

The details of available information are updated monthly

Firearms

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of members of gun clubs are from each religious denomination. [14069]

Sir John Wheeler: Religion is not taken into account in the consideration of firearms certificate and firearms club applications. Such information is therefore unavailable.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many gun licences have been granted in Northern Ireland since 1966; and how many guns can be held on one licence. [14065]

Sir John Wheeler: There are no records of the numbers of firearm certificates issued prior to 1975, but the table shows the number of certificates current at 31 December for each year since then:

1975: 78,216
1976: 79,718
1977: 81,402
1978: 82,248
1979: 83,549
1980: 85,379
1981: 83,342
1982: 84,250
1983: 85,170
1984: 86,039
1985: 88,340
1986: 89,169
1987: 88,358
1988: 88,130
1989: 88,410
1990: 87,422
1991: 86,907
1992: 87,456
1993: 87,383
1994: 87,949
1995: 88,170.

There is no specific limit to the number of firearms which can be held on one certificate. However, article 28(ii) of the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 states that a firearm certificate shall not be granted unless the Chief Constable is satisfied that the applicant has a good reason for purchasing, acquiring or having in his possession the firearm or ammunition in respect of which the application is made.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the current figures for ownership of gun licences among *(a)* Protestants and *(b)* Roman Catholics. [14066]

Sir John Wheeler: There is no information held on the religious background of any firearm certificate holder or gun club member.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many gun licences are currently held in Northern Ireland by farmers. [14067]

Sir John Wheeler: The information needed to answer this question is not available in the form requested and to obtain it would incur disproportionate cost.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the current memberships of gun clubs. [14068]

Sir John Wheeler: The total membership of the 42 approved firearms clubs in Northern Ireland is approximately 3,350.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what changes have taken place in the criteria relating to gun licences since the ceasefire. [14070]

Sir John Wheeler: The regulations governing the issue of firearms certificates are contained in the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 and they have not changed since the order was made.

Spare Computer Capacity

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all cases where spare computer capacity has been sold to other Departments since 1987, giving the Department and value of each contract. [14084]

Sir John Wheeler: There have been no cases.

Interpretation Act

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will set up a working party to arrange for drafting an updated merger of the Interpretation Act 1954, c. 33 (Northern Ireland) with the Interpretation Act 1978 c. 30. [13798]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 8 February 1996]:* No. I am unaware of any concerns having been expressed about the operation of either the 1954 Act or the 1978 Act. I therefore have no plans to set up a working party to draft a new Interpretation Act.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many claimants in the

last three years were refused incapacity benefit because of inadequate national insurance contributions or credits; and if he will introduce an alternative eligibility rule based on the best two years of the last five years of contributions. [14551]

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 13 February 1996]:* The information is not available in the form requested.

The Government have no plans to change the contribution conditions for incapacity benefit.

Concessionary Fares Scheme

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many new passes have been issued since July 1995 in respect of the Northern Ireland concessionary fares scheme. [14726]

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 13 February 1996]:* A total of 12,270 new passes were issued between 1 July 1995 and 4 February 1996.

Murders and Beatings

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many murders and beatings have been attributed to terrorist organisations since the start of the current ceasefires. [14470]

Sir John Wheeler: From 1 September 1994 to 7 February 1996, there were 12 murders in Northern Ireland: three attributed to loyalist groups, nine to republican groups. This does not include a police officer, Constable Seymour, who died on 2 March 1995 as a result of injuries sustained in a gun attack on 4 May 1973. Eleven of these murders were carried out since the ceasefire announced by the combined loyalist military command on 14 October 1994.

In addition, 287 people were injured in so-called punishment assaults during this period, 107 of which were attributed to loyalist groups, 180 to republican groups. Since the CLMC ceasefire, 275 people have been injured in this type of attack.

Community Employment Schemes

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many people have so far participated in the community work programme in each of the targeted areas; [14727]

(2) how many organisations have so far participated in the community work programme in each of the three targeted areas; [14731]

(3) what are the targets for participants in the community work programme for each of the next three years. [14732]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Mr. Eric Illsley, dated 14 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency to reply to your questions on the Community Work Programme.

Question 14727

The number of persons who have to date participated in each of the three pilot areas is as follows:

Area	*Number*
Belfast	251
Fermanagh	149
Strabane	74
Total	474

Question 14731

The number of participating organisations is:

Area	*Number*
Belfast	25
Fermanagh	69
Strabane	30
Total	124

Question 14732

The Community Work Programme is a pilot initiative for the long term unemployed with a target of 1,000 filled places in each of the two years 1996/97 and 1997/98. By 31 March 1997 a full evaluation of the pilot will have been completed and a decision taken on the programme's future.

I hope you find this reply useful. I will of course be pleased to provide further information if you would find it helpful.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Mobility Centres

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's decision not to provide financial support to the United Kingdom Forum of Mobility Centres; [13774]

(2) what plans he has to provide assistance to the United Kingdom Forum of Mobility Centres in the future. [13775]

Mr. Burt: Her Majesty's Government provide financial support to three members of the United Kingdom Forum of Mobility Centres. Extra funding for these voluntary sector organisations could not be provided through this Department due to competing pressures. We are currently discussing both with other interested Government Departments and members of the UK forum what practical and financial assistance, if any, can be provided to ensure they carry on their valuable work.

Spare Computer Capacity

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all cases where spare computer capacity has been sold to other Departments since 1987, giving the Department and value of each contract. [14078]

Mr. Burt: There is none.

Liable Relatives System

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of the total cases dealt with by the liable relatives system involved the arrangement of maintenance for *(a)* spouses without children and *(b)* sponsored immigrants in each year since 1989. [14456]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available.

Child Support Agency

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the service availability of the Child Support Agency computer system in each month since April 1993. [14458]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Child Support Agency computer system availability

Week ending	*Percentage service availability*
3 October 1993	96.9
10 October 1993	98.3
17 October 1993	97.1
24 October 1993	73.3
31 October 1993	94.0
7 November 1993	89.2
14 November 1993	96.0
21 November 1993	99.3
28 November 1993	87.6
5 December 1993	86.4
12 December 1993	86.6
19 December 1993	84.5
26 December 1993	77.5
2 January 1994	99.0
9 January 1994	86.6
16 January 1994	97.6
23 January 1994	96.5
30 January 1994	86.9
6 February 1994	94.5
13 February 1994	92.3
20 February 1994	86.8
27 February 1994	96.8
6 March 1994	86.8
13 March 1994	94.1
20 March 1994	95.1
27 March 1994	97.1
3 April 1994	87.2
10 April 1994	98.7
17 April 1994	95.9
24 April 1994	99.3
1 May 1994	99.0
8 May 1994	72.0
15 May 1994	77.1
22 May 1994	96.6
29 May 1994	97.0
5 June 1994	98.0
12 June 1994	97.0
19 June 1994	99.8
26 June 1994	100.0
3 July 1994	98.9
10 July 1994	98.9
17 July 1994	93.0
24 July 1994	87.1
31 July 1994	96.4
7 August 1994	96.3
14 August 1994	86.5

Child Support Agency computer system availability

Week ending	*Percentage service availability*
21 August 1994	99.7
28 August 1994	98.6
4 September 1994	96.7
11 September 1994	96.7
18 September 1994	98.5
25 September 1994	98.4
2 October 1994	98.4
9 October 1994	97.9
16 October 1994	97.4
23 October 1994	100.0
30 October 1994	95.8
6 November 1994	98.7
13 November 1994	90.4
20 November 1994	97.1
27 November 1994	84.1
4 December 1994	99.2
11 December 1994	92.6
18 December 1994	98.0
25 December 1994	84.2
1 January 1995	85.9
8 January 1995	87.4
15 January 1995	82.2
22 January 1995	99.9
29 January 1995	97.9
5 February 1995	94.9
12 February 1995	98.2
19 February 1995	96.8
26 February 1995	98.9
5 March 1995	96.9
12 March 1995	98.2
19 March 1995	95.2
26 March 1995	96.8
2 April 1995	98.4
9 April 1995	99.9
16 April 1995	77.3
23 April 1995	99.2
30 April 1995	76.7
7 May 1995	98.3
14 May 1995	99.9
21 May 1995	97.4
28 May 1995	100.0
4 June 1995	100.0
11 June 1995	100.0
18 June 1995	99.5
25 June 1995	97.9
2 July 1995	99.8
9 July 1995	96.5
16 July 1995	100.0
23 July 1995	99.6
30 July 1995	95.0
6 August 1995	100.0
13 August 1995	98.9
20 August 1995	100.0
27 August 1995	100.0
3 September 1995	90.7
10 September 1995	98.5
17 September 1995	99.8
24 September 1995	95.7
1 October 1995	99.9
8 October 1995	97.5
15 October 1995	100.0
22 October 1995	98.2
29 October 1995	98.3
5 November 1995	100.0
12 November 1995	100.0
19 November 1995	95.3
26 November 1995	99.9
3 December 1995	99.6
10 December 1995	98.4
17 December 1995	95.3
24 December 1995	100.0

Child Support Agency computer system availability

Week ending	*Percentage service availability*
31 December 1995	100.0
7 January 1996	99.9
14 January 1996	98.5
21 January 1996	98.8
28 January 1996	92.9

Disabled People

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to increase the independent living fund to help disabled people who use the funds to pay for a personal assistant; and if he will make a statement. [14604]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: None. Payments from the funds are intended to pay for personal care and assistance.

Mrs. Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to investigate alternative methods of payment to disabled people living independently to cater for the employment of personal assistants. [14605]

Mr. Burt: We keep the ways in which we provide support for disabled people and their carers under review.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what duties Departments and their agencies have under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to make their facilities and services available to disabled people. [14633]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) on 15 January, *Official Report*, column *417*.

Welfare State (Targets)

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what targets his Department has set to measure the success of the welfare state. [14759]

Mr. Burt: The Government's social security programme aims to provide a fair and efficient system of help for beneficiaries which also gives the best possible value for money for taxpayers.

A large range of indicators are used to measure the Government's success. For example, recent reforms have ensured that the social security system continues to be affordable by reducing projected expenditure by £3.5 billion this year, while at the same time continuing to maintain the value of benefits for those in most need.

The targets and achievements of the Department and its agencies are published each year in the departmental report. Copies of the report are available from the Library.

Compensation Recovery Scheme

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to publish the compliance cost assessment produced by Price Waterhouse on the cost of implementing the proposals of the Social Security Committee for reform of the compensation recovery scheme; and if he will be consulting on its findings. [15206]

Mr. Roger Evans: The compliance cost assessment has been published today and copies are being placed in the Library. I intend to consult widely on the implications of this assessment.

War Pensions

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements exist for reimbursing local authorities for the cost of operating the statutory £10 disregard of war widows' pensions and war disablement pensions when assessing eligibility for council tax and housing benefit; and what was the overall amounts paid to local authorities for such purposes in each of the last five years. [13599]

Mr. Heald: Central Government funding for the administration costs of operating the housing benefit and council tax benefit schemes, as distinct from subsidy paid in respect of benefit payments, is made to local authorities by the Department of the Environment, via the revenue support grant, and by direct grant from the Department of Social Security.

Neither payment is sub-divided by reference to individual aspects of these schemes.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of the claims for reinstatement of widows' pension by widows' who remarried but whose subsequent marriage ended have been processed; what percentage of the total this represents; how long it has taken on average to process each claim; and what steps he is taking to expedite such claims. [14045]

Mr. Heald: These are matters for Kevin Caldwell, the chief executive of the War Pensions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from K. C. Caldwell to Mr. Chris Smith, dated 13 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about restored War Widows Pension.

As at 2 February 1996, 12430 claims have been received of which 7394 have been notified of an award and had payment arranged, and 85 have had their claim rejected. Thus, 60 per cent. of the total claims received have bee processed.

I do not have a ready means of calculating precisely the average clearance times. But I can tell you that the first formal claims for a restored widows pension began to be received in August and we were able to start notifying widows of the result from 22 September, by which time we had received 8282 claims. We are now notifying and arranging payment in claims which were made in September.

We have recently been able to increase the staff working on this exercise and now have the capacity to notify up to 1000 widows a week of the result of their claim.

This will enable us to ensure that by the end of March 90 per cent of claimants will be notified of the result of their claims within 4 weeks of having made a claim.

I hope this is helpful.

Central Provident Fund

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will introduce a central provident fund following the model of Singapore in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [14897]

Mr. Heald: We have no such plans.

The International Monetary Fund recently reported that the average annual return on the state-run Singapore scheme since 1980 has been only 2 per cent. more than inflation. This contrasts with British pension funds which have yielded almost 10 per cent. more than inflation, and now stands at almost £600 billion.

Environmental Appraisals

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many environmental appraisals were produced by his Department using the guidance contained in the Department of the Environment's "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" in 1995; and if he will place copies in the Library. [15120]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Department of Social Security does not currently monitor environmental appraisals. However, we have a place in a departmental environmental strategy and we are currently running an environmental pilot scheme to examine what can be achieved by environmental good practice in a number of key areas. Results from the pilot scheme will be available by the end of August 1996. It is expected that the findings will assist future project development. We are also aware of the Department of the Environment's proposed project that will examine how far environmental impacts are taken into account in policy decisions and we will be pleased to co-operate.

Benefit Take-up Rates

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the take-up rates of *(a)* severe disability premium, *(b)* supplementary benefit, *(c)* social fund, *(d)* invalid care allowance, *(e)* disability living allowance (attendance/care), *(f)* disability living allowance (mobility), *(g)* income support and *(h)* the total benefits in (i) Warrington and (ii) the north-west region in the last 12 months. [14629]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of benefits is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 13 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what estimate he has made of the take-up rates of (a) Severe Disability Premium (SDP), (b) Supplementary Benefit, (c) Social Fund (SF), (d) Invalid Care Allowance, (e) Disability Living Allowance (attendance/care), (f) Disability Living Allowance (mobility), (g) Income Support (IS) and (h) the total benefits in (i) Warrington and (ii) the North West region in the last 12 months.

The information is not available in the format requested. Statistics about the number of customers receiving SDP are not available because they are not routinely collected. Supplementary Benefit was replaced by IS in April 1988.

Table A shows the latest available information for DLA. The North West Region is the area covered by Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Lancashire. The Disability Living Allowance figures are for all customers who have a Warrington postcode.

Table B show the latest available information for Social Fund and Income Support. However, information for these benefits is not collected by region and the figures supplied are, therefore, based on Districts involved at the footnote of the table. The Benefits Agency's North Cheshire District covers the Warrington area.

The Invalid Care Allowance information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Table A: Disability Living Allowance (DLA) awards for the year to November 1995

	North-west region[1]	Warrington[2]
Award of DLA mobility	40,000	2,000
Award of DLA care	41,000	2,000

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

[1] Statistics are collated by Disability Benefits Centres and the Disability Benefit Unit at Fylde. The North West region includes the Bootle and Manchester Disability Centres.

[2] DLA customers with a Warrington postcode.

These figures have been supplied by the Department of Social Security's analytical services division. They have been rounded and are based on a 5 per cent. sample.

Table B: Social fund applications and income support successful claims for the year to December 1995

	BA Districts listed below[1]	North Cheshire District Office[2]
Total SF applications	645,079	32,794
Total IS claims	438,012	21,996

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

[1] Statistics are collated at Area Directorate and District Office level and not by region. The figures given are collated from information provided by the following districts:

Liverpool Bootle, Liverpool Kirkby, Liverpool Breckfield, Liverpool Edge Hill, Liverpool Garston, St. Helens, Birkenhead North, Chester, Stockport South, Hyde, Manchester Wythenshawe, Warrington, Manchester Longsight, Salford South, Manchester Sale, Oldham, Manchester Bishopgate, Blackburn, Blackpool North, Bolton, Burnley, Lancaster, Preston, Bury and Wigan.

[2] Includes the BA offices of Warrington and Widnes.

These figures have been supplied by the Benefits Agency's central data unit, are provisional and may be subject to change.

Social Fund (Northumberland)

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many social fund applications for *(a)* grants and *(b)* loans have been turned down in the local benefits agencies of Blyth Valley, Northumberland since *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994. [13488]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Ronnie Campbell, dated 13 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many Social Fund applications for (a) grants and (b) loans have been turned down in the local benefits agencies of Blyth Valley, Northumberland since (a) 1992, (b) 1993 and (c) 1994.

Blyth Valley is part of the Benefits Agency district of Northumberland which comprises of the Benefit offices of Ashington, Berwick, Blyth and Hexham. The information is not

available in the form requested as figures are only available for the Northumberland District as a whole. These are shown in the table at Annex A.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Annex A: Social fund refusals April 1992–March 1995

Year	*Number of loans refused*	*Number of grants refused*
Northumberland district		
1992–93	2,632	3,309
1993–94	2,710	3,177
1994–95	3,064	3,803

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

Occupational and Private Pensions

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what effect converting an occupational or private pension assessed as trivial by his Department into a lump sum has for income support purposes; and if he will assess the advantages of disregarding a trivial occupational or private pension for income support purposes. [13782]

Mr. Heald: A lump sum acquired in this way is taken into account in accordance with the normal rules which provide for the first £3,000 of capital to be disregarded. A person who commutes a pension into a lump sum with the intention of securing income support, or of increasing the amount of benefit payable, can be treated as if that income were still in payment. There are no plans at present to change these arrangements.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Pensions and Stipends

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what powers the Synod has to instruct the Commissioners to *(a)* reduce the level of pensions already in payment and *(b)* reduce the level of stipends in payment.

Mr. Alison: The General Synod has no power to instruct the commissioners to reduce the level of pensions in payment. The levels are determined in accordance with the pensions regulations. Under the current arrangements, the legislation gives to the commissioners the power to increase the figures, which they customarily exercise in line with the Church's pensions policy. There is no provision for any reduction to be made in the monetary amounts payable.

Stipend levels are determined on a diocesan basis by the bishop with the concurrence of the Diocesan Board of Finance in accordance with section 5 of the Diocesan Stipends Funds Measure 1953, having regard to the advice of the commissioners as central stipends authority. The commissioners were appointed as central stipends authority by a General Synod Regulation in 1972, revised in 1982. The Synod has the power to amend this regulation if it so wishes by appointing another authority, but cannot directly reduce the level of stipends.

The Synod also has the power to amend the above legislation, subject to the agreement of Parliament.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 15 February 1996

ENVIRONMENT

Youth Service

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the total public spending on the youth service by each local education authority *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* as a proportion of the total local authority budget for each year since 1979; and what estimate he has made of the figures for (i) 1995–96 and (ii) 1996–97. [14656]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have placed the available information in the Library of the House.

Water (Pesticides)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the costs to the water industry of removing pesticides from water in 1994–95. [14642]

Mr. Clappison: The Director General of Water Services estimates that £200 million was spent on treatment to remove pesticides from drinking water supplies in England and Wales in 1994–95.

Mrs. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the costs to the water industry of removing *(a)* nitrates, *(b)* phosphates and *(c)* pesticides from water. [14647]

Mr. Clappison: The Director General of Water Services estimates that the costs to the water industry up to 1994–95 of removing nitrates from drinking water supplies in England and Wales is £150 million, and pesticides £600 million. No equivalent estimate is available on the cost of removal of phosphates.

Water Regulations

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the annual costs to the water industry of complying with the existing water regulations. [14646]

Mr. Clappison: The Director General of Water Services estimates that the cost to the water industry in England and Wales, in order to meet the requirements of the water quality regulations, in the period 1990–91 to 1994–95, was around £2,600 million.

Mrs. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the costs to the water industry of complying with the water regulations in 1994–95. [14641]

Mr. Clappison: The Director General of Water Services estimates the cost to the water industry in 1994–95 in England and Wales, in order to meet the requirements of the Water Quality Regulations, was around £500 million.

New Dwellings

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list by region the total number of dwellings started by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* housing associations, *(c)* new town development corporations and *(d)* other public authorities in each local authority area in England in each year since 1979; [15067]

(2) if he will list by region the total number of dwellings completed by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* housing associations, *(c)* new town development corporations and *(d)* other public authorities, in each local authority area in England in each year since 1979. [15068]

Mr. Curry: Local authorities' primary housing tasks are now the efficient management of their own stock of housing and enabling other organisations to provide new housing. Housing associations are now the main providers of new social housing.

The publications "Housebuilding in England by Local Authority Area: 1980 to 1989" and "Local Housing Statistics" show estimates of housebuilding starts and completions. They cover each local authority area and each new town development corporation area in England. They show starts and completions by sector, including activity by local authorities and by housing associations.

"Housebuilding in England by Local Authority Area: 1980 to 1989" shows figures for the period 1980 to 1984. "Local Housing Statistics" shows figures for 1979 and later years: issue number 59 covers 1979; number 103 covers the years 1985 to 1990; number 105 covers 1991: number 106 covers 1992; number 110 covers 1993; and number 114 covers 1994, the latest year for which annual figures are available. Copies of these publications are in the Library.

However, the starts and completions figures do not show all the new and additional social lettings made available by housing associations each year. In particular, lettings provided by renovation are rehabilitation and by shared ownership and incentive scheme programmes do not feature in the housebuilding statistics.

Local Government Finance

Sir Anthony Durant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total sum allocated to each English local authority from central Government resources in each year since 1974. [13822]

Mr. Curry: I have placed the available information in the Library of the House.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by region the total amount of *(a)* useable and *(b)* set-aside capital receipts held by each local authority in England at 31 March 1995. [15066]

Mr. Curry: A list by region of the amounts of accumulated usable capital receipts for each English local authority at 31 March 1995 was placed in the Library of the House in response to the question of Monday 22 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *85* from the hon. member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith).

Figures for the amounts of set aside capital receipts are not available. These form part of the provision for credit liabilities, which is reported to the Department, but which also includes amounts set aside from revenue.

Non-domestic Rates

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the rules regarding payment of non-domestic rates by businesses being run while in receivership; and if he will make a statement. [14997]

Sir Paul Beresford: In general, any non-domestic property which is in beneficial occupation is liable to a non-domestic rate. However, a number of recent court cases have cast doubt over the ability of local authorities to recover rates where a receiver or administrative receiver has been appointed.

We believe that companies which continue trading while in receivership should also continue to pay their on-going liability for rates. We are considering possible measures to make it easier for local authorities to ensure that this is done. We will issue a consultation paper later this year.

Minewater Discharges

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate has been made of the cost of eliminating *(a)* minewater pollution and *(b)* minewater discharges on a regional basis; and if he will make a statement. [14935]

Mr. Clappison: Discharges from operational mines are regulated in the same way as other discharges to controlled waters. As regards pollution from abandoned coal mines, the Coal Authority, in consultation with the National Rivers Authority, is in the process of assessing the cost of dealing with water pollution at a number of key sites. So far as discharges from other types of abandoned mines are concerned, it has not been practicable to make a general assessment of the cost of eliminating them. However, in the case of watercourses affected by discharges from the Wheal Jane tin mine in Cornwall, I understand that the National Rivers Authority has so far spent approximately £9 million on the treatment of minewater, and is currently assessing the cost of that treatment in the future.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received in respect of minewater pollution with particular reference to discharges produced by abandoned mines; and if he will make a statement. [14934]

Mr. Clappison: In the last six months, my Department has received three representations relating to the provisions on pollution from abandoned mines in the Environment Act 1995.

Urban Waste Water Directive

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimated number of overflows requiring work to meet the requirement of the urban waste water directive; and at what cost, *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in the north-west region; what funding his Department will make available; and if he will make a statement. [14936]

Mr. Clappison: The Director General of Water Services, when he set new price limits for the industry in July 1994, made provision of more than £1 billion for the upgrading of over 2,400 combined sewer overflows in England and Wales under the urban waste water treatment directive. The details of the programme of works are matters for the companies and the local offices of the National Rivers Authority.

Anti-social Neighbours

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent discussions he has had on the issue of criminal anti-social neighbours. [13858]

Mr. Clappison: The Housing Bill now before Parliament includes a range of legislative measures to help landlords to tackle anti-social behaviour. Discussions on this topic continue between officials in the relevant Government Departments and the local authority associations.

Bury and Oldham Borough Councils

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he has decided to take in relation to Bury metropolitan borough council following the notices served on it on 12 June and 29 August 1995 and to Oldham metropolitan borough council following the notice served on it on 15 August 1995 for anti-competitive behaviour in assigning certain services in-house. [15649]

Sir Paul Beresford: On 12 June and 29 August 1995, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State served notices on Bury metropolitan borough council, setting out his view that the authority had acted anti-competitively during a competition for refuse collection, street cleaning, public convenience cleaning and highways maintenance work worth £1.95 million per annum. On 15 August 1995, my right hon. Friend also served a notice on Oldham metropolitan borough council setting out his view that the authority had acted anti-competitively during a competition for the north-west area (area 2) building maintenance contract worth approximately £1.5 million per annum.

My right hon. Friend has given careful consideration to the authorities' responses to the notices.

Bury withheld information from private contractors relating to depot facilities and to the available vehicle fleet. In my right hon. Friend's view this was unfair as it made it impossible for private contractors to put in bids for the work based on the same information as was available to the in-house team. He has therefore today given the authority a direction which requires it to re-tender the refuse collection, street cleaning, public convenience cleaning and highways maintenance work by 14 October. It must seek his consent if, at the end of the re-tendering process, it plans to assign the work to its direct services organisation.

Oldham required prospective contractors to undertake to submit a TUPE bid—one incorporating the present staff's terms and conditions—if they were given the TUPE information. In my right hon. Friend's view, private contractors who have been given details of the present terms and conditions should still be allowed the freedom to bid using different assumptions because the

in-house team can revise the way in which it delivers the work and it is unfair to deny this to some of the bidders. He has therefore today given the authority a direction which requires it to re-tender the north-west area (area 2) building maintenance contract by 14 October. The direction bars its direct services organisation from undertaking the work in future.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources he will make available to those local authorities which are to be reorganised on 1 April and which were asked to reconsider whether the reorganisations in their area could be implemented more economically. [15858]

Mr. Curry: The councils of the East Riding of Yorkshire, Hull city, Bristol city, Bath and North East Somerset and York district were asked to reconsider their estimates of the amount of expenditure they expect to incur on transitional costs of reorganisation in 1996–97. On the basis of the revised information provided by the five authorities, I have decided the maximum amounts to allocate towards such costs in 1996–97. The amounts are as follows:

Maximum amounts: £ thousands rounded

Authority	*1996–97*	*Cumulative total 1995–96 and 1996–97*
East Riding of Yorkshire Council	7,000	8,200
Hull City Council	3,000	6,000
Bristol City Council	3,500	6,500
Bath and North East Somerset Council	4,000	5,810
York District Council	3,500	6,050

I shall make a further announcement about the allocations to authorities for which reorganisation orders have not yet been made.

Water Companies (Delayed Payments)

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about North West Water's delayed payments for work undertaken by local authorities on the company's behalf. [13202]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 5 February 1996]:* None. Any arrangements between water companies and local authorities are a matter for the individual parties concerned.

WALES

Teachers

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many full-time equivalent teachers were employed by each Welsh education authority in: *(a)* January 1991 and *(b)* January 1995. [14039]

Mr. Richards: The information requested is given in the following table. Figures refer to school teachers only. Teachers in further and higher education establishments were employed by local education authorities in 1991 but by 1995 the majority were employed by the institutions themselves. Comparisons between the two years would not therefore be meaningful.

Number of full-time equivalent school teachers

Local education authority	*Number*[1,2] *1991*	*1995*
Clwyd	3,707	3,212
Dyfed	3,527	3,570
Gwent	4,038	4,049
Gwynedd	2,299	2,232
Mid Glamorgan	5,302	5,443
Powys	1,234	1,184
South Glamorgan	3,733	3,831
West Glamorgan	3,632	3,464
Total	27,472	26,984

Notes:
[1] At January each year. Includes teachers based in schools, peripatetic teachers, advisory teachers and teachers in occasional service.
[2] Full time equivalent teacher numbers are shown to the nearest whole number.
Source:
Form 618G.

Health Service

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions *(a)* wards and *(b)* departments of hospitals have been closed in Wales in (i) 1995 and (ii) 1996; and if he will list the hospitals. [14802]

Mr. Richards: The information is not held centrally.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to request the Welsh health planning forum to review the future supply and demand for hospital beds. [15124]

Mr. Hague: The responsibility for ensuring that the NHS has the appropriate number of beds to meet the needs of the population rests with health authorities. Health authorities regularly review the bed capacity available in their areas and through the contracting process and in discussion with NHS trusts balance the provision between emergency, planned and continuing care.

The Department's contract with the Welsh Health Common Services Authority for the services provided by the Welsh Health Planning Forum expired last year.

Paediatric Intensive Care Beds

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the supply and demand for paediatric intensive care beds in *(a)* Welsh hospitals and *(b)* in adjoining English specialist hospitals serving adjoining areas of Wales; how many paediatric intensive care beds there are in each Welsh hospital which has them; how many beds are (i) installed but are not currently staffed and (ii) under construction; and if he will make a statement. [15141]

Mr. Hague: There is currently one paediatric intensive care facility at the cardiac unit at the University hospital of Wales. Other demand is met by adult units.

My Department has asked all health authorities and NHS trusts in Wales to work in partnership to review against assessed need the adequacy of the current provision for intensive and high dependency care facilities, including the requirement for dedicated facilities for children. Health authorities are due to report the outcome of this exercise, including action to address any deficiencies, by the end of this month.

Mr. Glyn Davies

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the payments of *(a)* salary, *(b)* expenses and *(c)* other emoluments to Mr. Glyn Davies in respect of membership of (i) the Development Board for Rural Wales and (ii) other public appointments between 1985 and 1995. [15221]

Mr. Hague: The information is not readily available. I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 15 February. [14015]

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 15 February. [14017]

The Prime Minister: This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Steen: To ask the Prime Minister how many directives have been passed through the Council of Ministers in each of last five years. [13906]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 14 February 1996]:* The Commission's most up-to-date figures for the number of Council directives in the last five years are:

1991: 68
1992: 93
1993: 66
1994: 49
1995: 31.

Ghazanfer Ali

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister if he will call for a further report into the case of Ghazanfer Ali who is detained in prison in Mirpur city in Azad Kashmir; and if he will make a statement. [15348]

The Prime Minister: I understand that Mr. Ali, a Pakistani national, has now been formally charged with murder and the illegal possession of arms and that he is making regular appearances in court. The next hearing are scheduled for 24 and 29 February. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary will continue to monitor his case on humanitarian grounds.

DEFENCE

Armed Forces (Northern Ireland)

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to reduce the presence and activities of the armed forces in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [14918]

Mr. Soames: Force levels in Northern Ireland are kept under continuous review and will remain appropriate to the security situation and to the need for UK bases.

Kevin Duncan

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations to the court were made on behalf of Kevin Duncan, a serving soldier in the Highlanders, in respect of his sentence for a drink driving conviction in January. [15075]

Mr. Soames: It is normal practice, as in the case to which the hon. Member refers, for an officer to accompany all soldiers to civilian court appearances to provide character references, job descriptions and details of pay and allowances. Information is also offered to the court about military matters which it may find helpful in its consideration of the case. The conduct of the court's proceedings is a matter for the court itself.

TRANSPORT

Rail Freight Capacity

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what spare freight capacity exists on the rail routes running north from London. [14741]

Mr. Watts: I am informed by Railtrack that considerable spare capacity exists.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he first learnt of the alleged irregularities involving work by Union Railways on the channel tunnel rail link. [15162]

Mr. Watts: I was first informed by Union Railways of the alleged irregularities on Tuesday 6 February.

There is no suggestion of any connection between the alleged irregularities and the evidence Union Railways has presented to the Select Committee considering the Bill, or of any connection with the competition to select the private sector promoter for the channel tunnel rail link project.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the inquiry into the alleged irregular processes involving Union Railways is to be completed. [15163]

Mr. Watts: The inquiry into the alleged irregular processes involving Union Railways began on Wednesday 7 February and is expected to take several weeks to complete.

Dial-a-Ride Service (London)

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future of the dial-a-ride service in the London area. [15297]

Mr. Norris: The Government are committed to the continued provisions of a dial-a-ride service in London.

Motor Vehicle Licensing Offices

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff are employed at the Coventry motor vehicle licensing office; and what provision for transfer of staff to other licensing offices when the Coventry office closes has been made. [15218]

Mr. Norris: There are currently 22 staff employed at Coventry vehicle registration office including job sharers and part timers, a member of staff on secondment from a neighbouring VRO and five casual staff. Permanent staff have given the opportunity to say if they would want to transfer to a neighbouring VRO. Every effort will be made to effect whatever transfers are necessary.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to close the Leicester motor vehicle licensing office. [15216]

Mr. Norris: As part of the rationalisation of DVLA's local office network, Leicester vehicle registration office will close later this year and the work will be transferred in stages to neighbouring VROs such as Nottingham, Peterborough and Birmingham. The VRO's customers including motor dealers, will be consulted so that their needs can be taken into account when making these revised arrangements.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vehicles were registered at *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* Nottingham motor vehicle licensing offices in each of the last six years. [15217]

Mr. Norris: The table shows the number of new vehicles registered at *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* Nottingham vehicle registration offices over the last four financial years excluding those intended for personal and direct export. The information is not readily available for the earlier periods as it was compiled on a different basis.

	Coventry	*Nottingham*
1991–92	46,233	46,015
1992–93	72,677	44,230
1993–94	72,696	48,463
1994–95	68,773	50,171

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from vehicle manufacturers in Coventry regarding the closure of the Coventry motor vehicle licensing office; and what proportion were in favour of the closure. [15219]

Mr. Norris: None.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultation his Department held with motor vehicle manufacturers in Coventry regarding the closure of the Coventry motor vehicle licensing office. [15220]

Mr. Norris: In August 1994, it was announced that the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency was to close all its local offices, including Coventry, by 1997. The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders and the Retail Motor Industry Federation were informed through their normal links with the agency. No consultation was undertaken with individual manufacturers. A later review completed in January showed a continuing need for a local office presence and although 40 of the 50 offices will remain, open 10—including Coventry—will still close by 1997.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what considerations underlay his Department's decision to close the Coventry motor vehicle licensing office. [15213]

Mr. Norris: In August 1994 my right hon. Friend wrote to the hon. Member to announce the closure of the vehicle registration office in Coventry. Although a more recent review has recommended retention of 40 offices, the one in Coventry is still planned to close.

The overall aim is to reduce the network's operating costs and to match its size to the expected future work patterns. In the case of Coventry, the lease on the premises had expired.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what extra provision he has made for increases in registration at the Nottingham motor vehicle licensing office from March. [15214]

Mr. Norris: Motor dealers who currently use Coventry vehicle registration office which is to close in March have been asked to indicate which vehicle registration offices they would prefer to use to conduct their business in future. That consultation is currently taking place and when complete will indicate what additional work will move to neighbouring offices such as Birmingham, Nottingham and Northampton. Resources will be adjusted to take account of any increases in order to maintain service standards.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the average capacity of a motor vehicle licensing office in respect of the issue of vehicle licences. [15215]

Mr. Norris: The capacity of each office varies according to the size and population of the area for which it provides services and the mix of those services, in particular the mix of work between registration and licensing work and vehicle excise duty enforcement. A national average capacity based on licensing work handled by the 50 local offices in 1994–95 would be around 94,000 licences per office per year.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when construction work will start on the modernisation of the west coast main line. [15298]

Mr. Watts: It is Railtrack's intention to invite tenders and award the main works implementation contract later this year.

A programme of initial modernisation work is being planned to commence this summer and will be targeted in those areas from which the greatest benefits can be gained.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Probate Offices, Bradford and Leeds

Mr. Madden: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many personal interviews took place at the Bradford probate office in each of the last five years to date; how many personal interviews took place at the Leeds district probate registry over the same period; what were the opening hours of both offices during this period; what representations have been received, to date, to the proposal to close the Bradford probate office; how many such representations have been *(a)* supportive of and *(b)* opposed to closure. [15347]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Max Madden, dated 15 February 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question about Bradford Probate Office and Leeds District Probate Registry.

The number of personal interviews at Bradford Probate Office for each of the last five years are as follows:

1991: 229

1992: 209

1993: 287

1994: 281

1995: 309.

The number of personal interviews at Leeds District Probate Registry for each of the last five years are as follows:

1991: 1,035

1992: 1,145

1993: 1,235

1994: 1,309

1995: 1,348

Bradford Probate Office is open to the public for interviews on the first and third Thursday of each month. Interviews can be arranged between 10.15am and 3.40pm. Leeds District Probate Registry opens Monday to Friday, except bank holidays, between 9.30am and 4pm.

The only representation received to date about the proposed closure of Bradford Probate Office has been from Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe, the Honourable Member for Bradford South, who is opposed to the proposal.

TREASURY

Incomes

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list *(a)* the total income before and after tax and national insurance and *(b)* the average earned and unearned income in 1995–96 and 1996–97 of (i) the top 1 per cent., (ii) the top 5 per cent., (iii) the top 10 per cent., (iv) the bottom 70 per cent., (v) the bottom 10 per cent. of taxpayers and (vi) all taxpayers. [14251]

Mr. Jack: Estimates are given in the table. Total income relates to income subject to tax and excludes non-taxable incomes such as certain social security benefits.

Quantile group of taxpayers	*Total income before income tax and national insurance £ million*	*Total income after income tax and national insurance £ million*	*Average total income before income tax and national insurance £ million*
1995–96			
Top 1	34,300	22,400	133,300
Top 5	81,600	56,000	63,400
Top 10	121,500	85,700	47,200
Bottom 70	176,100	146,100	9,800
Bottom 10	11,700	11,100	4,600
All taxpayers	407,700	315,500	15,900
1996–97			
Top 1	36,100	23,700	140,300
Top 5	85,800	59,200	66,600
Top 10	127,600	90,800	49,500
Bottom 70	182,300	151,900	10,300
Bottom 10	12,500	11,700	4,800
All taxpayers	428,100	334,300	16,600

Single European Currency

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment his Department has made of the impact of a single European currency on the United Kingdom economy. [14950]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer gave to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 8 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *363*.

Taxation

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, column *186*, if he will set out the effects of the flat rate tax for income exempt from taxation in £1,000 increments from £3,000 to £10,000 on the basis of *(a)* a single tax exempt amount per household, *(b)* a shared tax exempt amount per couple and *(c)* both *(a)* and *(b)* with an additional £2,000 tax exempt amount for married couples only. [14947]

Mr. Jack: Such an analysis of the effects of introducing a flat rate of income tax on a joint or household basis could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Pension Schemes

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many higher rate taxpayers are at present in *(a)* occupational pension schemes, *(b)* personal pension schemes and *(c)* executive pension schemes. [14665]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* Latest available estimates are that about 1.3 million members of occupational pension schemes and some 0.5 million members of personal pension schemes are higher rate taxpayers. A separate figure for executive pension schemes is not available.

Environmental Appraisals

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many environmental appraisals were produced by his Department using the guidance contained in the Department of the Environment's "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" in 1995; and if he will place copies in the Library. [15113]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 14 February 1996]:* None.

Child Care Disregard

Ms Hodge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assumptions he has made of the effect the proposed increase in the child care disregard will have in 1996–97 *(a)* on the number of women who will take up the disregard and *(b)* on the flowback to the Exchequer from bringing more women into the work force. [15222]

Mr. Roger Evans: I have been asked to reply.

We estimate that, on average, between 5,000 and 10,000 families will benefit from the increase in the child care disregard. The behavioural effects of the increase, and the pace at which they occur, are uncertain. No specific assumption has been made as to the flowback to the Exchequer.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what arrangements have been made for *(a)* distribution of the Scott report within the civil service and *(b)* access to legal support and representation for civil servants criticised by Lord Justice Scott. [14841]

Mr. Freeman: Copies of the Scott report will be obtained by Government Departments in sufficient quantities to meet the needs of civil servants. Legal support for civil servants criticised in the report will be given where their Department concludes that such support is appropriate

Fire Safety Review

Mr. Meale: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on each of the recommendations contained in the interdepartmental review of fire safety legislation and enforcement in the United Kingdom. [15398]

Mr. Freeman: The Government have been considering the findings of the review and the views expressed by interested parties, including the deregulation task force. It has also been further considering the fire safety aspects of the EC framework and workplace directives. An announcement on both will be made soon.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Belarus

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what resources have been committed to the Republic of Belarus to assist with the *(a)* medical, *(b)* agricultural and *(c)* other consequences of the Chernobyl incident; what resources will be committed in 1996–97; and when the Government propose next to review the level of assistance required. [15181]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: In 1986, the UK was the first country to respond to the United Nations' resolution on the Chernobyl accident. We have since contributed to international study and assistance programmes to Belarus and Ukraine through the EU, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the World Health Organisation and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's Nuclear Safety Account. The first priority of these programmes has been to ensure the safety of other nuclear installations in the region. Since 1991, 236 million ecu, around £180 million, has been committed via the EU's programme of technical assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States, to which the UK contributes 16 per cent. We also provide financial and technical expertise to international projects in the region on radioactive contamination, feasibility studies for cleaning up contaminated areas, and radiological training. Bilateral assistance to Belarus in dealing with the environmental effects of the Chernobyl accident is through the environmental know-how fund, and during 1996 and 1997 we will continue to examine suitable projects directed at the rehabilitation of the area.

Chechnya

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what inquiries he has undertaken to establish whether Russian troops serving with British forces in Bosnia have been involved in atrocities in Chechnya. [15390]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We have made no inquiries about whether the Russian troops, who are deployed in the American sector, have served in Chechnya.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a member of Her Majesty's embassy in Moscow last visited Chechnya. [15385]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Two members of Her Majesty's embassy in Moscow last visited Chechnya from 25 to 26 May 1995.

British Council Staff

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff

are employed at each British Council office; what changes have taken place in staffing levels since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [14471]

Mr. Hanley: The British Council currently employs 1,173 staff in the UK—excluding the Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges, CBEVE—and 4,985 staff overseas in 229 offices in 109 countries. The number of staff employed in each overseas office is not immediately available. I will, however, write to the hon. Lady giving the detailed figures.

Since 1990, the number of British Council staff working in the UK—excluding the CBEVE—has been reduced by 30 per cent. from 1,687 to 1,173. Over the same period, the number of British Council staff working overseas has increased by 13 per cent. from 4,390 to 4,985.

These changes reflect the fact that the council is now operating in 109 countries compared with 90 in 1990 and has over the same period implemented radical efficiency measures to reduce the number of its headquarters support staff.

Gibraltar (Pensions)

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on pensions in Gibraltar. [15753]

Mr. David Davis: We remain in close touch with the Gibraltar Government on the question of pensions. Discussions are continuing.

Compliance Cost Assessments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for primary and secondary legislation passed since 5 April 1995 which measures were subject to a compliance cost assessment; and what was the compliance cost in each instance. [13640]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 7 February 1996]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 14 February, *Official Report*, column *578*.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Senior Salaries Review Body

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Lord President of the Council which grades, appointments and other positions are covered by the Senior Salaries Review Body; and what are the three lowest salaries and the appointments to which they apply. [14626]

Mr. Newton: The Senior Salaries Review Body advises the Prime Minister on the remuneration of holders of judicial office, senior civil servants and senior officers of the armed forces. It can also be invited, from time to time, to advise on the pay, pensions and allowances of Members of Parliament and Ministers.

For the SSRB's three main remit groups, the lowest salaries and the appointments to which they apply are as follows. The salaries are those which will be payable from 1 April 1996.

£38,000
Entry point to Senior Civil Service (minimum of pay band 1).

£65,655
Two star officers (Rear Admiral, Major General, Air Vice-Marshall).

£62,018
Judiciary Group 7 (Chairmen, Independent Tribunal Service; Chairmen, Industrial Tribunals (England and Wales, and Scotland); Chairmen, Value Added Tax Tribunals; District Judges; District Judges of the Principal Registry of the Family Division; District Judges (Northern Ireland); Immigration Adjudicators; Masters and Registrars of the Supreme Court, Masters of the Supreme Court (Northern Ireland); Metropolitan Magistrates; President, Pensions Appeal Tribunals; Provincial Stipendiary Magistrates; Resident Magistrates (Northern Ireland); Vice President of the Value Added Tax Tribunals (England and Wales); Special Commissioners of Income Tax).

[1]Excluding salary leads for individual posts.

Ministerial Statements

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many oral statements have been made by the Secretary of State for Wales in each Session since May 1992 and what was the total length of time taken in making these statements and replying to questions. [1709]

Mr. Newton *[pursuant to his reply, 4 December 1995, c. 27]:* I regret that the information given was inaccurate and should have read:

	Number of statements made
1992–93	[1]6
1993–94	2
1994–95	1

[1] 28 October 1992, 14 December 1992, 1 March 1993, 1 April 1993, 14 June 1993, 19 October 1993.

The total length of time taken in making the statements and in replying to questions was six hours 20 minutes. I have written to the hon. Member expressing my apologies for the error.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Spare Computer Capacity

Mr. Miller: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all cases where spare computer capacity has been sold to other Departments since 1987, giving the Department and value of each contract. [14073]

Mr. Boswell: The management of MAFF's IT is in many cases the responsibility of local units. Consequently, not all records of any such transactions would be held centrally. There is insufficient time to gather the information requested from anywhere other than central records.

MAFF did charge for computer capacity in respect of the processing of grants and subsidies payments for the Department of Agriculture, Northern Ireland. The computer processing component of the total charge was approximately £50,000 per annum, and the contract came to an end in July 1994.

Empty Buildings

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many empty buildings his Department currently owns; what is the cost of insuring and securing these buildings; how many were designed as residential properties; and what was the total amount spent by his Department on empty property taxes in each of the last five years. [14573]

Mr. Boswell: The Ministry owns or leases 45 empty buildings. Most of these are surplus storage depots in the process of being sold. However, five were designed as, and still are, residential properties, but these are either due for disposal or awaiting new tenants.

The Ministry does not insure its buildings; as a general rule the Government carry their own insurance risk.

The Ministry does not pay uniform business rates to local authorities. Instead contributions in lieu of rates—CILOR—are paid to the Inland Revenue's Crown property unit. The amounts paid in the last three years in respect of empty properties are set out below.

1993–94: £7,403

1994–95: £57,208

1995–96: £53,194

The 1991–92 and 1993–94 CILOR payments, any reduced community charge/council tax on empty dwellings and the costs of securing empty property could be identified only at disproportionate cost.

MV Caroline

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the MV Caroline was used for the purposes of feeding, watering and resting live animals, and declared as such on respective journey plans during the period 18 January to 25 October 1995, for the purposes of the Welfare of Animals During Transport Order 1994. [14455]

Mrs. Browning: Yes.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to recover the costs awarded in favour of the Ministry in the case between the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and Live Sheep Traders Ltd., Live Sheep Traders (Ireland) Ltd. and Roger Ernest Mills. [14634]

Mrs. Browning: This matter was referred to a taxing master of the Supreme Court for adjudication. The Ministry is now seeking to recover the costs awarded.

Imported Animals and Birds

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many deaths of animals and birds have occurred at the animal quarantine station at Heathrow airport for each year since 1989. [8777]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 19 January 1996]:* The animal quarantine station at Heathrow airport—AQS—has informed me that the number of deaths of mammals and birds, including those dead on arrival, at the AQS is in the table.

	Birds	*Mammals*
1989	1,483	0
1990	906	5
1991	528	22
1992	723	43
1993	861	31
1994	286	5
1995	407	29

Upland Areas (Support Grants)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what have been the total sums paid in support grants to upland areas in each of the last three years. [13012]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 1 February 1996]:* The total of support grants paid to upland areas are not separately recorded. However, the total of direct subsidies paid to livestock producers in the less favoured areas in the United Kingdom is estimated at around £550 million in 1993 and in 1994 and about £600 million in 1995. These estimates cover only payments under the sheep annual premium scheme, suckler cow premium scheme, beef special premium scheme and hill livestock compensatory allowances scheme.

Live Animal Transport

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons his officials on the quayside at Dover returned a vehicle carrying sheep to a local lairage on Friday 2 February; if a prosecution is to be brought in respect of the animals involved; and if he will make a statement. [14328]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 9 February 1996]:* This consignment was returned to premises close to the port of Dover because two of the sheep had eye discharges and a more detailed inspection was required. The sheep were unloaded under official supervision and they were inspected the following morning. No serious welfare problems were revealed at this inspection, although 20 sheep had ear tags missing. After rest and a further inspection, at which three sheep were rejected as unfit to travel, the remaining animals were permitted to continue their journey from Dover on Monday 5 February 1996. These events are being considered by officials in consultation with Kent county council.

Hill Farmers

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what additional assistance his Department has the power to offer west Cumbria's hill farmers following the recent adverse weather conditions. [14815]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* The EC rules for the provision of hill livestock compensatory allowances, the main form of aid payable specifically to hill farmers, already provides compensation for the permanent natural handicaps affecting farming activities. There is no provision to pay allowances in respect of abnormal weather conditions. However, the Department's staff at the Carlisle regional service centre have been in contact with the local farming community and Cumbria

county council to co-ordinate assistance where required. Activity is mainly centred around the need for early road clearance to allow for milk tanker access to dairy units.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Nursery Schools

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average contract cost for an Office for Standards in Education nursery school inspection at the latest date for which figures are available. [15125]

Mr. Robin Squire: This is a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many Ofsted registered nursery education inspectors there are currently in England. [15126]

Mr. Squire: The Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Bill makes provision for the registration by Ofsted of a new body of nursery education inspectors. Registration itself cannot begin until the Bill has been enacted and brought into force.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she had made of the average contract cost, in phase one of the voucher scheme, for an inspection under the auspices of Ofsted of *(a)* a nursery school, *(b)* a playgroup and *(c)* under-fives provision in primary or infant schools. [15127]

Mr. Squire: The Department is presently in discussion with Ofsted about the cost of inspection contracts.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the cash value of the capital repairs backlog in schools in the grant-maintained sector; and when she will publish the findings of the Funding Agency for Schools conditions survey of grant-maintained schools. [15128]

Mrs. Gillan: This is a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Schools Inspections

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the original estimate for expenditure on inspection of schools in 1995–96; and what is the present budget. [15088]

Mr. Robin Squire: This is a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Local Education Authorities (Expenditure)

Sir Anthony Durant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the money sum and proportion of the standard spending assessment or its equivalent, allocated to each English local education authority in *(a)* 1974, *(b)* 1979 and *(c)* 1990 and for latest available year, for education purposes; and what was the actual expenditure and proportion of the local authority's budget spent on education in each of those years. [13821]

Mr. Robin Squire: I am placing in the Library tables that show for each local education authority, for the financial years 1990–91 and 1993–94—the latest available—total standard spending assessments and education SSAs, and total expenditure and education expenditure. Data in a similar form are not available for 1974 or 1979. Both SSA and spending figures include provision for grant-maintained schools. These figures have not been adjusted on account of any change in functions between the two years.

Computer Networks

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list all *(a)* Internet and *(b)* other computer network, sites or bulletin boards operated by her Department or containing information supplied by her Department, indicating for each site or bulletin board (i) the inaugural date, (ii) the timetable and policy in respect of updates, (iii) the Internet, or other network, address and (iv) to whom the site or board is currently made available and the criteria which must be fulfilled by applicants for access. [14229]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department for Education and Employment maintains an Internet site. This world wide web site was first made available on 24 April 1995 and is frequently updated. The address for this site is

"http://WWW.open.gov.uk/dfee/dfeehome.htm".

For technical reasons, some of the information on this site is held electronically at other sites, but all is available from the Department's home page. The Department has an Internet E-mail address-

info@dfee.gov.uk.

The Department does not operate any other bulletin board or supply information for inclusion on any other bulletin board.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people are employed by the TECs; and what was the figure for each year since their establishment. [14254]

Mr. Paice: Training and enterprise councils are private companies and as such are not required to provide information on the number of staff they employ.

Spare Computer Capacity

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list all cases where spare computer capacity has been sold to other Departments by her current Department or its two predecessors since 1987, giving the Department and value of each contract. [14082]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following systems have been/are run for other Departments:

Department	System	Value 1993–94 (£000)	Value 1994–95 (£000)	Dates
Central Statistical Office	Retail Price Index	315	947	Finished 1995
Central Statistical Office	Family Expenditure Survey	325	301	Finished 1994
Northern Ireland Department of Economic Development	New Earnings Survey/Census of Employment	80	80	Ongoing

The above figures include the cost of developments, enhancements, support and process.

Education (School Premises) Regulations

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many representations she received during the consultation for the Education (School Premises) Regulations; which local authorities wanted the minimum space requirements for teaching and learning removed; and if she will make a statement. [14319]

Mrs. Gillan: The Department and the Welsh Office sent some 1,500 sets of consultation papers to local education authorities, schools, and other organisations. We received only 119 responses, which is less than 8 per cent. of those consulted.

Of local education authorities in England and Wales, fewer than two fifths replied. Among those which did, several supported the principle of non-statutory guidance. In particular, East Sussex and Wandsworth LEAs positively welcomed the proposed deregulation of statutory space requirements.

We have given careful consideration to all the responses and intend to incorporate many of the detailed points raised into the final version of the regulations and the accompanying circular.

Teachers (Northamptonshire)

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many full-time equivalent teachers were employed by the Northamptonshire local education authority, grant-maintained and city technology college schools in the nursery, primary and secondary sectors in each year since 1979. [14309]

Mr. Robin Squire: The available information is shown in the following table.

Full-time equivalent of teachers in schools in Northamptonshire Local Education Authority area 1979–1995

Position in January in each year

	LEA maintained[1]			Grant maintained[1]		
	Nursery	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	City Technology Colleges[2]
1979	[3]—	2,105.7	2,899.2	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
1980	[3]—	2,062.7	2,977.0	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
1981	[3]—	1,962.0	2,928.4	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
1982	[3]—	1,979.7	2,953.4	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
1983	[3]—	2,034.2	3,028.6	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
1984	[3]—	2,024.4	3,019.7	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
1985	[3]—	2,041.0	2,993.9	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
1986	16.0	2,055.5	2,998.4	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
1987	16.8	2,036.0	2,851.1	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
1988	15.4	2,053.2	2,806.7	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
1989	15.6	2,066.8	2,774.0	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
1990	15.8	2,116.9	2,717.6	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
1991	14.9	2,120.1	2,633.1	[4]—	38.4	[4]—
1992	16.0	2,126.3	2,517.2	18.9	194.7	27.4
1993	16.0	2,135.5	2,130.8	37.0	549.2	47.6
1994	16.6	2,074.8	2,097.5	138.9	615.1	61.3
1995	16.2	2,075.8	2,119.1	149.9	628.1	63.6

[1] Qualified teachers only.
[2] Includes all teaching staff.
[3] Not available.
[4] Not applicable.

Asylum Seekers (Training)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if asylum seekers will be eligible for Government training programmes under the new regulations, with particular reference to training for work. [15172]

Mr. Paice: There is no change in asylum seekers' eligibility for Government training programmes. They are eligible for training for work or the Government's programmes for young people if they have been granted permission to work in the UK by the Home Office pending a decision on their application for political asylum. They must fulfil the other eligibility criteria for those programmes which apply to all UK residents.

Access to Work Scheme

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what was the total budget

for the access to work scheme in each of the last three years; and if she will give a regional breakdown of each national budget; [15331]

(2) what was the average payment per client of the access to work scheme, in each of the last three years; and if she will give a regional breakdown of the average payment per client. [15332]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mrs. Helen Jackson, date 15 February 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about the total budget for Access to work over the past three years and the average payment per client.

Access to work was introduced in June 1994. The total expenditure for 1994/95 was £15.7 million which included some residual payments on behalf of the preceding Special Schemes for people with disabilities. The budget for 1995/96 is £13.4 million but this is likely to be exceeded by some £6 million. The Employment Service regional breakdown for these years is given in the annex.

The average cost in 1994/95 was £1,513 per client. This includes people helped during 1994/95 under the special schemes that preceded Access to Work. Unfortunately the information we have for 1994/95 does not enable us to calculate regional average costs. The average costs for 1995/96 cannot be calculated until the end of the year.

I hope this is helpful.

Annex: Access to work budgets—regional allocation

£ million

ES Region	*1994–95 expenditure*	*1995–96 provision*
Northern region	0.7	0.9
Yorkshire and Humberside region	1.5	1.3
East Midlands and Eastern region	1.6	0.9
London and South Eastern region	4.4	3.9
South-west region	1.3	1.0
Office for Wales	0.7	0.9
West Midlands region	1.5	1.5
North-west region	1.5	1.7
Office for Scotland	1.1	1.3
Total	15.7	13.4

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many disabled people have benefited from the access to work scheme in each of the last three years; and if she will give a regional breakdown of national figures. [15330]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mrs. Helen Jackson, dated 15 February 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of people benefiting from Access to Work.

Access to Work began in June 1994. During 1994–95 10, 394 people were helped, of whom 7,669 people benefitted directly from Access special schemes in April and May 1994, some of whom transferred to Access to Work. During the period April to December 1995, the latest month for which we have figures, 12,267 people benefitted. A regional breakdown of these figures is given in the Annex.

I hope this is helpful.

Annex: Access to Work beneficiaries June 1994 to March 1995

Region	*Number*
Northern	374
Yorkshire and Humberside	798
East Midlands	758
London and South-east	1,776
South-west	735
Wales	445
West Midlands	919
North-west	1,106
Scotland	758
Total	7,669

We do not have a regional breakdown for the 2,725 people helped under the special schemes in April and May 1994.

Annex: Access to Work beneficiaries April to December 1995

Region	*Number*
Northern	722
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,345
East Midlands	1,335
London and South-east	3,243
South-west	1,164
Wales	576
West Midlands	1,267
North-west	1,897
Scotland	718
Total	12,267

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what was the original budget of the Government's access to work scheme in 1995–96; [15203]

(2) what is the estimated final outturn of the Government's access to work scheme in 1995–96; and what is the planned expenditure for the scheme for 1996–97. [15204]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions have been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Tony Lloyd, dated 16 February 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about the Access to Work budget for 1995–96 and 1996–97.

The original budget for Access to Work for 1995–96 was £13,434,000 and the current estimated outturn is around £19 million. The Access to Work budget planned for 1996–97 is £12,900,000.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what consultations have taken place with private employers about the access to work scheme; and what discussions have taken place in respect of employer's contributions. [15205]

Mr. Paice: Discussions are being held with the principal organisations concerned with the future operation of the access to work programme, including ones representing the views of private employers. The discussions are wide ranging.

Nursery Vouchers Scheme

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 8 February, *Official Report*, column *320*, relating to the appointment of Capita Manager Services Ltd. as contractors for the management of phase 1 of the voucher scheme for early years education, what was the number of tenders received; and what were the criteria, other than tender price, used in the appointment. [15346]

Mr. Robin Squire: Three tenders were received. The principal criteria, other than tender price, used to award the contract were: the quality of proposals for issuing and redeeming vouchers; the strength of proposals to ensure security and control; and the ability to comply with the timetable for phase one.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to the answer given on 8 February *Official Report*, column *320*, concerning the statutory basis for the appointment of Capita Manager Services Ltd., at what dates in the contract the first advances on payments are due; and on what dates thereafter. [15345]

Mr. Squire: Payments were made on 11 December and 20 December 1995 to meet the initial costs of equipment and materials required for the issuing and redemption of nursery vouchers. The remainder of the contract cost will be paid in monthly instalments. These started in December 1995.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools have notified her Department of their interest *(a)* in increasing their number of assisted places and *(b)* in using the assisted places scheme for the first time; how many extra places have been notified in the last available year; and if she will make a statement on (i) the numbers to be provided and (ii) the expected timetable of provision. [15445]

Mrs. Gillan: Over 400 schools have bid for over 7,400 new entry places from September 1996 as part of the expansion of the assisted places scheme in England, and more bids have been received for further places in 1997. Over 260 of these schools already participate in the scheme, and over 140 have applied for admission. These bids far exceed the scale of expansion necessary to meet the announced doubling of the total size of the scheme over time. My right hon. Friend hopes shortly to announce the first allocations of new places for September 1996.

Skills Training Agency

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when the Skills Training Agency was first established; how many people it employs; what have been its total running costs to date; and what are the estimated running costs for 1995–96 and 1996–97. [15084]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 13 February 1996]:* The Skills Training Agency was established as a self-contained agency of the Department of Employment in 1985. It was transferred into the private sector in 1990. At that point, it ceased to be staffed by civil servants. The Department does, however, meet some residual costs relating to former staff and properties arising from the privatisation of the Skills Training Agency: for 1995–96 these are estimated at £1.8 million and for 1996–97 at £1.5 million.

SCOTLAND

Agriculture Department

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the current ratio of Scottish Office Agriculture Department staff is to the total number of farmers, partners and directors in Scotland. [12304]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The ratio of staff currently employed in agricultural divisions of the Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department to the estimated number of farmers, partners and directors in Scotland is approximately 1:43. This figure is based on recorded permanent staffing levels at 1 January 1996 and an estimate of the number of farmers, partners and directors in Scotland from the latest available information, at June 1995.

GP Fundholding

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current target figure for the number of patients to be covered by general practitioner fundholding practices within each health board area in Scotland. [13252]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office has not specifically set a target number of general practitioner fundholding practices for each health board area in Scotland. However, all health boards other than Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles have agreed with the NHS management executive an objective of achieving at least 30 per cent. coverage of the population by 1995–96.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many on-line terminals are currently functioning in the national lottery. [14256]

Mr. Sproat: This is an operational matter for Camelot Group plc. The Director General of the National Lottery has licensed Camelot to run the national lottery and he regulates its operations. I have therefore asked the director general to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the exact amount of start-up costs *(a)* to public funds and *(b)* to Camelot for the national lottery. [14257]

Mr. Sproat: Costs associated with the establishment of the national lottery fall *(a)* to Camelot Group plc, *(b)* to the Office of the National Lottery, *(c)* to my Department and *(d)* to lottery distributors.

Details of costs incurred by Camelot Group plc. are a matter for Camelot. I have asked the Director General of the National Lottery to write to the hon. Member with information about the costs of Oflot and to place copies of his response in the Library of the House.

The costs incurred by the national lottery distribution branch within the Department of National Heritage to 31 March 1995 totalled £247,000. It is estimated that these costs were predominantly for the setting up of systems and procedures for administering the fund. These costs were met from the national lottery distribution fund. Other costs of the national lottery division were met from the Department's administration vote. For the year ending 31 March 1995, these come to approximately £251,000.

Funds drawn down from the NLDF by the 11 lottery distributors, to cover administration costs, totalled £5.049 million for the period to 31 March 1995. These costs have also been shown to be predominantly set-up costs.

HEALTH

Anglia and Oxford Regional Health Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost of the Anglia and Oxford regional health authority cook-chill venture; and if he will make a statement. [14529]

Mr. Horam: This is a matter for the Anglia and Oxford regional health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Stuart Burgess, the chairman, for details.

Paediatric Intensive Care Units

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the number of paediatric intensive care units in the North West and West Midlands regions, part of whose planned capacity is deemed to meet demand from north and mid-Wales; and how many beds in those regions are installed but not staffed. [15142]

Mr. Bowis: Health authorities are responsible for assessing health needs and I understand that the long-standing arrangements for the referral of critically ill children from Wales are taken into account in the planning and provision of paediatric intensive care units in the North West and West Midlands regions. There are currently 44 beds. Two more staffed beds will be brought into use next month.

Residential Homes

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average daily number and the number per 1,000 people aged 75 years and over, of (i) occupied geriatric beds, (ii) long-stay beds in NHS nursing homes and (iii) places occupied in *(a)* local authority residential homes, *(b)* voluntary residential homes, *(c)* private residential homes and *(d)* private nursing homes in England and Wales for the latest year for which information is available. [14660]

Mr. Bowis: The average daily number of available national health service beds for elderly people in England in 1994–95 was 54,040 and the number per 1,000 people aged 75 years and over was 16. Beds in NHS nursing homes are not separately identified. Data on the average daily number of places in residential care homes or private nursing homes are not available centrally. The number of residents at 31 March 1995 and the number per 1,000 people aged 75 years and over are shown in the table.

Information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Occupied places in residential and nursing care homes, England, 31 March 1995

	All residents in homes for elderly people	*Residents per 1,000 people aged 75 or over*
Local authority residential homes[1]	55,100	16
Voluntary residential homes[1]	32,770	10
Private residential homes[1]	132,740	40
Private nursing homes[2]	115,550	35

Source:
DH Annual Statistical Returns.
Notes:
[1] Excluding residents in dual registered homes, who are counted in the nursing homes figure.
[2] Predominantly collected as at 31 March 1995.

Life Expectancy

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of average life expectancy *(a)* by region and *(b)* by health authority. [14807]

Mr. Horam: The average expectation of life at birth for 1992, the latest year for which figures are available, for regional health authorities of England and Wales, is shown in the table.

Average expectation of life at birth from abridged life tables for 1992
Regional health authorities of England and Wales (in increasing order of male life expectancy)

Health authority	*Expectation of life (years)*	
	Males	*Females*
North Western	72.3	77.6
Northern	72.4	77.7
Mersey	72.9	78.2
West Midlands	73.4	78.7
Wales	73.5	78.9
Trent	73.6	78.9
Yorkshire	73.6	78.8
England and Wales	73.8	79.2
North-east Thames	73.8	79.5
South-east Thames	74.0	79.6
North-west Thames	74.5	80.1
Oxford	74.9	79.6
South Western	74.9	80.3
Wessex	75.0	80.3
South-west Thames	75.2	80.3
East Anglia	75.4	80.3

By 1993, life expectancy for England and Wales has increased further by 0.2 years for men and 0.1 years for women.

Calculation of life expectancy at birth by type of authority and type of census ward will be published in "Population Trends" in spring 1996, copies of which will be placed in the Library.

Psychiatric Beds

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, column *921*, how many of the 66,000 psychiatric hospital beds are in private hospitals; and how many of the 14,000 beds in residential units for mentally ill people are provided *(a)* by the private sector, *(b)* by the voluntary sector and *(c)* by local authorities. [15131]

Mr. Bowis: The latest figure for the number of beds in hospital and staffed residential units for mentally ill people is 89,158. The information about these beds is shown in the table.

Number of available beds and staffed residential places for mentally ill people—England

	1994–95
Local authority residential places	4,747
Voluntary sector residential places	5,421
Private sector residential places	12,973
Private hospital beds	24,190
NHS mental illness beds	41,827
Total beds and places	89,158

Source:
Department of Health RAC5, RA13A, KO36 and KHO3 returns.

Fazakerley Hospital, Liverpool

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the level of elective surgical admissions to Fazakerley hospital, Liverpool, and the impact of the market forces factor in the funding formulae. [15132]

Mr. Horam: Fazakerley hospital is part of Aintree Hospitals national health service trust. The number of elective admissions to the acute surgical specialty in Aintree Hospitals NHS trust during 1993–94, the latest period for which figures are held centrally, was 21,150[1].

The purpose of the market forces factor in the weighted capitation funding formula for health authorities is to take account of the geographical variations in the cost of providing health services.

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics[1]

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the discharging of patients from Fazakerley hospital under the care in the community legislation. [15133]

Mr. Bowis: Responsibility for the discharge of patients from Fazakerley hospital, part of Aintree Hospital national health service trust, under the care in the community legislation lies with clinicians. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the trust for details.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *715*, what factors led to the introduction of the Deregulation (Still Birth and Death Registration) Order 1996; and what account was taken of the additional expenditure burden on local authorities. [14043]

Mr. Horam: The White Paper "Registration: proposals for change" (Cm 939), published in 1990, recommended that it should be possible to register a death or still birth by means of a declaration made in a sub-district other than the one in which the death or still birth occurred. In 1995, my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight) introduced a ten-minute Bill to give effect to these changes. The Bill failed to gain a Second Reading because of the pressure on parliamentary time. Finally, I am advised by the Registrar General that he has received many letters over the years from members of the public urging him to implement this particular proposal.

There was also significant support amongst those consulted about the proposed deregulation order, including the local authority associations, for introducing the measure. It was acknowledged that the likely take-up of the facility for giving a declaration would be minimal. It was felt that the improvement to the service offered to the bereaved would far outweigh the burden of the small amount of any additional postage and telephone costs.

Colney Hospital, Norfolk

Mr. Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made as to whether the proposed location of the planned Colney hospital in south Norfolk is in accordance with the advice in the Department of the Environment planning policy guidance notes 6 and 13. [15089]

Mr. Horam: This is a local matter. Planning permission for any hospital development has to be obtained from the local planning authority, which must take account of the contents of planning policy guidance notes The planning application is a matter between the local authority and the trust.

Mr. Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much of the West Norwich hospital will be retained by the Norfolk Mental Health Care trust; what investment is proposed there; what parts of the West Norwich hospital will be closed by the Norfolk and Norwich Health Care trust if the proposed Colney hospital is constructed in South Norfolk district; and how much of the site is intended to be redeveloped; [15090]

(2) if his Department has received a business plan for the proposed Colney hospital, South Norfolk district; and if he has yet responded; [15143]

(3) what is the estimated cost of the proposed Colney hospital in Norwich; what is the expected annual cost to the NHS of the use of the hospital if provided by the private sector; and what expenditure on planning, design and site acquisition has been undertaken by the Norfolk and Norwich health care trust or its predecessor since the site was first identified; [15144]

(4) what plans there were to retain the Norfolk and Norwich hospital at the time of the Colney hospital public inquiry in 1988; and if it was described as a second district hospital; [15145]

(5) how many beds are provided in the existing NHS hospitals in Norwich, excluding Norfolk mental health care trust beds; how many beds will be retained within

the city of Norwich after the construction of Colney hospital; and how many beds will be provided at the proposed Colney hospital. [15146]

Mr. Horam: The provision of local services is a matter for local managers. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Stuart Burgess, chairman of Anglia and Oxford regional health authority, for details of the proposals.

Norfolk and Norwich Health Care national health service trust submitted its formal business case for building a new hospital at the end of January. Given the size of the proposed project, the business case will be considered by officials at both the NHS executive and HM Treasury before it is passed to Ministers for final approval. I cannot comment further until all aspects of the business case have been fully considered.

National Blood Authority

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the running costs of the National Blood Authority in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95; what is the estimated outturn for 1995–96; and how much they are expected to be in the next three financial years. [15354]

Mr. Horam: The published accounts of the National Blood Authority do not identify the cost of the headquarters organisation separately from those of the rest of the National Blood Service.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional costs and savings are expected to result from the reorganisation of the operations of the National Blood Authority; and what will be their principal sources. [15353]

Mr. Horam: Details of the estimated costs and savings from the reorganisation of the National Blood Service and their sources are set out in the document "Plans for the Future of the National Blood Service" of November 1995, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of bills were paid by the National Blood Authority within 30 days of receipt on *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95. [15355]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Blood Products (Overseas Sales)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy towards the sale of blood products to overseas customers. [15352]

Mr. Horam: The National Blood Authority may sell surplus blood products on a cost-recovery basis to any other country after national health service demand has been satisfied. This avoids waste of a valuable resource and keeps down costs to the NHS. The alternative would be destruction.

Blood Service

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the price charged to hospitals in Oxford for blood products following reorganisation of the blood service will contain an additional charge to reflect the costs of transporting blood to and from the regional centres at Birmingham, Bristol or Southampton. [15352]

Mr. Horam: Charges paid by hospitals reflect the costs of collecting, processing, storing and distributing blood.

The document "Plans for the Future of the National Blood Service" of November 1995, copies of which are available in the Library, recognises that relocating bulk processing and testing of blood away from Oxford and some other blood centres to other such centres will lead to some increases in transport costs, but it also points out that these extra costs will be more than offset by savings arising from the reorganisation of the service.

Gender Dysphoria Syndrome

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the definitions of gender dysphoria syndrome recognised within the NHS. [15227]

Mr. Bowis: This syndrome is described in ICD 10—Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorder—under code F66.1 egodystonic sexual orientation and would be recognised by clinicians.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many diagnosed cases of gender identity disorder there are in the United Kingdom broken down to show (i) male-to-female and (ii) female-to-male trans-sexuals; if he will indicate the statistical assumptions underlying his calculation; and if he will make a statement; [15228]

(2) how many citizens are currently being treated for gender identity dysphoria by the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [15229]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Prescribing Records

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish list D data on prescribing records from 1991 onwards. [15225]

Mr. Malone: The Department has a duty of confidence relating to the use of information derived from patient records and, following our usual practice, the information requested cannot be supplied at the level of detail of list D data because it is confidential.

St. Charles Youth Treatment Centre, Brentwood

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will allow staff of the former St. Charles youth treatment centre in Brentwood, Essex, to continue occupation of their homes until an alternative use for the site is found; what plans he has to allow local homeless people to use accommodation on the same site on an interim basis; and if he will make a statement; [15374]

(2) what plans he has for the use of the site and buildings of the former St. Charles youth treatment centre in Brentwood, Essex; and if he will make a statement. [15373]

Mr. Bowis: No decisions have yet been taken on the future use of the site of the former St. Charles youth treatment centre.

The residents remaining in the accommodation on the site have had their notice to quit extended from the required 14 days to six months.

Hospital Admissions

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of *(a)* surgical, *(b)* adult medical, *(c)* paediatric, *(d)* intensive treatment unit—ITU, *(e)* accident and emergency and *(f)* other emergency admissions in each year since 1989–90. [12626]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 30 January 1996]:* The information that is available centrally from the "Hospital Episode Statistics" is shown in the table.

Published data on emergency admissions have traditionally included, not only the first episode of care, but subsequent episodes of care for each patient within a patient spell.

A more appropriate system has been developed which counts first episodes of care only. The information from this source is set out in the table. Information in this form is currently available only for the years 1993–94, 1991–92 and 1990–91. Data for 1989–90 and 1992–93 will be available in due course.

Emergency admissions—NHS hospitals, England, by specialty

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1993–94*
Acute surgical	1,194,296	1,182,136	1,241,728
Adult[1] acute non-surgical (adult medical)	1,039,133	1,047,224	1,206,630
Paediatric	365,844	386,301	405,797
ITU[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a
A and E[3]	(71,879)	(71,558)	(73,642)
Other emergency admissions	500,461	503,965	557,491

[1] Adult is defined as aged 15 years and over; adult acute non-surgical excludes those of 15's who are included in the paediatric specialty.
[2] ITU is not a recognised specialty in hospital episode statistics.
[3] Included in acute surgical.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Arcadia Café, Portrush

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what firm proposals have been put to him by private enterprise for *(a)* the development and *(b)* the redevelopment of the Arcadia in Portrush; [14405]

(2) what improvement or refurbishment works have been carried out to the Arcadia in Portrush in each of the last three years and the current year; and what sums were expended in each of these years; [14407]

(3) what proposals he has for the future development or redevelopment of the Arcadia site in Portrush; [14406]

(4) what investigations he has carried out into the structural soundness of the Arcadia in Portrush; what was the recommendation of the engineers involved; and when he expects to announce his conclusions as to the future of *(a)* the ballroom extension and *(b)* the rest of the building. [14404]

Mr. Moss: The private sector made a planning application in 1991 to redevelop the site for student accommodation. Planning permission was refused and a subsequent appeal to the planning appeals commission was dismissed.

No works for improvement/refurbishment have been carried out. During 1995, internal demolition works were carried out at a cost of £5,300.

The Department of the Environment, Works Service, carried out a preliminary property survey in 1993 and a detailed property survey in 1995. These confirmed that the ballroom was in a poor state of repair and that it would be feasible to retain the former Arcadia café building.

On 29 January 1996, the Department announced its intention to demolish the ballroom and invite development proposals for the cleared site while retaining the former Arcadia café building as part of any future development.

Public Appointments

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what criteria are used to select individuals for appointments to each *(a)* statutory and *(b)* non-statutory body and board in Northern Ireland. [14620]

Sir John Wheeler: In making public appointments, the prime considerations are an individual's ability or potential to contribute to the work of a particular body and the need for each body to have the range of experience and skills necessary to carry out its functions; individuals are appointed on merit.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are on the waiting list for *(a)* orthopaedic operations and *(b)* coronary by-pass surgery in each health and social services hospital trust in Northern Ireland; and what was the figure 12 months previously. [14622]

Mr. Moss: The attached table shows the number of patients waiting for hospital treatment in trauma and orthopaedic surgery and cardiac surgery in each health and social services trust providing these specialties in Northern Ireland. The figures reflect the position as at the end of September each year. The waiting list details held centrally are not specific as to the nature of the patients' operation.

		Trauma and orthopaedic surgery		*Cardiac surgery*
HSS trust		*Ordinary admission*	*Day case*	*Ordinary admission*
Altnagelvin	1994	273	88	—
Group[1]	1995	254	108	—
Belfast City	1994	131	5	—
Hospital	1995	131	30	—
Greenpark	1994	2,079	473	—
Healthcare	1995	2,020	572	—
Mater	1994	1	—	—
Infirmorum	1995	3	—	—
Royal				
Group	1994	—	—	449
	1995	3	7	460

HSS trust		Trauma and orthopaedic surgery: Ordinary admission	Trauma and orthopaedic surgery: Day case	Cardiac surgery: Ordinary admission
Ulster, North	1994	51	33	—
Down and Ards	1995	21	22	—

[1] Altnagelvin Group of Hospitals currently has shadow trust status and will attain full trust status on 1 April 1996.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are on the waiting list for orthopaedic operations form the Down/Lisburn trust, Craigavon and Banbridge trust and Newry and Mourne trust; and what was the figure 12 months previously. [14623]

Mr. Moss: The information is not available in the form requested.

Public Appointments

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the membership of each *(a)* statutory and *(b)* non-statutory board and body established in Northern Ireland between 1 April 1973 and 31 March 1995. [14621]

Sir John Wheeler: Northern Ireland Departments maintain records of the membership of statutory and non-statutory boards and bodies for which they are responsible. The provision of this information from 1 April 1973 to 31 December 1994 could be given only at disproportionate cost. The membership of public bodies in Northern Ireland on 1 January 1995 is in the Northern Ireland public appointments list, which is available in the House of Commons Library. This list will be updated at 31 March 1996.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are *(a)* the criteria and *(b)* the procedures for public appointments. [14631]

Sir John Wheeler: All public appointments are governed by the overriding principle of selection based on merit, by the well-informed choice of individuals who, through their abilities, experience and qualities, match the needs of the public bodies in question. Board members must be committed to the principles and values of public service and be prepared to perform their duties with integrity.

The procedures followed by NI Departments when making public appointments are as follows:

- a specification is drawn up both for the appointment and for the person(s) required to fill it;
- a field of candidates is identified by a combination of using the central appointments database, advertising (where appropriate) and consultation with interested outside bodies;
- candidates are shortlisted based on merit, with the aim of achieving a balance of relevant skills and background and recommended to the appropriate Minister.

However, these procedures will be revised to take account of the appointment of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, Sir Len Peach.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many written parliamentary questions were passed for answer to executive agencies and non-governmental departments in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [14983]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested on the number of written parliamentary questions passed for answer to executive agencies and non-governmental departments is a matter of public record but it could be extracted in the form requested only at disproportionate cost.

Parliamentary questions are passed to the head of an executive agency for reply when the matter is one delegated to him or her under the agency framework document.

Public Bodies

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will ensure that the Fair Employment Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission publish reports on the composition of bodies or individuals publicly appointed to quangos, statutory bodies and other non-departmental organisations. [14630]

Mr. Ancram: Both the Fair Employment Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission (NI) are independent bodies with their remit defined by statute which does not cover the preparation of reports as suggested by the hon. Member.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a list of all individuals sitting as members of quangos, statutory bodies, and other publicly appointed non-departmental organisations. [14632]

Sir John Wheeler: The membership of public bodies in Northern Ireland is contained in the Northern Ireland public appointments list, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Community Employment Schemes

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many redundancies of core workers, who are funded by the Training and Employment Agency through the action for community employment training scheme, he has forecast for each of the next five years; [14728]

(2) how many core workers who are funded by the Training and Employment Agency through the action for community employment training scheme have so far been made redundant as a result of the changes in the ACE training scheme; [14729]

(3) what representations have been made to him from the organisations participating in the action for community employment training scheme who have experienced reductions in the number of placements in excess of 25 per cent.; [14730]

(4) what will be the effect on other programmes of the reduction in expenditure on the action for community employment training programme in each of the next three years. [14733]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 14 February 1996]:* Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Mr. Eric Illsley, dated 14 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency to reply to your questions about the effects of the reduction in the Action for Community Employment (ACE) budget.

Question 14728

The budget reduction may lead to 134 redundancies among the programme's Core Workers during 1996/97. The question of further redundancies over the following 4 years will depend upon the budget available but at present I am not forecasting the need for such redundancies.

Question 14729

At this stage I am not aware of any redundancies having been made by ACE schemes.

Question 14730

A large number of representations have been made regarding the reduction. The Minister and I have met public representatives and delegations from voluntary organisations and the Northern Ireland Federation of ACE Schemes to discuss their collective and individual concerns. We are not seeking to implement reductions beyond those required to operate within the budget allocated in 1996/97.

Question 14733

The reduction in the ACE budget has allowed the Government to meet emerging budgetary pressures in a number of areas and especially those which are important to the continued growth in the NI economy.

I hope you find this reply useful. I will of course be pleased to provide further information if you would find it helpful.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Treasury Solicitor's Office (Computer Disc Theft)

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Attorney-General (1) what investigations are under way into the theft of a DTI computer disc from the Treasury Solicitor's office; [14636]

(2) what action is to be taken in respect of the people alleged to have stolen a DTI computer disc from the Treasury Solicitor's office. [14635]

The Solicitor-General: The Metropolitan police commenced an investigation in November 1994, and in 1995 reported to the Crown Prosecution Service who advised that, in relation to one of the two persons investigated, there was no evidence of any criminal offence having been committed within the jurisdiction and that, therefore, no action could be taken by the Metropolitan police in relation to him, and in relation to the second person that there was sufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction but that it was not in the public interest to prosecute her. The police were advised to caution her.

Of the two people investigated by the Metropolitan police, only one had ever worked at the Treasury Solicitor's Department. She worked as a temporary typist, but had already left the Department before any investigation commenced.

Trophy International Animal Products Ltd.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Attorney-General if the Serious Fraud Office will investigate the franchising operation of Trophy International Animal Products Ltd. [14637]

The Solicitor-General: The Serious Fraud Office undertakes criminal investigations and prosecutions only in cases of serious or complex fraud. Relevant factors in deciding whether to accept a case include the need for accountancy and investigative skills to be brought together and for the use of specialist statutory powers of the office. The moneys at risk or lost are usually at least £1 million.

If there is evidence of criminality in the franchising operations of Trophy International Products Ltd. which would appear to fall within the acceptance criteria, it should be drawn to the attention of the director of the Serious Fraud Office. If the evidence points to criminality, but not of the scale dealt with by the Serious Fraud Office, it should be drawn to the attention of the police for the matter to be investigated.

Elaine Steel

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Attorney-General if he will review the papers in the case of Elaine Steel of Workington. [13871]

The Attorney-General: I have called for the papers in this case and I shall write to the hon. Member in due course.

Transexuals

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Attorney-General how much public money has been expended in each of the last five financial years in defence of legal actions relating to transexuals brought against Government Departments; and if he will make a statement. [15226]

The Attorney-General: The information requested by the hon. and learned Member cannot be compiled in the time provided. I shall write to him as soon as possible with the information which is available and arrange for a copy of my letter to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Closed Circuit Television

7. **Sir Roger Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his assessment of the contribution to crime prevention made by closed circuit television surveillance in town centres. [13855]

Mr. Howard: CCTV systems around the country are having a significant impact on reducing crime and the fear of crime. The value of CCTV has been confirmed by the police and by independent research. This is why we are making £45 million available over the next three years to encourage the spread of this technology.

Probation Service

15. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his Department is doing to

broaden the recruitment base of the probation service to encourage the recruitment of more mature and experienced people. [13865]

Mr. Sackville: We have ended the unnecessary requirement for probation officers to hold a social work qualification for appointment. We have also put in hand action to create a new, rigorous and more flexible system of training which will recognise the experience of mature candidates.

Domestic Burglaries

16. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many domestic burglaries there were in Kent in each of the last two years for which figures are available. [13866]

Mr. Howard: The number of domestic burglaries recorded by the police in Kent in the 12 months to June 1994 was 17,900. In the 12 months to June 1995 it was 15,315, a fall of 14 per cent. I congratulate the chief constable of Kent and his officers on this achievement.

Carl Bridgewater

17. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many fingerprints on the bicycle belonging to Carl Bridgewater are so far unidentified; and if he will make a statement. [13867]

Mr. Kirkhope: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin).

20. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make a final decision in the Bridgewater Four case; and if he will make a statement. [13870]

24. **Mr. Ashby:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to announce his decision in the Carl Bridgewater case; and if he will make a statement. [13876]

Mr. Kirkhope: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden).

Prison Service Redundancies

19. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about proposals for redundancies in the Prison Service. [13869]

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. and learned Friend has received a number of representations about Prison Service plans for cost reductions and for improving its efficiency. The aim will be, so far as possible, to achieve any necessary staffing reductions without resort to compulsory redundancy.

Violent Crime

21. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new measures he plans to introduce to combat violet crime; and if he will make a statement. [13873]

Mr. Maclean: Severe penalties are already available for those convicted of serious offences. Life imprisonment is the maximum penalty for the most serious offences, and long terms of imprisonment can be imposed for other violent offences. Maximum penalties for violent offences are kept under constant review and we have not hesitated to increase them when necessary. The Government fully support the private member's Bill being promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), which proposes to tighten the law and increase the penalties for knife-related crime. The Government also propose that the courts should be required to impose an automatic life sentence on those convicted for the second time of a serious violent or sex offence. Full details of our proposals on sentencing will be set out in a White Paper in the spring.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek powers to double the penalties upon those convicted of violent crime within a given radius of schools; and if he will make a statement. [14016]

Mr. Maclean: I believe that offences should be punished for what they are, not where they are committed.

Severe penalties are already available for those convicted of serious offences. Life imprisonment is the maximum penalty for the most serious offences, and long terms of imprisonment can be imposed for other violent offences. Maximum penalties for violent offences are kept under constant review and we have not hesitated to increase them when necessary. The Government fully support the private Member's Bill being promoted by my hon. Freind the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) which proposes to tighten the law and increase the penalties for knife-related crime. The Government also propose that the courts should be required to impose an automatic life sentence on those convicted for the second time of a serious violent or sex offence. Full details of our proposals on sentencing will be set out in a White Paper in the spring.

Stolen Vehicles

22. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on stolen vehicle recovery rates. [13874]

Mr. Maclean: Figures for 1994 show that 59 per cent. of stolen vehicles recorded by the police in England and Wales were recovered. This is the same percentage as that recorded in 1993. Vehicle theft fell by 10 per cent. in 1994 as compared with 1993.

Crime Victims

23. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new proposal he has to help the victims of crime. [12875]

Mr. Maclean: We are aiming shortly to publish a new victim's charter which will set out the minimum standards of service victims can expect from the criminal justice agencies. It will explain clearly which agency is responsible for providing each service, and how victims can complain if they do not get the standard of service promised.

Achievement of the charter service standards will be monitored closely by the agencies concerned, and progress will be reported in the Home Office annual report.

The new charter demonstrates our commitment to respond to the needs and interests of victims in a real and practical way.

Immigration (Children)

25. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines he has issued to immigration officers at ports of entry relating to the admission of unaccompanied children from overseas seeking refugee status in Britain. [13877]

Mr. Kirkhope: Guidance to Immigration Service staff at ports on unaccompanied children seeking asylum covers a variety of issues and specifically that applications from minors are to be given priority and handled with particular care.

Prisoners (Debt)

26. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons are in prison for debt. [13878]

Miss Widdecombe: At the end of November 1995, there were 462 prisoners held in prison custody for non-payment of fines, 38 for non-payment of council tax and 10 for civil debts.

Crime Victims (Compensation)

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the ways prisoners can compensate the victims of crime. [13868]

Miss Widdecombe: The Government are committed to the introduction of arrangements whereby a proportion of prisoners' earnings from prison work is set aside to help victims of crime. I congratulate my hon. Friend on obtaining a Second Reading for his private Member's Bill last Friday which provides a statutory framework for this purpose.

Prisons (Greater Manchester)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of *(a)* the total inmate population of the prisons in the Greater Manchester area in each of the next five years and *(b)* the total number of prison places that will be available. [13456]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Jim Callaghan, dated 15 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the estimate of the total inmate population of the prisons in the Greater Manchester area in each of the next five years and (b) the total number of prison places that will be available.

There are three prisons in the Greater Manchester area: Manchester, Hindley remand centre and Buckley Hall. These prisons currently provide a total of 1,656 places and hold 1,723 prisoners. The number of places and prisoners held within each of these prisons is not expected to vary significantly over the next five years. The Prison Service has plans to build a new 800 place prison at Agecroft in the next five years, which will help provide the additional capacity needed in the region.

Empty Buildings

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many empty buildings his Department currently owns; what is the cost of insuring and securing these buildings; how many were designed as residential properties; and what was the total amount spent by his Department on empty property taxes in each of the last five years. [14567]

Mr. Howard: The Home Office assumes accountability for all the office in which it has occupations, including any vacant space therein, from 1 April 1996. Up to that date, responsibility for the whole of the Government common user (office) estate in which Government Departments were housed rests with Property Holdings. That part of the question is, therefore, a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

The Home Office has 208 empty properties on its departmental estates at the present time. Of these, 192 are residential properties on the prisons estate, most of which are temporarily vacant awaiting new tenants.

As a general rule, the Government carry their own insurance risk. The costs of securing these properties and the total amount spent by the Home Office on empty property taxes in the last five years cannot be readily identified without disproportionate cost.

Fire Service College

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the future of the Fire Service College. [14594]

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future of the Fire Service College. [14795]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Members to the answer given to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) on 13 February, *Official Report*, column *517*.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what conclusions he has reached on the report on the Fire Service College. [15399]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the question from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) on 13 February, *Official Report*, column *517*.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people who had obtained entry clearance as visitors prior to travelling to the United Kingdom were refused entry on arrival in 1994. [14797]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information available relates to all persons with an entry clearance or work permit who were refused leave to enter on arrival in the United Kingdom. There were 950 such persons in 1994.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of applications made in *(a)* Jamaica and *(b)* Trinidad and Tobago for entry clearance as a visitor to the United Kingdom were refused; and what proportion of applications on arrival for leave to enter the United Kingdom as a visitor from passengers from *(a)* and *(b)* were refused in 1994. [14798]

Mr. Kirkhope: Some 910 entry clearance applications for temporary purposes were refused initially in Jamaica, and 30 in Trinidad and Tobago, in 1994. These represented 26 and 3 per cent. respectively of the applications decided. Citizens of these two countries do not need an entry clearance to visit the United Kingdom. The information available on passengers seeking leave to enter the United Kingdom is given in the table.

Citizens of Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago, admitted and refused at United Kingdom ports in 1994

	Jamaica	*Trinidad and Tobago*
Admissions of visitors	13,200	8,480
Total of passengers refused leave to enter	366	61
Those refused because of insufficient means for proposed visit or not a genuine visitor[1]	306	50

[1] Excluding visitors refused for other reasons, eg false passport.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people with indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom were refused re-entry to the United Kingdom under the returning residents rule in 1994 when they had been out of the country for *(a)* less than and *(b)* more than two years; and what were the nationalities of the people concerned. [14800]

Mr. Kirkhope: The total number and nationalities of persons refused leave to enter and removed from the United Kingdom in 1994, on the basis that they did not qualify as returning residents as claimed, are given in the table. It is not known how many of these persons had been out of the country for less than two years.

Passengers claiming to be returning residents who were refused leave to enter, and removed from, the United Kingdom in 1994

Nationality	*Number*
Bangladesh	8
Canada	1
India	1
Iran	1
Jamaica	4
Malaysia	2
Mauritius	2
Mexico	1
Morocco	1
Nigeria	6
Pakistan	3
Philippines	3
South Africa	3
USA	1
Total	37

Contact Orders

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions for assault have occurred as a result of incidents *(a)* prior to, *(b)* during and *(c)* after contact between parents whose children were subject to contact orders made under section 8 of the Children Act 1989 in each year since 1991. [14850]

Mr. Maclean: Information on the number of convictions for assault relating to incidents where contact orders were made under section 8 of the Children Act 1989 is not collected centrally.

Pregnant Prisoners

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) pursuant to his oral statement on 18 January, *Official Report*, column 893, if the policy of shackling pregnant prisoners whilst they are escorted to the hospital is still in force; [15000]

(2) if he will make it his policy that women receiving hospital and maternity care will be escorted by women officers. [14999]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 15 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the treatment of pregnant prisoners.

Except where there is a medical objection to using restraints or where the governor decides, following a risk assessment, that restraints are unnecessary, pregnant prisoners en route from closed prisons to hospital for antenatal or other appointments will normally be restrained on the journey to the hospital and on the way from the vehicle to the hospital waiting area, or hospital entrance in the case of women prisoners who are being taken to hospital to give birth.

It is the Prison Service's policy that prisoners may be escorted by officers of either sex except where this would place the officer or the prisoner in an unreasonable position in terms of privacy or decency. For prisoners giving birth our aim is that both officers should be female, but sometimes, for example in the case of an emergency, there may not be sufficient staff on duty to allow this. In this situation, one of the officers must be a woman.

Secure Training Centres

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what are the current estimated costs for the construction and operation for secure training centres; and if he will indicate when the successful tenders will be announced; [15013]

(2) for what reasons tenders for the first two sites for secure training centres have been resubmitted. [15012]

Mr. Maclean: Each of the proposals submitted was non-compliant in some respects. Negotiations are continuing with the tenderers, who are being asked to revise the relevant aspects of their bids. For reasons of competition and commercial confidentiality, I cannot disclose the prices of the bids. Contracts will be signed, and announced, as soon as the terms have been settled.

Drivers (Drugs)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of state for the Home Department what powers the police have to test drivers for driving under the influence of drugs; how many convictions there have been over the past two years; and what representations he has had urging *(a)* more testing and *(b)* higher penalties. [15061]

Mr. Maclean: Section 4 of the Road Traffic Act 1988—as amended by section 4 of the Road Traffic Act 1991—empowers a constable to arrest a person if he has reasonable cause to suspect that that person has been driving or been in charge of a mechanically propelled vehicle when unfit through drugs. Section 7 of the 1988 Act empowers a constable to require the suspect to provide a specimen for a laboratory test.

Separate statistics for driving offences involving drugs only are not available centrally. I am not aware of any representations urging higher penalties for the offences but I know that the Association of Chief Police Officers is concerned about drugs and road safety and has called for the development of a device to test for drugs in drivers similar to the roadside breathalyser for alcohol. As a first step, research into the extent of drug use by drivers is being commissioned.

Fire Services

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which fire station provides cover for Brent Cross; and what level of cover is provided. [14746]

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for the London fire and civil defence authority. My hon. Friend should contact the chairman of the LFCDA for details.

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those local authorities which are currently budgeting to spend on fire services *(a)* more than their standard spending assessment, *(b)* at the level of their standard spending assessment and *(c)* below their standard spending assessment. [14910]

Mr. Sackville: Information is not yet held centrally on the budgets which fire authorities in England are in the process of setting for 1996–97.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made as to whether all fire brigades in the United Kingdom will be able to meet, alongside their other statutory responsibilities, the emergency needs of their communities in the year 1996–97. [15401]

Mr. Sackville: Under section 1 of the Fire Services Act 1947 a fire authority has a duty to make provision for firefighting purposes and, in particular, to secure the services of a fire brigade and equipment in order to meet efficiently all normal requirements. Section 3(1)(e) of the Act gives the fire authority discretionary powers to employ its brigade and use its equipment for purposes other than fire fighting. Fire authorities have been able to provide such services from within the resources available to them for firefighting purposes. Fire authorities do have arrangements in place for mobilising assistance from neighbouring authorities in the more serious incidents, for example Windsor castle.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made as to whether all fire brigades in the United Kingdom will be able to meet the minimum statutory standards for their rescue and fire fighting roles in the year 1996–97. [15400]

Mr. Sackville: Such an assessment can be made only by individual fire authorities in the light of their own local circumstances. It is for each fire authority to set a budget which will allow it to comply with its statutory duties under the Fire Services Act 1947.

Prison Service Director General

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the name of the new Director General of the Prison Service; and if he will make a statement. [14977]

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on 5 December, column *204*.

Women Prisoners

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if women who have been assessed for open conditions, and then placed in the HMP Holloway, are subject to mechanical restraints whilst on escort. [15002]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 15 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about women who are subjected to mechanical restraints while one escort.

Women who have been approved for open conditions are not normally subject to mechanical restraints. Women who are sent back to Holloway prison as being unsuitable for open conditions will be subject to mechanical restraints while on escort.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many written parliamentary questions were passed for answer to executive agencies and non-governmental departments in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [14984]

Mr. Howard: This is a matter of public record. Although the information readily available in the Department does not give figures for each of the last five years, it suggests that the total number of written parliamentary questions which have been passed for answer to executive agencies since they were established is:

	Number
United Kingdom Passport Agency (established on 2 April 1991)	86
The Prison Service (established on 1 April 1993)	2,309

	Number
The Forensic Science Service (established on 1 April 1991)	33
The Fire Service College (established on 1 April 1992)	5

No parliamentary questions have been passed for answer to non-governmental departments.

Cemeteries

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will legislate to amend the Local Authority Cemetery Act 1977, and the Local Government Act 1972, to allow exhumation in defined circumstances to allow the re-use of graves; and what response he has sent to the representations on this topic from Reverend Peter Jupp, director of the National Funerals College. [14048]

Mr. Sackville: There are no plans to amend the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 or the Local Government Act 1972 to permit the exhumation of human remains for the re-use of existing graves. We have no record of the receipt of any representations from Reverend Jupp on this matter.

Fire Cover Review

Sir John Hunt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to receive the final proposals from the London fire and civil defence authority in respect of its fire cover review. [14923]

Mr. Sackville: Presently, these remain matters for the authority. I understand that it intends to consider the reaction to its recent consultation process at its meeting on 22 February.

Sir John Hunt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reply he has sent to the London borough of Bromley in response to its representations on the proposed reductions in fire cover affecting the borough; and if he will make a statement. [14924]

Mr. Sackville: The reply explained the criteria which my right hon. and learned Friend would apply to an application from a fire authority to reduce fire cover. It confirmed that, should such an application be received from the London fire and civil defence authority, the representations would be taken into account.

Identity Cards

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to respond to the consultation exercise on the Government's Green Paper on identity cards. [14925]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) on 26 January, *Official Report*, column *470*.

Docklands Bombing (Fire Appliances)

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many fire appliances attended the site of the docklands bombing on 9 February; at what times the first appliance arrived and the last appliance left; how many appliances arrived within *(a)* five and *(b)* 10 minutes of being summoned; from which fire stations appliances were sent; and how many fire fighters attended. [15202]

Mr. Sackville: I have been informed by the London fire and civil defence authority that a total of 113 appliances attended this incident over three days. The first appliance arrived on 9 February at 19:07 and the last appliance left on 12 February at 13:46. One appliance arrived within five minutes of being summoned and two within 10 minutes. In total, 427 fire service personnel attended the incident.

Appliances were sent from the following stations: Addington, Barking, Battersea, Beckenham, Bethnal Green, Bromley, Bow, Chelsea, Croydon, Dagenham, Deptford, Dockhead, East Greenwich, East Ham, Erith, Forest Hill, Greenwich, Hainault, Hornchurch, Ilford, Lambeth fire boat, Lewisham, Leytonstone, Manchester Square, Millwall, New Cross, Norbury, Old Kent Road, Plaistow, Plumstead, Poplar, Romford, Shadwell, Sidcup, Silvertown, Stratford, Sutton, Tooting, Tottenham, Wandsworth, Westminster, Whitechapel, Woodford, Woodside and Woolwich.

Programme Development Unit

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will announce his decision on the outcome of the second round of funding for local projects considered by the programme development unit of his Department. [15224]

Mr. Howard: The matter of second stage bids to the programme development unit for funding local projects is being given careful consideration. I hope to be able to announce a final decision shortly.

Home Country Reports

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) pursuant to his answer of 12 February, *Official Report*, column *411*, if he will place in the Library a copy of the home country report on Pakistan used by a Home Office presenting officer at an immigration appeal hearing in Leeds in 1995; [15342]

(2) if he will place in the Library home country reports and other related information which he considered in respect of the designation of Bulgaria, Cyprus, Ghana, Poland, Romania, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Pakistan and Tanzania for the purposes of determining countries from which asylum cases are likely to prove unfounded. [15350]

Miss Widdecombe: As I explained in answer to the question from the hon. Gentleman on 12 February, *Official Report*, column *411*, when the country assessments to be made available to adjudicators have been finalised, I will place them in the Library.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he has taken to remove Nigerian nationals from the short procedure, introduced last May, for deciding asylum cases likely to prove unfounded; and if he will make a statement. [15351]

Miss Widdecombe: The short procedure operates within existing legislation and has never been confined to countries which are candidates for designation under clause 1 of the Asylum and Immigration Bill. Individual applications which on examination are unsuitable for the short procedure are removed from it.

Firearms-related Crime

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further steps he is taking to deal with the problem of firearms-related crime. [13872]

Mr. Maclean: Our aim is to cut the supply of guns used in crime and to ensure that the courts have adequate powers to deal with those who commit firearms offences. The controls on firearms are already stringent and kept under constant review. The penalties for misuse are substantial. The maximum penalty for carrying a firearm in the furtherance of crime is life imprisonment and the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 increased the maximum penalties for a wide range of other firearms offences. If further legislative measures are considered necessary, the Government will not hesitate to take them.

Local initiatives to detect or prevent armed crime are the responsibility of individual chief officers of police. I understand that the chief constable of Merseyside police has recently launched a high profile campaign to combat the particular threat posed by armed criminals in his force area.

European Parliamentary Constituencies

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what supplementary review of European parliamentary constituencies in England the parliamentary boundary commission for England plans to conduct. [15824]

Mr. Howard: The commission has informed me that it intends to consider making a supplementary report on the European parliamentary constituencies in England, and to commence forthwith a general review of the European parliamentary constituencies in England.

Research Projects

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for 1995 and each of the previous five years *(a)* the longest period and *(b)* the shortest period between the receipt by his Department of a report of a research project commissioned by his Department and its subsequent publication; and in each case if he will give (i) the title of the publication and (ii) the subject of the project. [14671]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 13 February 1996]:* Details for reports published in 1994 and 1995 follow. There are no systematic records for previous years.

In 1994, the shortest and longest periods between receipt and publication were for the following reports:

Research and Planning Unit Paper (RPUP) "86 Drug Education Amongst Teenagers", (two months) and Home Office Research Studies (HORS) 134 "Contacts between Police and Public: findings from the 1992 British Crime Survey", (12 months) respectively.

In 1995 the reports concerned were:

HORS 147 "Anxiety about crime: findings from the 1994 British Crime Survey", (2.5 months) and RPUP 90 "Improving bail decisions: the bail process project phase 1" (14 months).

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what targets he has set for his Department in respect of publishing the reports of research projects regarding crime, police and other issues. [14672]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 13 February 1996]:* There are no formal targets for the publication of research reports. Once a report is accepted as meeting the terms of the research contract, it is published as soon as practicable.

Legislation (Compliance Cost Assessments)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for primary and secondary legislation passed since 5 April 1995 which measures were subject to a compliance cost assessment; and what was the compliance cost in each instance. [13659]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 14 February 1996]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 14 February, *Official Report*, column *578*.

Discretionary Life Sentences

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 6 February, *Official Report*, column *107*, on offences carrying a discretionary life sentence, for what offences were the five life sentences imposed; what offences were committed by the 29 offenders who did not receive an immediate custodial sentence for a second offence carrying a discretionary life sentence; and what sentence was imposed in these cases. [15191]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 14 February 1996]:* I regret that the information given in the answer of 6 February, on offences carrying a discretionary life sentence, has been found to be incorrect due to an error in the way the sample was drawn. The first paragraph and table 1 of this answer show the revised figures.

The information requested is not collected routinely. A sample of those convicted of indictable offences in five weeks of 1993–94 included 1,086 offenders, not 600 as previously stated, convicted of sexual or violent offences carrying a discretionary life sentence, 224, or 21 per cent., not 198, or 33 per cent., of whom had previous convictions for such offences. One hundred and eighty-two not 169—of the offenders with previous convictions for such offences were given a custodial sentence, five, as previously given, of whom were sentenced to life imprisonment. The table shows the average sentence imposed, excluding life sentences, by offence group. Information is not available on sentences actually served by the offenders included in the sample.

Table 1: Sentencing of offenders reconvicted of sex and violent offences carrying discretionary life sentences

Offence	Number sentenced to immediate custody on second or greater occasion	Average custodial sentence imposed (months)
Manslaughter	5	45
Rape	8	81
Robbery	103	40
Buggery	4	75
Wounding with intent to do grievous bodily harm	34	48
Aggravated burglary	3	74
Firearms offences	1	48
Other offences	19	36
Total	177	44

Table 2: Offenders reconvicted of sex and violent offences carrying discretionary life sentences and not given a custodial sentence[1]

Disposal	Manslaughter	Robbery	Wounding with intent to do GBH	Other offences
Absolute discharge	—	1	—	—
Conditional discharge	—	—	—	3
Supervision order	—	6	—	3
Probation order	—	4	—	9
Community service order	—	1	—	—
Combination order	—	2	—	2
Fully suspended sentence	—	—	—	1
Otherwise dealt with	1	4	1	4
Total	1	18	1	22

[1] All offenders convicted of rape, buggery, aggravated burglary or firearms offences were sentenced to immediate custody.

Of the five offenders sentenced to life imprisonment, four were convicted of rape and one of robbery. Forty-two offenders with previous convictions for sexual or violent offences were not given a custodial sentence. The offence and disposal for these offenders are shown in the table.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Benefit

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what checks operate to prevent those living abroad receiving child benefit paid into a United Kingdom bank account; and what estimate his Department has made of the amount of money thus claimed. [14751]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Child benefit is normally payable only to those who are resident in the UK. Exceptions are made for temporary absences abroad for up to eight weeks, and for longer periods in certain circumstances where a child is absent abroad for education or medical purposes. When people leave the country, payment of child benefit terminates after the eighth week. A number of different mechanisms are used to prompt notification by those leaving the country for longer than eight weeks.

The most commonly identified situation where payment could continue into a United Kingdom bank account despite a lack of entitlement is where a person from abroad returns home without notifying the child benefit centre. Special inquiries are made in cases where this is thought to be a possibility.

Operation Rattle was launched in November 1995 to deter this type of abuse. To date, cases have been found which, if action had not been taken, could have led to expenditure of up to £8 million.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will review his policy concerning cold weather payments; and if he will make a statement. [14911]

Mr. Roger Evans: There are no plans for major changes to the scheme. However, after the end of March each year, the operation of the scheme is reviewed with the Meteorological Office. In particular, links between weather stations and postcode areas are reviewed and, where appropriate, changes are made.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the temperature level at which cold weather payments are triggered; and if he will make a statement. [15007]

Mr. Evans: Cold weather payments give extra help to vulnerable groups towards additional heating costs resulting from sustained periods of very cold weather. An average temperature of 0°c (freezing point) or below, over seven consecutive days, is considered a clear and reasonable indication of a sustained period of very cold weather, not normally expected to occur in the majority of British winters. During the winter, the scheme is monitored, and at the end of each March, a review of the scheme takes place with the Meteorological Office. Changes are considered, if appropriate. No further research has been considered necessary.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations he has received since 1 January 1995 about delays in payment of attendance allowance for blind people; and how many representations there were in the last five years. [14915]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I receive many representations concerning almost every area of the Department's business both from individuals and organisations. Detailed information on the nature of those representations is not routinely collected.

Child Support

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in how many and what percentage of cases the parent with care has indicated on the Child Support Agency maintenance application forms that the absent parent is unaware of the child. [14959]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: As the agency has no business need for the information requested, it could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were in each year from 1979 to 1994, in real terms, *(a)* the running costs of Ministers' private offices, separately identifying expenditure on staff and *(b)* the running costs of the Department. [15357]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

The running costs of Ministers' private offices is only available for 1994–95 and is in table 1:

	£
Salaries	1,474,194
Running costs	449,049
Total	1,923,243

Ministers are currently housed in Richmond house and all facilities are provided by the Department of Health. This Department has been responsible for paying its own share of the rent and rates since 1992. All expenditure on accommodation is included in the running cost expenditure of the two Departments, which is published in their annual reports, copies of which are in the Library.

The available information on departmental running costs in table 2.

	£ million[1]
1982–83	2,008
1983–84	1,933
1984–85	1,850
1985–86	1,901
1986–87	2,026
1987–88	2,400
1988–89	2,364
1989–90	2,334
1990–91	2,483
1991–92	2,542
1992–93	2,798
1993–94	2,888
1994–95	3,010

Notes:

1. Real term—calculated on the basis of the December 1995 figures.
2. From 1987–88 running costs include costs of Accruing Superannuation Liability Charge (£165m cash in 1987–88).
3. ITSA moved to net running costs control from 1994–95.

Source:

Running Cost tables. The Government's expenditure plans 1986–87 to 1988–89 and Social Security Departmental Report (The Government's expenditure plans 1995–96 to 1997–98).

State Earnings-related Pension Scheme

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of people *(a)* paying contributions to SERPS each year since its inception and *(b)* drawing pensions in each year since the scheme's inception and if he will detail his estimates for both *(a)* and *(b)* 10, 20 and 30 years hence. [15235]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the tables.

Table 1 shows, for 1978–79 and later years, the number of people in the UK who paid class 1 national insurance contributions at the not contracted-out rate on earnings equal to or above the annual lower earnings limit for that year. These people have accrued entitlement to additional pension as have a small but unquantifiable number of people whose earnings in one or more of the years were marginally below the annual LEL and who reach state pension age before April 2000.

Table 1

	Million
1978–79	9.7
1979–80	10.1
1980–81	9.5
1981–82	8.7
1982–83	8.6
1983–84	8.8
1984–85	9.1
1985–86	10.2
1986–87	10.4
1987–88	7.8
1988–89	7.8
1989–90	7.5
1990–91	7.5
1991–92	6.7
1992–93	6.5

Notes:

1. Figures exclude Appropriate Personal Pension holders and women paying Reduced Rate National Insurance contributions.
2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 0.1 million.

Source:

NIRS 1 per cent. sample.

Table 2 shows the number of people receiving additional pension at the date specified. Figures for periods before 30.9.85 are not available.

	Million
30th September 1985	1.4
30th September 1986	1.8
30th September 1987	2.1
30th September 1988	2.4
31st March 1989[1]	2.6
30th September 1990	3.1
30th September 1991	3.4
30th September 1992	3.7
30th September 1993	4.0
30th September 1994	4.3

Notes:

[1] September figures are not available.

1. Figures are for all Countries and include widows.
2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 0.1 million.

Source:

10 per cent. sample of Retirement Pension Bi-annual enquiry.

Burnley Benefit Agency

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many telephone calls were made to the Burnley Benefits Agency office under Operation Speakeasy; and if he will make a statement. [14930]

Mr. Heald: A freephone telephone line was piloted for three months up to 31 January 1996, to help the public refer cases of suspected fraud to the Benefits Agency for

investigation. A total of 570 calls were made for the Blackburn and Burnley areas. It is not possible to identify separately the number of calls for the Burnley office.

Women Workers

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assumption was made for financial year 1995–96 on the flowback to the Exchequer from encouraging women back to work; and what revisions have been made to those assumptions during the course of the year. [15223]

Mr. Burt: No specific estimate has been made on the overall flowback to the Exchequer from social security and employment measures focused on helping women into work. On average, encouraging a lone parent to move from income support to family credit saves £50 per week from a combination of public expenditure savings and increased revenue. For those women, or their partners, who are not in receipt of income-related benefits, the payback will be lower.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 16 February 1996

SCOTLAND

Court Service

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in what circumstances a sheriff may hear representations on sentences in private; and on how many occasions such representations have been heard in private in the last five years. [15059]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There is no information on the number of occasions on which sheriffs have heard representations on sentence in private. Representations on sentence are normally made in open court.

Mental Incapacity

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to reply to the report on mental incapacity recently produced by the Scottish Law Commission; and if he will make a statement. [15403]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has welcomed the Scottish Law Commission report on incapable adults. We are studying its wide-ranging proposals very carefully, but I cannot yet say when we shall be in a position to respond.

ENVIRONMENT

Water Courses

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans the National Rivers Authority has to increase public access to water courses. [15156]

Mr. Clappison: The National Rivers Authority has a general duty to promote the use of inland and coastal waters and associated land for recreation, and must ensure that its own water or associated land is made available in the best manner for recreational purposes. The Government's code of practice on conservation, access and recreation gives guidance to the NRA and the water and sewerage companies on the exercise of their environmental and recreational duties. Details of the NRA's activities in these areas are contained in its annual report on conservation, access and recreation.

Water Regulations

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those regulations concerning licenses for the abstraction of water which remain to be covered by regulations to be brought in to implement European Union directive 92/43 on habitats and species; and when he expects to lay drafts before Parliament. [15198]

Mr. Clappison: Chapter II of part II—sections 24 to 72—of the Water Resources Act 1991 concerns the granting of licences for the abstraction of water. Those sections will be covered by further regulations implementing the EC habitats directive. It is expected that the regulations will be laid before Parliament later this year. Currently, regulation 3 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 required all competent authorities, such as the National Rivers Authority or environment agency, in the exercise of any of their functions, to have regard to the requirements of the habitats directive.

Chemical Recycling Plant, Warndon

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will investigate the application by Norchem to construct a chemical recycling plant at Warndon, Worcester; and if he will make a statement: [15411]

Sir Paul Beresford: The current application by Norchem in relation to the Warndon area of Worcester is for a waste management licence under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The application has been made to Hereford and Worcester county council, the licensing authority, and is for waste oil treatment recovery and chemical waste transfer. The council is considering a number of matters relating to the application.

Homelessness

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has in respect of grants to homelessness voluntary organisations under section 73 of the Housing Act 1985; and if he will make a statement. [16138]

Mr. Clappison: The section 73 grant programme continues to represent good value for money. Since 1990–91, it has been particularly successful in assisting a large number of single people to find and keep accommodation. Programme expenditure has grown from £2 million to £6.9 million in 1995–96 and the number of schemes funded has increased from 30 to 160.

For 1996–97, the Government have increased to £7.8 million the sum to be made available to voluntary organisations to help them to meet the running costs of practical schemes that assist single people in housing need. This means that, in addition to continuing to fund all eligible existing projects, we shall invite bids to start new schemes in 1996–97.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Roads Services

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to review the proposals to contract out parts of the Department of the Environment's roads services. [16009]

Mr. Moss: I have received a number of representations about the proposals to contract out large parts of the activities of the roads service. I have decided that an

extensive market testing programme would provide an alternative way of securing improved value for money and give employees of the roads service an opportunity to compete with the private sector for the delivery of service.

TRANSPORT

Railway Franchises

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what mechanism exists to ensure that the public are made aware of any new level of subsidy agreed in the event that a franchisee for the south-west or great western line returns to the franchising director to renegotiate the level of subsidy upwards. [15169]

Mr. Watts: The level of subsidy paid in respect of the South West Trains and Great Western franchises is detailed in the relevant franchise agreement, which is available to the public via the franchising director's register. If the franchising director were to agree any new level of subsidy with either the South West Trains or Great Western franchisee, this would be shown in a revised franchise agreement which would be placed on the register.

Supersaver Tickets

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps the Government have taken to secure the future of the supersaver ticket and its applicability to the current range of services. [15294]

Mr. Watts: This is a matter for railway operators. The British Railways Board offers supersaver tickets because of their commercial potential, and private railway operators are likely to set up similar schemes for the same reason.

Disabled Car Drivers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which London boroughs do not recognise the orange badge usable by disabled car drivers; and if he will make a statement. [15394]

Mr. Norris: The orange badge scheme does not apply to the City of London, the city of Westminster, the royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea and part of the London borough of Camden. Each of these authorities, however, operates its own independent concessionary scheme for disabled people who live or work in the area and offers limited concessions in relation to designated parking and meter parking to orange badge holders generally.

Gateshead Western Bypass

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will *(a)* list the number of private companies and agencies consulted by the Highways Agency for advice and information to date in connection with the agency's proposed Al Gateshead western bypass and *(b)* give the total cost of the amounts paid by the agency to private companies and agencies. [15193]

Mr. Watts: The Highways Agency contracted preparation work on the bypass to one firm of design consultants. The consultant has obtained specialist advice about matters concerning geology, archaeology, ecology, landscaping and agriculture from a number of firms.

The total cost of preparatory work to date is £3.3 million, excluding VAT.

MV Derbyshire

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to include an expert nominated by the Derbyshire Family Association on the proposed inquiry into the wreck of the MV Derbyshire; and if he will make a statement. [15536]

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 22 January, *Official Report*, column *38*.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plan she has to collate information about applications to courts in respect of public interst immunity certificates. [14902]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Government will consider the maintenance of records relating to public interst immunity certificates in the light of the recommendations in Sir Richard Scott's report.

Contact Orders

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many parents with care have been imprisoned for contempt of court following non-compliance with a contact order made under section 8 of the Children Act 1989 in each year since 1991. [14848]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and accordingly I have asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Mike Gapes, dated 15 February 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, has asked me to reply to the above Question about the number of parents with care imprisoned for contempt of court.

This information is not collected centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many contact orders have been made under section 8 of the Children Act 1989 where the presiding judge has been aware that one parent has been charged with, or convicted of, assaulting the other parent. [14842]

Mr. Evans: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Mike Gapes, dated 15 February, 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, has asked me to reply to the above Question about the number of Children Act contact orders made.

Between October 1991, the date on which the Children Act came into force, and September 1995, the latest date for which figures are available, 106,911 contact orders were made under section 8 of the Act. It is not possible to identify with certainty the number of cases which involved a parent who had been charged with, or convicted of, assault and the task of extracting what information might be available would be disproportionately costly in view of the volume of cases.

Legal Aid

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in how many cases the legal aid costs were over £100,000 in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* so far in 1995–96. [14747]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information requested is shown in the table. For civil legal aid, the figures represent the number of individual legal aid certificates where gross payments, including VAT, have exceeded £100,000, but exclude multi-party actions. The criminal legal aid figures also include VAT and cover cases in the magistrates' courts and the crown court.

Year	*Civil*	*Criminal*	*Total cases*
1993–94	54	172	226
1994–95	56	237	293
1995 to date	65	178	243

HOME DEPARTMENT

Pregnant Prisoners

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the current status of contracting out the care of pregnant women to the NHS by women's prisons; and what such plans exist for HMP Holloway. [15001]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 16 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the current status of contracting out the care of pregnant women to the NHS by women's prisons and what such plans exist for Holloway prison.

No women's prison has contracted out maternity care. With the exception of women at Holloway prison, women prisoners receive such care from local hospital and community NHS services. At Holloway, antenatal and postnatal care is shared between the Prison health care service and NHS staff. Intrapartum care is provided at local NHS maternity units, usually the Whittington Hospital. Health care staff from Prison Service headquarters and the prison itself are currently reviewing all aspects of the delivery of health care at Holloway. One option under consideration is the contracting out of some specialist services following a competitive tender process. It has not yet been decided, however, whether maternity services should be contracted out.

Criminal Cases Review Authority

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date the post of chairman of the Criminal Cases Review Authority was advertised; how many applications were received; how many candidates were shortlisted; on what date the shortlisted candidates were interviewed; and with what result. [14933]

Mr. Kirkhope: The post of chairman of the Criminal Cases Review Commission was advertised on 3, 5 and 8 September 1995. Thirty-seven applications were received in response to the advertisement and these, along with 87 candidates drawn from other sources, were considered. Six shortlisted candidates were interviewed on 12 and 20 December 1995. The decision whom to appoint is for Her Majesty the Queen, advised by the Prime Minister. When that decision has been taken, an announcement will be made.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many industrial tribunals have been registered in the last 12 months in respect of staff employed in the Prison Service; how many have been settled prior to a hearing taking place; how much compensation has been paid to individuals in total; how much costs have been incurred by *(a)* services provided by Treasury Solicitors for industrial tribunals and *(b)* services provided by counsel advising and attending tribunals; and how many cases are still outstanding. [14954]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 16 February 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about applications to Industrial Tribunals by members of the Prison Service.

Information on appeals to Industrial Tribunals by Prison Service staff is not held centrally by the Prison Service.

The information in the attached table has been provided by the Treasury Solicitor's Department which normally acts for the Prison Service in Industrial Tribunal cases. There may have been other cases in which the Treasury Solicitor's Department was not involved but the number is likely to be very small.

	Amount
Total number of Industrial Tribunal cases received in the last 12 months by the Treasury Solicitor's Department in respect of staff employed within the Prison Service	54
Number of these cases settled without an award being imposed	[1]14
Total compensation paid	£29,723
Total costs (of which £4,053.75 were fees paid for services provided by counsel advising and attending tribunals)	£124,655.78
Number of cases outstanding	30

[1]Includes 1 case settled by a Respondent other than the Prison Service.

Passport Offices

Mr. Hawksley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy that there should be an office for the issue of passports in Birmingham. [15425]

Mr. Kirkhope: The UK Passport Agency undertook a review of the location of its offices in 1995 and concluded that the six regional passport offices in the United Kingdom were able to meet current and expected levels of demand and that there was no case for additional offices.

The UK Passport Agency has recently introduced a partnership arrangement under which passport applications can be handed in at high street post offices and branches of ARTAC World Choice travel agents who will check the application form for accuracy and deliver it to the agency for processing. There are more than 40 post office outlets and five ARTAC World Choice travel agents in the Birmingham area.

DEFENCE

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will institute changes in his Department's practice on the non-disclosure of internal papers containing classified or commercially sensitive information involving arms or military equipment sales. [14900]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made yesterday by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, *Official Report*, columns 1139-44.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library copies of all documents submitted by his Department to the Scott inquiry on the quantities and values of the Jordan arms sales package. [15693]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Sir Richard Scott intends to publish in due course copies of all document which he considers are relevant to the text of his report. This will be available to the House.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list in the *Official Report* the titles of each of the papers his Department provided to the Scott inquiry. [15699]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have no plans to list the titles of the 29,000 pages of papers which my Department provided to the Scott inquiry. The inquiry will be publishing a substantial number of these documents in the annex to the report.

Military Training (Foreign Nationals)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his practice to give details of types of training and the number involved in the training of foreign nationals involved at military establishments in the United Kingdom and at British military bases abroad. [15696]

Mr. Soames: We disclose details of those countries which received UK training, whether in the UK or overseas, and also the number of students concerned during any particular period. It is not normally our practice to disclose the precise details of military training given to any particular country as such details are regarded as confidential between Governments. There are no plans to change this policy.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has anything to add to the answer to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) of 25 January 1991, *Official Report*, column *357*. [15630]

Mr. Arbuthnot: No.

Abbey Wood Building

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures are being taken to ensure that sub-contractors working on the new Ministry of Defence building at Abbey Wood, Bristol are being paid on time by the main contractors and according to the amount of work executed. [15479]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The contractual relationship between a main contractor and his sub-contractors and suppliers are a matter for the main contractor. However, contracts for Abbey Wood construction works place an obligation on main contractors to include a term in sub-contracts which require payment to be made to suppliers or sub-contractors within a specified period not exceeding 30 days from receipt of a valid invoice as defined by the sub-contract requirement.

The overall progress on the main construction works at Abbey Wood is continuously monitored by the MOD project team and its commercial works project manager to ensure that programmed milestones—linked to payment plans set out in the respective contracts—are being met, with the achievement of agreed progress milestones triggering payment. We understand that sub-contractors and suppliers are being dealt with in accordance with the terms and conditions agreed between the parties concerned. Were this not the position, we would expect a detrimental impact on progress which would then be taken up directly with main contractors.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimates he has made of the cost of the work being undertaken in respect of the construction of the new MOD building at Abbey Wood, Bristol; and if he will make a statement on the extent of the overrun against the original estimate. [15480]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The estimated works cost of the Abbey Wood development—inclusive of site acquisition, construction, fitting out, professional works management fees and VAT—is kept under constant review and remains within the approved budget of £248.5 million at 1992 prices—£273.4 million at 1995 prices.

New Office Accommodation

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff have been or are planned to be accommodated in new office accommodation. [36587]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Detailed information relating to all the new build office accommodation is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Four new office accommodation projects in excess of £10 million in value have been approved centrally since 1991 to accommodate some 8,800 staff in total. All of these are part of wider strategies which result in significant savings to the taxpayer. They are the new Procurement Executive headquarters at Abbey Wood near Bristol, an additional office block at Andover for HQ quarter master general's staff, a new personnel and training command headquarters at RAF Innsworth and a new logistic command headquarters at RAF Wyton.

Land Mines

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ban the export of self-destruct anti-personnel land mines. [36586]

Mr. Arbuthnot: No. It would not be right to ban completely the export of a weapon which we may in future need to import for our own armed forces.

Trafalgar Class Submarines

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to award the contract for the construction of batch 2 Trafalgar class submarines. [36572]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I hope to be in a position to place a prime contract for the construction of batch 2 Trafalgar class submarines next year.

Intelligence-gathering Satellites

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence with which countries the United Kingdom is collaborating or discussing collaboration on intelligence-gathering satellites. [36578]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Western European Union is currently studying the possibilities of co-operation on a European satellite observation system. The United Kingdom is contributing fully to that work.

Anti-missile Defence

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement of progress on the feasibility study on anti-missile defence. [36580]

Mr. Arbuthnot: A contract was awarded in October 1994, to a consortium led by British Aerospace, to carry out a pre-feasibility study to identify ballistic missile defence systems to counter potential threats to the United Kingdom, the dependent territories and our forces deployed overseas. The study, which is scheduled to run for some 18 months and is proceeding according to schedule, will identify practical defensive architectures against a range of scenarios taking account of performance criteria, costs, time scales and technical risk. This advice will inform subsequent policy consideration, including whether the UK has a requirement for ballistic missile defence.

Attack and Support Helicopters

Mr. Mark Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Britain's requirements for attack and support helicopters now meet the United Kingdom's needs into the next century. [36585]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The orders which were announced during 1995, for 67 Apache attack helicopters for the Army, and 14 Chinook Mk II and 22 utility EH101 support helicopters for the Royal Air Force, will ensure that the United Kingdom's requirements for these capabilities will be satisfied for the foreseeable future.

TREASURY

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for the most recent year available the cost of conditional exemption from inheritance tax of *(a)* chattels and *(b)* land in each case indicating the number of estates granted exemption. [13927]

Mr. Jack: The estimated cost to the Exchequer of granting conditional exemption from inheritance tax in 1994–95 is about £55 million for chattels, and £5 million for land and buildings. These figures represent the amount of tax deferred as long as the owners comply with their undertakings about the maintenance and preservation of the exempted property, and the provision of public access. If the undertakings are breached, or the property sold, tax is charged on the value of the property at that time.

In 1994–95, conditional exemption was granted to 59 estates in respect of chattels, and to 18 estates in respect of land and buildings.

Taxpayers (Children)

Miss Hoey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average number of children in households where the husband or wife is *(a)* a higher rate taxpayer, *(b)* a basic rate taxpayer and *(c)* a lower rate taxpayer, classifying households by the taxpayer on the highest marginal rate. [14263]

Mr. Jack: Estimates for 1995–96 are as follows:

Marginal tax rate of married couple or single person[1]	*Average number of children for single people and married couples with at least one child*[2]
Lower rate	2.1
Basic rate	1.7
Higher rate	1.8
All	1.8

[1] Marginal tax rate of single person or higher marginal tax rate of married couple.
[2] Child defined as being aged under 16.

The estimates are based on information projected from the 1993 family expenditure survey and are therefore provisional.

Working Mothers

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update his answer to the hon. Member for Peckhan (Ms Harman) of 5 March 1993, *Official Report*, column *335*, on an allowance for working mothers. [14403]

Mr. Jack: Estimates of the cost of introducing allowances against taxable incomes for working mothers and lone parents in 1995–96 are set out in the table. The first year cost would depend on how the measure was implemented.

Cost (£ billion)

	Allowance of: (a) £1,000 per year	(b) £2,000 per year
All working mothers'	0.7	1.3
All working mothers with a child under 5'	0.2	0.4

' Including lone parents who are working.

The estimates are based on information projected from the 1993 family expenditure survey and are therefore provisional.

Opposed Measures

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a list of all the measures on personal and business taxation since 1979 which were approved by Parliament and opposed by Her Majesty's Opposition *(a)* on Second or Third Reading, *(b)* in Committee and *(c)* on Report; and if he will make a statement. [13122]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 6 February 1966]:* The Opposition have voted against every Finance Bill on Second Reading since May 1979, apart from the pre-election 1992 Finance Bill.

They have voted against Bills including measures:

to reduce the basic rate of income tax from 33 per cent. to 24 per cent. and the top rate of income tax from 83 per cent. (98 per cent. on savings income) to 40 per cent.; and

to reduce to rate of tax on companies to its present level, which is the lowest of any major industrial country.

A full list of all the measures requested in the question could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions since 1 January 1995 *(a)* he, *(b)* Ministers in his Department and *(c)* officials in his Department have had contact with Lord Howe concerning his correspondence with the Scott inquiry. [14821]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* As a former colleague, Lord Howe has had informal contact from time to time on these matters with the Treasury at ministerial level.

My officials have had no such contact with Lord Howe on departmental business nor, so far as I am aware, on an informal basis.

Personal Tax Returns

Mr. French: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to raise the de minimis rule as it applies to personal tax returns. [14664]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* There is no de minimus rule applying to tax returns.

EU Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for primary and secondary legislation passed since 5 April 1995 which measures were subject to a compliance cost assessment; and what was the compliance cost in each instance. [13655]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* I refer to the answer that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster gave to my hon. Friend on 14 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *578*.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Dr. Alan George

Mr. Allason: To ask the Attorney-General if he will refer to the Director of Public Prosecution the allegations made by Dr. Alan George and referred to him on 29 January. [15058]

The Attorney-General: Dr. Alan George wrote to me drawing attention to conduct by another which may have involved the commission of criminal offences. He indicated that he had also drawn the matter to the attention of the Metropolitan police.

Dr. George has been advised that the matter should first be investigated by the police. They will refer the case to the Crown Prosecution Service if their investigations reveal that criminal offences may have been committed.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Llew Smith: to ask the Attorney-General if he will list the titles of each of the papers his Department provided to the Scott inquiry. [15698]

The Attorney-General: I have no plans to list the titles of the 1,778 pages of papers which my Department provided to the Scott inquiry. The inquiry will be publishing a substantial number of these documents in an annex to the report.

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Attorney-General (1) what plans he has to make changes to the public interest immunity certificate arrangements; [14898]

(2) if he will make a statement on the use of public interest immunity certificates. [14906]

The Attorney-General: The Government do not propose to comment on issues within the scope of Sir Richard Scott's inquiry until his report has been published and fully considered by the Government.

Serious Fraud Office

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Attorney-General how many prosecutions were brought by the Serious Fraud Office in each of the last four years; in how many all defendants were found guilty; and in how many the principal defendant was found guilty of the most serious charge. [14748]

The Solicitor-General: I have been asked to reply.

Since 5 April 1992, the Serious Fraud Office has brought 68 cases to trial. In 37 of these trials, all the defendants were convicted. In 53 of the trials, the principal defendant, or a principal defendant, was convicted.

This is broken down as follows:

5 April 1992 to 4 April 1993

21 trials

12 trials in which all of the defendants were convicted

16 trials in which a principal defendant was convicted

5 April 1993 to 4 April 1994

26 trials

14 trials in which all of the defendants were convicted

20 trials in which a principal defendant was convicted

5 April 1994 to 4 April 1995

12 trials

5 trials in which all of the defendants were convicted

9 trials in which a principal defendant was convicted

5 April 1995 to date

9 trials

6 trials in which all of the defendants were convicted

8 trials in which a principal defendant was convicted

In Serious Fraud Office cases, only serious charges appear in the indictment.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

HMSO Publications

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if the Government will meet the costs incurred when interested parties translate HMSO material into *(a)* braille, *(b)* large print or *(c)* audio tape. [14663]

Mr. Willetts: Her Majesty's Stationery Office is just one of many printers and publishers undertaking Government work. Individual Departments, agencies and other public bodies determine how, in what form and at what cost their official information is to be made available, and details are not held centrally.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many written parliamentary questions were passed for answer to executive agencies and non-governmental departments in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [14982]

Mr. Willetts: Since the Department was formed in May 1992, a total of 13 questions have been passed for answer to executive agencies and non-governmental departments for which this Department is responsible. The figure can be broken down as follows:

1992–93: 2

1993–94: 0

1994–95: 8

1995 to date: 3

Seconded Staff

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the individuals, by name and company, who are engaged on temporary secondments in the Cabinet Office and Office of Public Service; and if he will list the type and nature of the secondment. [14675]

Mr. Willetts: The following staff are currently seconded into the Cabinet Office, Office of Public Service, from industry and commerce:

Name	*Company*
Mr. M. Blessing	PA Consulting
Mr. S. Culhane	Lloyds Bank
Mr. M. B. De Ferranti	GEC/Marconi Ltd.
Mrs. L. Emin	Cable and Wireless plc
Ms M Guiot	British Telecom
Mr. S. Greenstreet	Coopers and Lybrand
Mr. A. Harris	Clifton Corporate Services Ltd.
Mr. S. Hoffman-Womersley	Shandwich Communications Ltd.

All are engaged on work relating to improving efficiency and effectiveness of public services or to competitiveness and deregulation.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many written parliamentary questions were passed for answer to executive agencies and non-governmental departments in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [14995]

Mr. Hanley: This Department has transferred no parliamentary questions to non-departmental public bodies.

The number of written parliamentary questions referred to next steps agencies by this Department is as follows:

Session 1992–93: 7

Session 1993–94: 4

Session 1994–95: 6

Session 1995–96: 8

Information for previous Sessions is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

It is normal practice to print answers from the heads of our agencies in the *Official Report.*

Chechnya

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the aims, operations and achievements of Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe in Chechnya. [15382]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The OSCE long-term objective is to promote a peaceful settlement in Chechnya. Through the assistance group in Grozny, it continues to make every effort to help bring about an early ceasefire and encourage

negotiations to find a settlement acceptable to all parties. The assistance group can play an important role in bringing Chechen and Russian representatives together and was instrumental in brokering the talks which led to the conclusion of the military agreement in July 1995. This agreement still offers the best basis for securing a lasting peace. Despite operating in often dangerous and difficult conditions, the assistance group continues to do a good job in building contacts with all parties.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Her Majesty's ambassador in Moscow last met Mr. Sergei Kovalyov to discuss the situation in Chechnya. [15384]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Her Majesty's ambassador to Moscow last met Mr. Sergei Kovalyov on 22 September 1995, at which meeting the situation in Chechnya was raised.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Her Majesty's ambassador in Moscow last discussed the situation in Chechnya with *(a)* President Yeltsin, *(b)* Mr. Gennadzy Zynganor, *(c)* General Lebed, *(d)* Arkadiy Volsky, *(e)* Mr. Vladimir Zhirinovsky, *(f)* Prime Minister Chernomyrdin, *(g)* Mayor Luzhkor and *(h)* Foreign Minister Primakov; and what were his conclusions. [15383]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Her Majesty's ambassador in Moscow last met Mr. Primakov on 6 February 1996 and Mr. Zyuganov on 14 September 1995. The situation in Chechnya was touched upon on both occasions. Her Majesty's ambassador presented his credentials to President Yeltsin on 12 February 1996, but did not discuss Chechnya with him. He has not met any of the other people listed. It is clear from these contacts and others that the situation in Chechnya and the search for a settlement is a major preoccupation both for the Government and Russian political leaders.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will now list the titles of each of the papers his Department made available to the Scott inquiry. [15700]

Mr. Hanley: I have no plans to list the titles of the 16,234 pages of papers which this Department provided to the Scott inquiry. The inquiry will be publishing a substantial number of these documents in an annex to the report.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions since 1 January 1995 *(a)* he, *(b)* Ministers in his Department and *(c)* officials in his Department have had contact with Lord Howe concerning his correspondence with the Scott inquiry. [14818]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 12 February 1996]:* Communications between Ministers in this Department and others concerning correspondence with the Scott inquiry are private. Lord Howe has, like other witnesses to the inquiry, had contact with officials in the FCO from time to time.

Immigration (Mrs. Noreen Bibi)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a decision is going to be taken on an application made by Mrs. Noreen Bibi (Ref. IMMI/Co 534) to the post in Islamabad to join her husband in the United Kingdom. [15558]

Mr. Hanley: I have asked the high commission at Islamabad for details and will arrange for the hon. Member to receive a substantive reply from the migration and visa correspondence unit as soon as possible.

WALES

Health Service Staff

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many nurses there were in Welsh hospitals between 1990 and 1996; [14804]

(2) how many managers there were in Welsh hospitals between 1990 and 1996. [14829]

Mr. Richards: The information is given in the table. The figures include all staff employed by NHS trusts, health authorities and the Welsh Health Common Services Authority as separate figures for staff in hospitals are not available centrally. A reliable split between nursing staff and midwifery staff is not available centrally, so the information given relates to all staff in the nursing and midwifery group excluding pre-registration learners. For managers, all staff paid on manager pay scales are included in the figures; a number of these staff have been reclassified as managers from within the administrative and clerical and other staff groups. Managers from all disciplines may be included.

Whole-time equivalent number of staff in post at 30 September

	Nursing and midwifery staff[1]	*Administrative and clerical staff*	
		Total	*Of which managers*
1990	25,017	8,185	436
1991	25,050	8,865	711
1992	25,555	9,498	893
1993	25,422	10,082	1,159
1994	25,220	9,905	1,292
1995	24,728	9,875	1,350

[1] Excluding pre-registration learners.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the *(a)* monetary targets and *(b)* the actual return on capital for each NHS trust annually since its inception; and how much of the surplus was (i) retained by each NHS trust and (ii) returned to the Government. [14625]

Mr. Richards: The information requested is contained in NHS trusts' annual financial reports, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the total amount of *(a)* useable and *(b)* set-aside capital receipts held by each local authority in Wales at 31 March 1995. [15065]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is given in the table.

Capital receipts and outstanding loan debt at 31 March 1995[1]

£ 000

	Usable cash backed accumulated receipts	*Receipts set aside but not yet redeemed*[2]	*Total outstanding loan debt*
Alyn and Deeside	521	5,813	35,067
Colwyn	783	3,367	27,763
Delyn	0	0	32,279
Glyndwr	512	3,416	11,980
Rhuddlan	397	3,622	27,743
Wrexham Maelor	1,305	0	74,603
Carmarthen	2,098	5,572	35,755
Ceredigion	1,918	8,630	21,618
Dinefwr	790	4,185	28,116
Llanelli	1,344	4,577	47,698
Preseli Pembrokeshire	3,202	2,772	41,828
South Pembrokeshire	1,397	285	21,090
Blaenau Gwent	2,199	6,630	103,856
Islwyn	390	14,214	50,848
Monmouth	5,482	0	45,849
Newport	7,642	8,678	122,004
Torfaen	2,773	14,024	83,132
Aberconwy	628	747	20,265
Arfon	0	8,137	29,695
Dwyfor	554	1,307	15,939
Meirionnydd	0	1,017	10,635
Ynys Mon	350	3,665	53,675
Cynon Valley	0	5,899	52,914
Merthyr Tydfil	600	5,328	64,194
Ogwr	4,245	11,828	74,913
Rhondda	396	2,704	87,253
Rhymney Valley	749	6,919	71,738
Taff Ely	631	14,761	41,957
Brecknock	1,497	7,710	31,614
Montgomeryshire	873	12,004	23,199
Radnorshire	399	3,376	13,239
Cardiff	18,597	5,526	183,971
Vale of Glamorgan	6,702	26,007	60,004
Port Talbot	0	8,592	40,166
Lliw Valley	596	8,308	39,742
Neath	0	8,789	39,981
Swansea	593	13,179	135,631
Clwyd	5,095	2,875	145,656
Dyfed	2,256	2,973	118,889
Gwent	7,353[3]	0	171,914
Gwynedd	2,197	-27[4]	80,160
Mid Glamorgan	4,630	2,191	134,775
Powys	613	7,431	57,412
South Glamorgan	875	0	171,374
West Glamorgan	1,947	0	170,118
Total Wales	95,131	257,031	2,952,252

Source:

Local authority returns.

Notes:

[1] Excluding Joint Police Authorities. Receipts figures include sales of capital assets and repayments of capital grants and advances.

[2] Including EC grants.

[3] Includes Gwent Police Authority.

[4] Prior year adjustment.

Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are employed, and in what capacity, at the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation's regional office in Swansea. [14941]

Mr. Richards: One person is employed at the regional office in the capacity of schools liaison officer.

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the rent of the regional office of the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation in Swansea; and who receives that rent. [14942]

Mr. Richards: It is for the foundation to negotiate the best possible terms within the funding made available from the Welsh Office. Such arrangements are commercial in confidence.

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many inquiries the regional office of the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation in Swansea has handled since it opened. [14943]

Mr. Richards: Two hundred and six, many of which resulted in visits to schools to talk to governors, teachers and parents.

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what publications the regional office of the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation in Swansea produces; and what is the cost of producing these publications. [14944]

Mr. Richards: The production of publications by the regional office in Swansea is a matter for the foundation.

British Eagle Cycle Factory

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the closure of the British Eagle cycle factory in Newtown. [15230]

(2) if he will list all *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect financial support given by statutory agencies to British Eagle cycle company in respect of its business in Newtown; and if he will make a statement. [15231]

Mr. Hague: The Development Board for Rural Wales is the only statutory agency to have given support to British Eagle Cycles. I have asked the chief executive of the board to write to the hon. and learned Member with the information requested and I will arrange for a copy of his reply to be placed in the Library of the House.

Hospital Waiting List Initiative

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will publish the current guidelines on the use of waiting list initiative funding on *(a)* British United Provident Association, *(b)* private consultants and *(c)* NHS consultants on piecework rates; and if he will make a statement. [15657]

(2) what guidelines he has issued on the removal of patients from eligibility for waiting list initiative funding on the basis of their refusal to accept NHS treatment at *(a)* non-local hospitals and *(b)* private hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [15658]

(3) if he will list for each family health service authority the amount agreed with each GP fundholding practice for waiting list initiative funding for out-patient consultation or treatment to be completed by 31 March. [15660]

Mr. Hague: It is for health authorities and GP fundholders to decide on the most effective ways of spending the resources available under the waiting times initiative. Purchasers can agree contracts with private hospitals and with consultants on a private basis.

The allocations do not distinguish between the resources available for reducing waiting times for out-patient appointments or for treatment as an in-patient or day case.

No guidance has been issued on the use of waiting times initiative funding for patients who refuse the offer of treatment at NHS hospitals outside their local area or at private hospitals. Such patients can expect to be seen or treated at the hospital of their choice as quickly as local contractual arrangements between purchasers and providers allow. The treatment involved may be funded from waiting times initiative funds or from purchasers' general allocations.

Waiting times initiative allocations to individual GP fundholders are made by family health services authorities from the total amount available for the district as a whole. Details of the allocations made to individual fundholders are not held centrally.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultation she has had with the chairmen of the University Hospital of Wales Trust, the south Glamorgan health authority and the south Glamorgan family health services authority concerning the payments of waiting list initiative funds to GP fundholders for the treatment or diagnosis of long waiting list orthopaedic patients at *(a)* BUPA, *(b)* consultants' private consulting rooms and *(c)* weekend sessions in NHS hospitals. [15661]

Mr. Hague: No such consultation has been made. It is for health authorities and GP fundholders, as purchasers of hospital services, to decide on the most effective way of using waiting times initiative funding. In doing so, they are conscious of the need to achieve value for money.

General Practitioner Training

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list each GP training programme in Wales, the number of places allocated in each centre and the number of GP trainees at the latest available date. [15659]

Mr. Hague: This information is not held centrally by the Welsh Office. The sub-dean of the University of Wales college of medicine, department of postgraduate education has advised that, as at February 1996, there are 12 vocational training schemes in Wales. The number of places on each of those schemes are:

	Number
East Glamorgan	8
Carmarthen	4
Gwynedd	6
Abergavenny	6
North Clwyd	4
South Clwyd	4
Aberystwyth	6
Cardiff	8
Bridgend	10
Haverfordwest	2
South Gwent	6
Swansea Bay	16
Total	80

A total of 49 trainees are at present on these schemes. In addition, 41 trainees are undertaking self-constructed schemes.

Hard-to-fill Vacancies

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the percentage of hard-to-fill vacancies over the previous 12 months in 1994 and 1995. [15560]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Figures relating to number of vacancies over the periods are not available. However the report "Skill Needs in Britain, 1995" published by the Department for Education and Employment indicates that the percentage of establishments with 25 or more employees in Wales reported hard-to-fill vacancies in 1994 was 16 per cent. The figure of 35 per cent. quoted in that report for 1995 is not directly comparable due to changes in the questions asked. A comparable 1995 figure is not available.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Bankruptcy (Manchester)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many petitions for bankruptcy have been initiated by her Department in respect of businesses in the Greater Manchester area in the past five years. [10303]

Mr. Robin Squire: Records are not kept that would allow a definitive answer to be given but I am aware of no instance of the Department, or of the former Departments for Education and Employment, having initiated such action within the period.

Empty Buildings

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many empty buildings her Department currently owns; what is the cost of insuring and securing these buildings; how many were designed as residential properties; and what was the total amount spent by her Department on empty property taxes in each of the last five years. [14571]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department for Education and Employment and the Employment Service together currently own 26 freehold properties which are empty.

One property includes a hostel block for use by trainees and four terraced houses for the use of hostel supervisors.

Following general Government practice, the Department and the ES bear the cost of their own property insurance.

The Department and the ES together also hold 135 leasehold properties which are empty. None is designed for residential use.

In many leaseholds buildings, the landlord insures the building and recovers the cost through the overall service charge; it is not possible to disaggregate this charge without disproportionate time and cost.

The cost of security for empty buildings is also included in maintenance costs and it is therefore not possible to identify the separate total for security costs.

The Department's contribution in lieu of rates on vacant properties for the current year ending March 1996 will be £170,900. The ES's CILOR on vacant properties in the year ended 31 March 1995 was £680,000. CILOR

figures for previous years are included in overall running cost figures and cannot be separated out without disproportionate costs.

Education Funding (Warwickshire)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 12 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *438*, how many children are covered by the management and administration cost of £2,924,000; and what is the pupil:manager ratio in Warwickshire local education authority. [15367]

Mr. Robin Squire: A total of 68,699 pupils: this figure, like those given in my answers of 2 and 12 February, is taken from the authority's 1995–96 local management of schools budget statement. The Department does not collect the information which would be needed to answer the second part to the question.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) for how many weeks of jobseeker's allowance a claimant will be eligible after a suspension period imposed on grounds of having left a previous job voluntarily; [15548]

(2) what mechanism will be used to reclaim jobseeker's allowance, paid during the adjudication period, to a claimant who is subsequently judged to have left his previous employment voluntarily and has his allowance suspended. [15557]

Mr. Forth: Provided that the jobseeker satisfied the entitlement conditions for JSA, payment of benefit will not be suspended pending an adjudication officer's decision on a question of whether a claimant left his employment voluntarily. If the adjudication officer decides that the claimant did leave his employment voluntarily without just cause, he will also decide the length of the period—at least one week, but not more than 26 weeks—for which JSA is not payable. Since any sanction will start from the week following the determination, repayment of JSA received before the decision will not be required. The claimant's period of eligibility for JSA after the sanction will depend on how long he continues to satisfy the conditions of entitlement.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what requirements the jobseekers scheme will place on applicants to ensure that their appearance is suitable for the job being applied for; and what assessment she has made of the impact of these requirements on the ability of small businesses to comply with equal opportunities legislation. [15554]

Mr. Forth: To be entitled to jobseeker's allowance, a jobseeker must seek employment actively. Any act which would otherwise be considered a step in actively seeking employment will be disregarded if, by his appearance, the jobseeker undermines his prospects of securing employment, unless due to reasons beyond his control. An example of this would be where a jobseeker chose to dress for a job interview in a way which he knew would be unacceptable in that particular type of employment.

These matters relate to the conditions for jobseeker's allowance and have no bearing on the ability of any business to comply with equal opportunities legislation.

School Inspections

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average cost of a school inspection; and how many inspections took place in each of the last five years. [15469]

Mr. Robin Squire: This is a matter for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Social Affairs Council

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the outcome of the informal Social Affairs Council held on 2 to 4 February in Venice. [15091]

Mr. Forth: An informal meeting of Social Affairs Ministers in Venice on 3 February 1996 re-emphasised the importance of education and training issues to European competitiveness. The Commission's White Paper, "Teaching and Learning: Towards a Learning Society", provided a focus for a debate on the contribution of education and training to the promotion of employment. As this was an informal meeting, no formal conclusions were reached.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what steps she will be taking to ascertain the number of new places created in *(a)* the maintained sector, *(b)* the private sector and *(c)* the voluntary sector in phase one of the voucher scheme; [15299]

(2) what steps she will be taking in phase one of the voucher scheme to ascertain the number of nursery vouchers redeemed by those currently in *(a)* maintained and *(b)* private sector provision. [15300]

Mr. Robin Squire: We have information on the number of four-year-olds currently in maintained schools but do not hold information on the number of four-year-olds in the private sector. We will collect information on the number of vouchers redeemed in the maintained and private and voluntary sectors once phase 1 of the scheme begins in April 1996.

Pupil Exclusions

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment *(a)* how many 11 to 16-year-old pupils are permanently excluded from (i) local education authority secondary schools and (ii) grant-maintained secondary schools for the most recent year for which figures are available, *(b)* 11 to 16-year-old pupils have been admitted following permanent exclusion from another school to (1) local education authority secondary schools and (2) grant-maintained secondary schools and *(c)* the total number of schools in each category in that year. [15481]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information is as follows:

(a) A survey published by the Department in July 1995 showed that in the academic year 1993–94, 8,960 pupils were excluded from secondary schools within the 101 local education authorities that responded. The data returned did not distinguish between grant-maintained and other schools.

(b) This information is not available.

(c) There were 3,035 local education authority maintained secondary schools and 594 grant-maintained schools at the end of the academic year 1993–94.

School Mergers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools in England have *(a)* closed and *(b)* merged for each year since 1979, giving the totals for (i) primary, (ii) secondary and (iii) special schools. [15344]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 15 February 1996]:* This question could be answered in the form in which it is asked only at disproportionate cost.

In January 1979 there were 21,309 primary schools, 4,606 secondary schools and 1,489 special schools in the maintained sector. In January 1995 these figures had dropped to 18,551, 3,614 and 1,218 respectively.

Mortgages

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Eduction and Employment how many heads of household below retirement age and available for work have mortgages. [14300]

Mr. Clappison: I have been asked to reply.

The latest estimate for England is that 7,540,000 heads of household who are below retirement age, and were either in employment or seeking and available for work, have mortgages. This estimate is from the 1994–95 Survey of English Housing and is subject to sampling error.

HEALTH

Bed Closures

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds were closed in 1995 in *(a)* Consett, *(b)* Sunderland, *(c)* Grimsby, *(d)* Good Hope, *(e)* West Middlesex and *(f)* Newham general hospitals. [14652]

Mr. Horam: Details of bed closures are not held centrally. Since the beginning of this year an extra 10 beds have been opened in Consett, 26 in Sunderland, 17 in Grimsby, 24 in Good Hope, 12 in West Middlesex and 32 in Newham general hospital.

Dental Health

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the mean number of decayed, missing or filled teeth in five-year-olds in each health authority in each of the last five years; and what are the latest available figures. [14766]

Mr. Malone: Tables setting out the mean number of decayed, missing and filled teeth of five-year-old children in each health authority in 1991–92 and 1993–94 will be placed in the Library. The 1993–94 figures are the latest available.

Kirby-Harris Libel Case

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what grounds his Department will pay the libel costs of the defendants in the Kirby-Harris libel case. [14661]

Mr. Malone: The Department agreed to make an ex-gratia payment towards the legal costs of the parties on the grounds that bringing the proceedings to an end before further costs were incurred represented the best value for money. This decision was based on legal advice that very substantial costs, in excess of the costs paid, might fall to be paid by the Cornwall Healthcare NHS Trust out or resources which should be used for the health-care of the people of Cornwall.

Renal Care

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to publish the review of renal care in the United Kingdom. [15470]

Mr. Horam: The national review of renal services, which was completed at the end of 1994, covered only England. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) on 8 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *348*.

Health Authority Funding

Sir Terence Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) to what extent each of the former district health authorities in West Sussex is currently underfunded in both cash and percentage terms in *(a)* the current financial year and *(b)* 1996–97; and what is the level of underfunding of the two most underfunded health authorities elsewhere in the United Kingdom; [15404]

(2) what plans he has to implement his policy of ensuring that from 1 April 1996 all health authorities in the South Thames region will be broadly within 5 per cent. of their target share. [15402]

Mr. Horam: The planned 1996–97 allocations will bring all health authorities within the former South Thames regional health authority within 5 per cent. of their weighted capitation targets.

For 1996–97 there is only a single planned weighted capitation target for the new West Sussex health authority and it is under target by 4.8 per cent. or £15.8 million. In 1996–97 the two most under-target health authorities in England are South Essex at 7.7 per cent. or £22.8 million and North Essex at 6.4 per cent. or £23.0 million.

In 1995–96 Mid Downs was 5.7 per cent. or £6.1 million below target Chichester 7.9 per cent. or £6.5 million and Worthing 13.0 per cent. or £15.7 million.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what monitoring of the ethnic origin of staff is being undertaken by national health service employers; and what reports he intends to publish based on that information; [15668]

(2) what measures are planned to monitor the steps taken by national health service employers in respect of levels of race discrimination following the Policy Studies Institute report, "Nursing in a Multi-Racial Society", commissioned by his Department; [15665]

(3) what measures are in hand to monitor the steps being taken by trusts to improve equal opportunities under the enabling agreements recently introduced in the national health service. [15666]

Mr. Malone: I attach great importance to achieving equality of opportunity for all staff in the NHS. Information on the ethnic origin of NHS employees is collected annually and published in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin for "NHS Hospital and Community Health Services Non-Medical Staff in England", which will be placed in the Library shortly and separately for "NHS Medical and Dental Staff", also issued annually, copies of which are available in the Library.

I have taken seriously the issues raised by the Policy Studies Institute report on "Nursing in a Multi-Ethnic NHS" and refer the hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State gave to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 18 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *687*.

The enabling agreements of the General Whitley Council are for management and staff to implement locally in accordance with particular local needs. I have no plans to monitor these arrangements.

However, the NHS Executive's director of human resources recently reminded NHS chief executives and general managers—in EL(96)4—of their personal responsibility for progressing equal opportunities issues.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he intends to take following the recent industrial tribunal case McCarthy *v.* British Nursing Association. [15667]

Mr. Malone: This matter does not concern a national health service employee. However, the NHS Executive is strongly committed to equal opportunities in NHS employment and will be studying the consequences for the NHS of any further legal action in this case.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the position of asylum seekers needing advice or treatment from national health service health care staff. [15669]

Mr. Horam: Asylum seekers can seek advice or treatment from national health service health care staff on the same basis as other individuals.

Community Care

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many judicial reviews of community care policy there have been since 1 April 1993; [15475]

(2) how many judicial reviews of community care policy have been applied for since 1 April 1993; [15476]

(3) what has been the cost of each judicial review of community care policy since 1 April 1993; [15477]

(4) how many requests for judicial reviews of community care policies have been turned down since 1 April 1993. [15478]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Relocation Expenses

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what data his Department collects about the relocation expenses paid by national health service employers. [15663]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 8 March 1995, *Official Report*, column *242*.

Adoption Law

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when will he publish the Bill outlining changes to adoption law. [15670]

Mr. Bowis: A draft of the proposed Adoption Bill will be issued shortly in the form of a consultation document.

NHS Contractors

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his Department's policy to disqualify organisations that commit acts of race discrimination from being contractors with the national health service. [15664]

Mr. Horam: All national health service contractors are expected to comply with their statutory obligations under the Race Relations Act 1976 or any enactment relating to discrimination in employment, and to take reasonable steps to secure their observance by staff or agents employed in the performance of any NHS contract. Where a contractor is in serious or continuing breach of this requirement in a particular case, without taking remedial action, the NHS trust or authority concerned has the option of disqualification or termination, depending on the local circumstances of the case.

Electromagnetic Fields (Cancer)

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the relationship between electromagnetic fields and child leukaemia; if he will place copies of that research in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [15633]

Mr. Horam: Commissioned research relation to electromagnetic fields and childhood leukaemia includes:

- a direct Department of Health contribution to the United Kingdom childhood cancer study—a five-year prospective study of childhood cancer being undertaken by the UK Coordinating Committee on Cancer Research—to which a substantial effort is also being devoted by the National Radiological Protection Board, which advises Government on radiation hazards;
- a study by the NRPB, shortly to be published, of the possible effects of exposure to mains frequency EMF on the proliferation of cultured human cells;
- NRPB-funded work at Oxford university investigating the possibility that weak EMF might damage genetic material.

The Department is currently considering a number of other research projects for funding which bear on EMF and possible health effects.

In addition, a major evaluation of scientific publications on EMF and cancer has been undertaken by the NRPB's advisory group on non-ionising radiation under the chairmanship of Sir Richard Doll and was published in 1992. The Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment has endorsed the advisory group's report. Two brief supplementary reports, in 1993 and 1994, were published by the NRPB to take into account the results of epidemiological studies from Scandinavia and Canada. Copies of the advisory group's report and the supplementary documents are available in the Library.

The Department will continue to monitor the results of all research closely, and to maintain its support for research in these areas, consulting NRPB and COMARE as necessary.

Registered Home Tribunals

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the individuals who serve on registered home tribunals, by region, indicating their gender and occupation. [15662]

Mr. Bowis: The information requested is shown in the tables. The information requested is not kept by region as tribunal members may be required to attend tribunals in any area of the country.

Registered homes tribunal chairmen

Name[1]	Sex
C. Cradic	Male
E. Goodman	Female
M. Goodman	Male
D. Hershman	Male
P. Hughes QC	Male
A. C. Lauriston QC	Male
S. MacDonald	Female
M. Rowland	Male
M. Rutherford QC	Female
P. Singh	Male

[1] The persons listed are either solicitors or barristers.

Registered homes tribunal side members

Name[1]	*Sex*	*Occupation*
S. Adams	Female	Health authority inspection officer
Dr. A. Admani	Male	Retired consultant physician
C. Alford	Female	Nursing home owner
M. Attenborough	Male	Residential home owner
Dr. A. Banerjee	Male	Consultant physician
R. Bessell	Male	Former director of social services
M. Bishop	Male	Director of social services
R. Brooks	Male	Former director of social services
D. Browne	Male	Consultant in social care
E. Burquest	Female	Director of nursing and residential services
D. Carter	Male	Deputy director of social services
W. Churchill	Male	Executive secretary of an organisation representing independent sector care providers
R. Clough	Male	General secretary of a professional staff association
K. Coleman	Male	Deputy director of commissioning of a health authority
V. Coleman	Female	Health authority registration officer
J. Corbett	Male	Retired senior manager for social services
Dr. J. Cox	Male	Consultant physician

Registered homes tribunal side members

Name[1]	*Sex*	*Occupation*
K. Dainty	Male	Head of health authority inspection unit
R. Doidge	Female	Director of nursing services
W. Dowridge	Male	Retired senior manager for social services
Dr. J. Dunlop	Male	Consultant in communicable disease
G. Dunn	Male	Retired director of social services, now consultant in voluntary sector
S. Entwistle	Female	Matron/manager of residential home
J. Fisher	Male	Residential home owner
Dr. G. Florschutz	Male	Medical practitioner
T. Galletly	Female	Nursing home owner
B. Garner	Male	Director of organisation representing independent sector care providers
S. Gilhespie	Female	Assistant director of social services
L. Gladwin	Female	Social work consultant
D. Graham	Female	Senior social worker
D. Grassie	Female	Head of health authority inspection unit
S. Hardwick	Male	Retired general secretary of organisation representing independent sector providers
G. Harper	Male	Director of social services
R. Humphries	Male	Consultant in social care
P. Jenkins	Female	Health authority inspector
M. Jobbins	Male	Local authority inspection officer
N. Kelly	Female	Matron in charge of nursing home
A. Kendall	Male	Retired director of voluntary organisation
M. Kreft	Male	Residential/nursing homes owner
J. Lowcock	Female	Nursing home owner/manager
B. Marcus	Male	Consultant surgeon
J. Mathieson	Female	Former assistant director of social services
R. Maurice	Male	Retired consultant surgeon
Dr. S. McDougall	Male	Retired physician
M. McGregor	Female	Nursing home owner/manager
S. Mead	Female	Head of local authority inspection unit
Dr. N. Merali	Male	General practitioner
R. Mills	Male	Director of voluntary organisation
B. Moorhouse	Male	Residential/nursing home owner
M. Nash	Female	Residential home owner
E. Newby	Female	Retired divisional director of social services
E. O'Farrell	Female	Director of voluntary organisation
G. Peacock	Female	Chief executive of voluntary organisation
J. Powell	Female	Consultant
J. Reynolds	Female	Chief executive of voluntary organisation
M. Score	Female	Retired social services manager
S. Scott	Female	Chief executive of voluntary organisation
E. Sherrington	Female	Chairman of voluntary organisation
H. Smith	Female	Head of health authority inspection unit
D. Stanley	Male	Deputy director of operations, social services
D. Stephenson	Male	Retired director of social services
R. Stewart	Male	Nursing home owner
G. Thomas	Male	Retired director of voluntary organisation
Dr. P. Tiplady	Male	District medical officer
Dr. C. Treves Brown	Male	Consultant psychiatrist
J. Tunstill	Female	Professor of social work studies
D. Tyler	Female	Health authority inspection officer

Registered homes tribunal side members

Name[1]	*Sex*	*Occupation*
V. Tyndall	Male	Assistant director of housing for a local authority
D. Venables	Male	Chief executive of voluntary organisation
D. Wakefield	Male	Retired director of social services
F. Watts	Male	Consultant for homeowners
P. Westland	Male	Retired under-secretary of local authority association
K. White	Male	Director of voluntary organisation
M. Wilson	Female	Retired director of nursing services

[1] The persons listed are selected to hear particular cases on the basis of their expertise, to ensure that there is a balance of interests in each tribunal.

Professors of General Practice

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many professors of general practice are currently in post; and at which institutions [14806]

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

I understand that there are 23 professors of general practice in post: seven at schools of the university of London and the remainder at the universities of Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Dundee, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, Keele, Leeds, Leicester, Manchester, Newcastle upon Tyne, Nottingham, Sheffield and Southampton.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer on 16 January, *Official Report*, column *568* on accounting methods used by the Child Support Agency to calculate benefit savings, if he will place in the Library a copy of the audits carried out by Price Waterhouse in 1993–94 and 1994–95. [14523]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 15 February 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about accounting methods used by the Child Support Agency.

The reports to which you refer were commissioned as a private stu... to examine areas the Agency already knew were in need of improvement. They were internal audits to assist CSA managers in of improving the administration of the Agency's business. A summary of the findings will be placed in the library shortly.

I hope this is helpful.

National Insurance

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what methods his Department has to guarantee employees that their current or previous employers have forwarded their part of national insurance contributions. [15097]

Mr. Heald: The administration of national insurance operational matters is for Mrs. Faith Boardman, the chief executive of the Contributions Agency. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Faith Boardman to Mr. Spencer Batiste, dated 15 February 1996:

As Chief Executive of the Contributions Agency, I have responsibility for answering questions about operational matters relating to the Agency and the National Insurance (NI) scheme.

I have been asked to reply to your question regarding the methods used to guarantee employees that their current or previous employers have forwarded their part of National Insurance contributions (NICs).

A number of measures are in place which directly or indirectly monitor the requirement for employers to pay NICs and to ensure that the Agency receives these NICs.

Employers are required to make payments monthly (quarterly for some small employers) to the Collector of Taxes for tax and NICs due that month. At the end of the tax year the employer has to send a statement (P35) to the Inland Revenue of the years total of tax and NICs for all employees. The Inland Revenue ensures that the balance of payments due at that time is collected.

Employees' individual returns of tax and NICs are also sent to the Inland Revenue and forwarded to the Agency. Any discrepancies between the figures on the employer's annual statement (P35) and the aggregated total on the individual returns (P14s), are identified and followed up by the Agency. Missing individual returns may be identified by this process.

Employees' returns showing no NICs due but substantial tax earnings may be queried and followed up by the Agency with the employer (but there are still some legitimate reasons for tax due but no NICs due e.g., pension payments).

The Agency has a programme of visiting employers to check their compliance with NI law and to also offer advice and guidance. Around 10% of employers are scheduled for visit in 1995/96. The Inland Revenue also has a programme of making audit visits to employers; the Agency and Revenue work closely together to avoid duplication of effort.

The Agency has measures in place to enable employees themselves to identify any discrepancy. Firstly, an employee is entitled to a certificate (P60), at the end of the tax year, of the tax and NICs deducted. This P60 should be a copy of the P14 which the employer sends in. The employer may at that stage contact the Revenue or the Agency about any discrepancy or non receipt.

Once the majority of employers' end of year returns are expected to have been received, the Agency has an established system of sending individual notices to certain people for whom no contributions have been received or an amount insufficient to benefit qualification has been received. The Agency can take action to resolve any queries which are from these notices.

Whether or not a deficiency notice has been sent, an employee can ask the Agency at any time for a statement of their NICs received and their effect on benefit. These queries may also be received subsequent to a request for a state Retirement Pension Forecast. These statements record the recent tax years where there are any NI deficiencies and what may be done about that deficiency.

State Earnings-related Pension Scheme

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total value of entitlements so far gained under SERPS. [15410]

Mr. Heald: The total value of accrued additional pension rights was £178 billion in 1993 cash prices. This figure does not include entitlements accrued by people who have subsequently died, nor does it include additional pension currently in payment.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Social Fund

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what help is available from the social fund to people on income support who have suffered loss and damage as a result of the recent exceptionally severe weather in the Glasgow area; and if he will make a statement. [16137]

Mr. Roger Evans: Disaster relief following any such crisis is essentially a matter for the relevant local authority. However, through the social fund, crisis loans can be made available to help individuals in such unfortunate circumstances and community care grants are also available to help those families who find themselves under exceptional pressure. Applications to the social fund are dealt with, as speedily as possible, by specially trained social fund officers who look carefully at the individual circumstances surrounding each application and use discretion and flexibility when forming their decision.

Until 31 January 1996, a total of 967 social fund awards had been made to people in the Glasgow area who had been worst affected by the severe weather, at a cost of £268,308. An individual allocation from the social fund of £268,308 will be made immediately to reimburse those district offices worst affected and we will continue to monitor the whole situation carefully within the limits of funding available.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Empty Buildings

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many empty buildings his Department currently owns; what is the cost of insuring and securing these buildings; how many were designed as residential properties; and what was the total amount spent by his Department on empty property taxes in each of the last five years. [14568]

Mr. John M. Taylor: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is providing figures for empty buildings on the common user estate. These figures cover most of my Department's properties. This reply supplements the central response by supplying information covering properties classed as departmental estate for which my Department currently has direct responsibility.

My Department is currently responsible for nine empty buildings. These are all on the Department's site at Teddington.

My Department carries its own insurance risk on these buildings, so on expenditure on commercial insurance has been incurred. It does not maintain separate records of the costs of securing empty buildings.

Two of the empty buildings were designed as residential properties but one was used for non-residential purposes before it was vacated.

My Department pays a contribution in lieu of rates on its Teddington site, but figures to show the element attributable to the empty properties are not available. The following council tax payments have been made in respect of empty properties:

1993–94: £270.40

1994–95: £297.00

1995–96: £341.50.

Figures for payments made before 1993–94 can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Franchise Operators (Refund Agreements)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to introduce regulations on the advertising of refund agreements by franchise operators. [14638]

Mr. Page: There are no plans to introduce such regulations.

Single European Currency

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment his Department has made of the impact of a single European currency on United Kingdom trade. [14952]

Mr. Oppenheim: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 8 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *363*.

Iraq (Biological Agents)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will establish an investigation into the requests received by the British Government from Iraqi companies or Government agencies for biological agents since 1979. [14901]

Mr. Lang: If the hon. Member has any evidence that such an investigation is necessary, I should be happy to consider it.

BMARC

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 26 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *423*, how many of the newly discovered batch of export licence applications from BMARC did not have full supporting documentation. [14580]

Mr. Oppenhiem *[holding answer 9 February 1996]:* Of the recently recovered BMARC—or Astra Defence Systems—export licence applications which were dealt with under the military list between 1985 and 1990, about 60 per cent. were accompanied by copies of one or more of the type of documents normally recognised as constituting adequate supporting documentation. In around a further quarter of the cases, other supporting information was provided. Less than a tenth of the applications had no supporting documentation or information of any kind. In the remaining cases, the application papers themselves have not been recovered, so it is not possible to say whether supporting documentation or information was provided.

Trade Mission (Burma)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those companies which will be taking part in

the forthcoming trade mission to Burma in February; what level of financial assistance is being offered to those attending; and if he will make a statement. [14587]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 13 February 1996]:* A list of those companies taking part in the DTI mission to Burma in February 1996 follows. Twenty-six of the companies are eligible to apply for a DTI travel grant of £1,000 towards the costs of taking part in the mission.

The Government's policy towards Burma, including trade, was fully set out in the speech by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, on 7 February 1996, *Official Report*, columns 296–302. There is no obstacle to UK firms exploring business in Burma not covered by the European Union embargo.

Allied Domecq Thailand
Balfour Beatty Malaysia
Blue Circle Industries plc
Bulmer Travel Associates
British Electrotechnical and Allied Manufacturers Association
Calder Wilkinson Ltd.
College of Petroleum and Energy Studies
Edukasia Ltd.
Enterprise Associates International
Food Consult Ltd.
GEC Marconi Communications Ltd.
Gordon Simmonds Partnership
Interpower International Ltd.
Jackson Engineering Products
J D Engineering Services Ltd.
John Brown Engineers and Constructors
John Laing International Ltd.
Kelvin Diesels Ltd.
Kent Meters Ltd.
Kier International Ltd.
Laundry Installations Group
Mackie International Group plc
Malvern Instruments Ltd.
Medical Marine Computing Ltd.
Mitsui Babcock Ltd.
Myanmar British Business Association
Powergen International
Rolls Royce International Ltd.
RPM International Ltd.
Siemens Plessey Systems
Speedwing
Steelite International plc
The British Electrical and Manufacturing Co Ltd.
Western Merchant Bank Ltd.

Manufacturing Sector

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current size of the manufacturing sector; what were the figures for 1979; and if he will make a statement. [13820]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 14 February 1996]:* In 1994, the latest year for which figures are available, the net ouptut of the manufacturing sector was worth £156.5 billion. Manufacturing output grew by 9.5 per cent. in volume between 1979 and 1994. Manufactured goods account for more than 80 per cent. of visible exports and have grown by almost 90 per cent. since 1979 while output per head has grown faster than in Japan, the United States of America, Germany and France.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

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SESSION 1995–96

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

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Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker's rulings and statements'.

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The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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